



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE



THE ART CURATOR AND TOURISM

Presented by Alessandra Denza
The Contemporary Art Travellers



Travel and Tourism Contracts course | Università di Firenze 2026

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OVERVIEW

- Introduction: Who Am I?
- Who is the Curator
- Cultural Tourism
- Cultural Tourism in Florence
- Cultural Tourism abroad
- Art Market
- Conclusion



Sol Calero, *Pavillon Criollo*
Venice Biennale 2024

INTRODUCTION

Alessandra Denza

The Contemporary Art Travellers

Curator and art advisor with an international background in contemporary art from **Sotheby's Institute of Art** and a specialization in conservation from the **Opificio delle Pietre Dure**. Founder of **The Contemporary Art Travel**, a project that combines art, cultural tourism, and experiences for collectors and enthusiasts. Experience in galleries, fairs, and the art market, including curation, art advisory, and exhibition and event organization.



WAW

Women At Work



**the
Garden's
heart**

**Expert in Art Management, Curatorship
and Strategies for the Art Market**

In addition to the consulting work, I pursue a vibrant curatorial research in recent projects and group exhibitions :

- Art & Medicine Symposium in fall 2026
- *WAW - Women At Work* in 2025 in Vinci and Firenze
- *The Garden's Heart* in Florence during BIAF 2024
- Sponsorship of the *Sol Calero Pavilion Criollo* at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024



CA



WHO IS A CURATOR?

An art curator is a specialised professional responsible for managing, interpreting, and presenting collections of artwork in museums, galleries, or other cultural institutions. Define the theme of exhibitions, select and research pieces, and oversee the display, engaging audiences.

01 The role transforms from museum curator to cultural mediator and author of narrative devices. **Hans Ulrich Obrist** interprets it as a relational process based on listening and dialogue.

Nicholas Serota, director of Tate, opened in **2000 Tate Modern**. In 2025 with 4 million visitors is the most famous and visited museum of modern and contemporary art in the world. During Frieze week, London becomes a playground for collectors.

The Case Studies of Excellence:

Palazzo Strozzi (Florence): **James Bradburne** led the transformation of Palazzo Strozzi from 2006 to 2015 (then at Pinacoteca Brera 2016-2024), and **Arturo Galansino** since 2016 lighted it up.

Curator: **Alberto Salvadori** curator's model.

02



International Curators

- **Hans Ulrich Obrist:** Artistic Director of the *Serpentine Galleries* London, known for his interdisciplinary approach.
- **Okwui Enwezor:** The first non-European curator to direct *Documenta11* (2002) and curated *Venice Biennale* 2015.
- **Thelma Golden:** Director of the *Studio Museum in Harlem*, celebrated for promoting African-American artists.
- **Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev:** Italian-American, she directed *Documenta 13* (2012) and led the *Castello di Rivoli*
- **RoseLee Goldberg:** Founder of *Performa in New York*, she is the leading advocate of performance

Italian Curators

- **Massimiliano Gioni:** Associate Director of the *New Museum in New York* and of *Nicola Trussardi Foundation*.
- **Francesco Bonami:** Curator of the *Venice Biennale* in 2003.
- **Cecilia Alemani:** Director of the *High Line Art in New York* and curator of the 59th *Venice Biennale* (2022)
- **Achille Bonito Oliva:** Theorist of the *Transavanguardia* and a historic figure in Italian criticism.
- **Paola Antonelli:** Senior Curator at *MoMA in New York*, she included contemporary design.
- **Alberto Salvadori:** founder and director of **Fondazione ICA Milano**, former director of **Museo M. Marini**

Alberto Salvadori's curation has the ability to transform archival research into a contemporary critical device, offering valuable insights for future curators. The last important projects are Ventesimo+ in ArteFiera and Ketty LaRocca/Valie Export at Thaddeus Ropac Milano.

Salvadori's Curatorship

1. The Dialogue Between Modern and Contemporary

One of the most striking aspects of his work is his ability to bring contemporary artists into dialogue with historicised contexts. Salvadori does not see art history as a broken line, but as a continuum.

2. The Obsession with Archives and Research

Salvadori often works with "funds" and bequests. His curation is not limited to the staging of an exhibition, but delves into documents, letters, and less visible creative processes. The ability to present to the public not only the finished work, but the artist's thoughts.

3. The Institution as a Community (ICA Model)

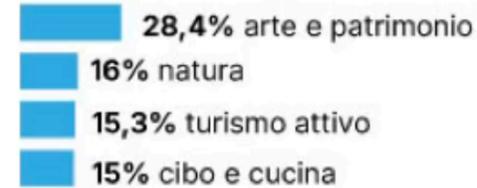
With the creation of ICA Milan, Salvadori promoted a model of a nonprofit institution that places sharing and the transversality of the arts at its core, where the curator is not a solitary "gatekeeper," but a facilitator of collective experiences.

CULTURAL TOURISM



I NUMERI DEL TURISMO CULTURALE IN ITALIA NEL 2025

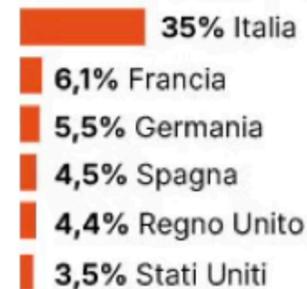
Cosa cerca chi viaggia in Italia?



Chi sono i visitatori culturali in Italia



Da dove provengono i turisti culturali?



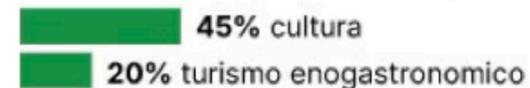
I musei più recensiti (per numero di contenuti online)

Museo Leonardo da Vinci interattivo di Firenze **21.400**
Musei Vaticani **18.000**
Parco Archeologico di Pompei **9.500**

Le attrazioni più recensite

Fontana di Trevi
Colosseo
Duomo di Milano

Perché i viaggiatori stranieri scelgono l'Italia?



1 visitatore straniero su 5
usa l'intelligenza artificiale per pianificare la vacanza



ADSI

60% of Italian historic homes already generate economic activities attributable to different, often complementary spheres: tourism, agriculture, culture, and events. In 2024, these entities welcomed over 35 million visitors, and more than 20,000 homes organized at least one cultural event.



FAI

FAI It is a non-profit foundation founded in 1975 with the aim of protecting, safeguarding and enhancing Italy's artistic, historical and naturalistic heritage. It protects properties that families can no longer maintain, opening them to the public and passing them down.

Luoghi del Cuore project



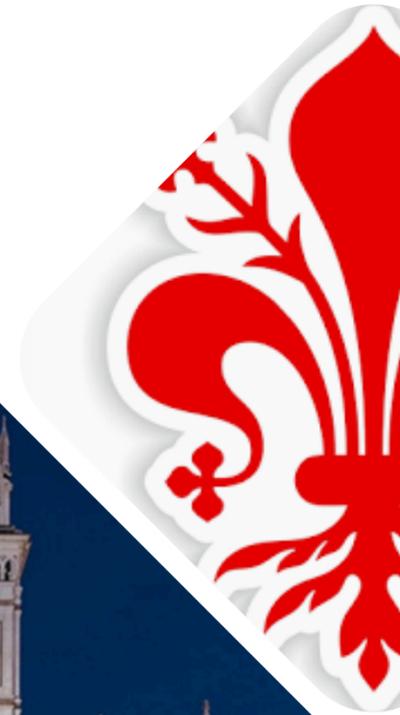
Sustainable tourism

Focuses on long-term sustainability by protecting natural resources, respecting host communities, and creating economic opportunities for local people. Implementing green initiatives and efforts to conserve local natural habitats.

e.g. WWF, Borghi d'Italia and Museo Marino Marini in Florence



CULTURAL TOURISM FLORENCE



Florence Tourism in numbers

Tourism numbers in Florence are also expected to rise in 2026. In the first ten months of the 2025, the Tuscan capital recorded over **4 million arrivals** and **9.7 million overnight stays**, up **7.1%** and **8.5%** respectively on an annual basis, according to estimates compiled by Cst Firenze.

Uffizi Galleries in 2024, the complex surpassed **5 million visitors**. **Galleria dell'Accademia** set a historic record in 2023, surpassing **2 million** visitors, it represents significant growth compared to the 1.5 million visitors pre-pandemic levels.



Growth affected the domestic market (+96,000 visitors) but especially the foreign market (+666,000 visitors). The months with the greatest increases were April (+132,000 visitors) and May (+228,000), with July (-1.6%) being the only month to decline.



FLORENCE INSTITUTIONS



✓ Palazzo Strozzi

Record set with the exhibition dedicated to **Beato Angelico** had over **250,000** visitors. Contemporary exhibitions Olafur Eliasson (2022) and Anish Kapoor attracted more **young people** (38% of visitors under 35). Around 50% of visitors are day-trippers specifically for Palazzo Strozzi. In 2023, the **economic impact** generated on the city was **€71 million**, rising to €114 million in the record year of 2022.

✓ Museo Marino Marini

Under the direction of **Patrizia Asproni** set a record growth: In 2016, the increase was **25.72%** compared to the previous year. The peak in 2017, attendance jumped to **47,852**, an incredible **+129.35%**. The exhibition *Treasures of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem* in 2024 showing the gifts made by European royal houses to the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem which attracted **8,128 visitors**, a +62% increase for the museum.

✓ Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

Reopens in Oct2015, for the reopening and special events of the Opera del Duomo Museum in Florence, the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore has historically engaged influencers and Instagrammers through initiatives such as the **#empty** movement. Currently boasting **112,000** followers and **1.356.484** visitors in 2024,



SUCCESSFULL EXHIBITIONS

1. **La Biennale di Venezia (various editions, es. 2013, 2017, 2019)** record of **600.000** visitors in 2019

2. **"The Weather Project" - Olafur Eliasson (Tate Modern, London, 2003)**
2 mlns people have seen the artificial sun into Turbine Hall.

"Nel tuo tempo" at Palazzo Strozzi in Firenze (sept 2022–jan2023), had **163.000** visitors representing an important cultural revival for the city. contemporary art can become a "living" mass attraction, encouraging visitors to travel to experience the installation.

3. **"Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present" (MoMA, New York, 2010)**
850.000 people sat in front of her in this huge retrospective.

4. **"Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty" (Met, NY, 2011 / V&A, Londra, 2015)** A fashion exhibition that led at Metropolitan Museum over **660.000** entrances.

5. **"Ai Weiwei" (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2015)** Political activism and public success. **"Ai Weiwei. Libero"** held at Palazzo Strozzi in Firenze sept2016 to jan2017 bringing **150.000 visitors**. It broke down prejudices and paved the way for a series of excellent exhibitions, bringing Florence into the world spotlight.



SUCCESSFULL EXHIBITIONS

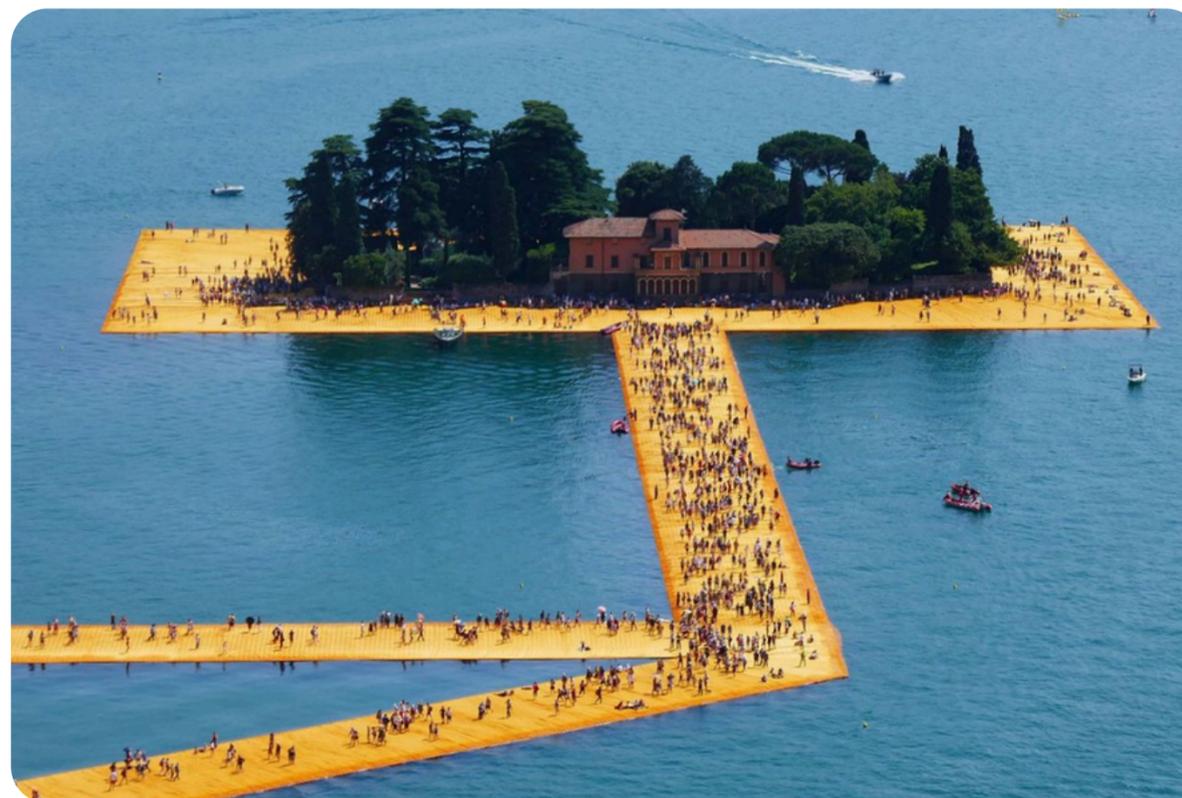
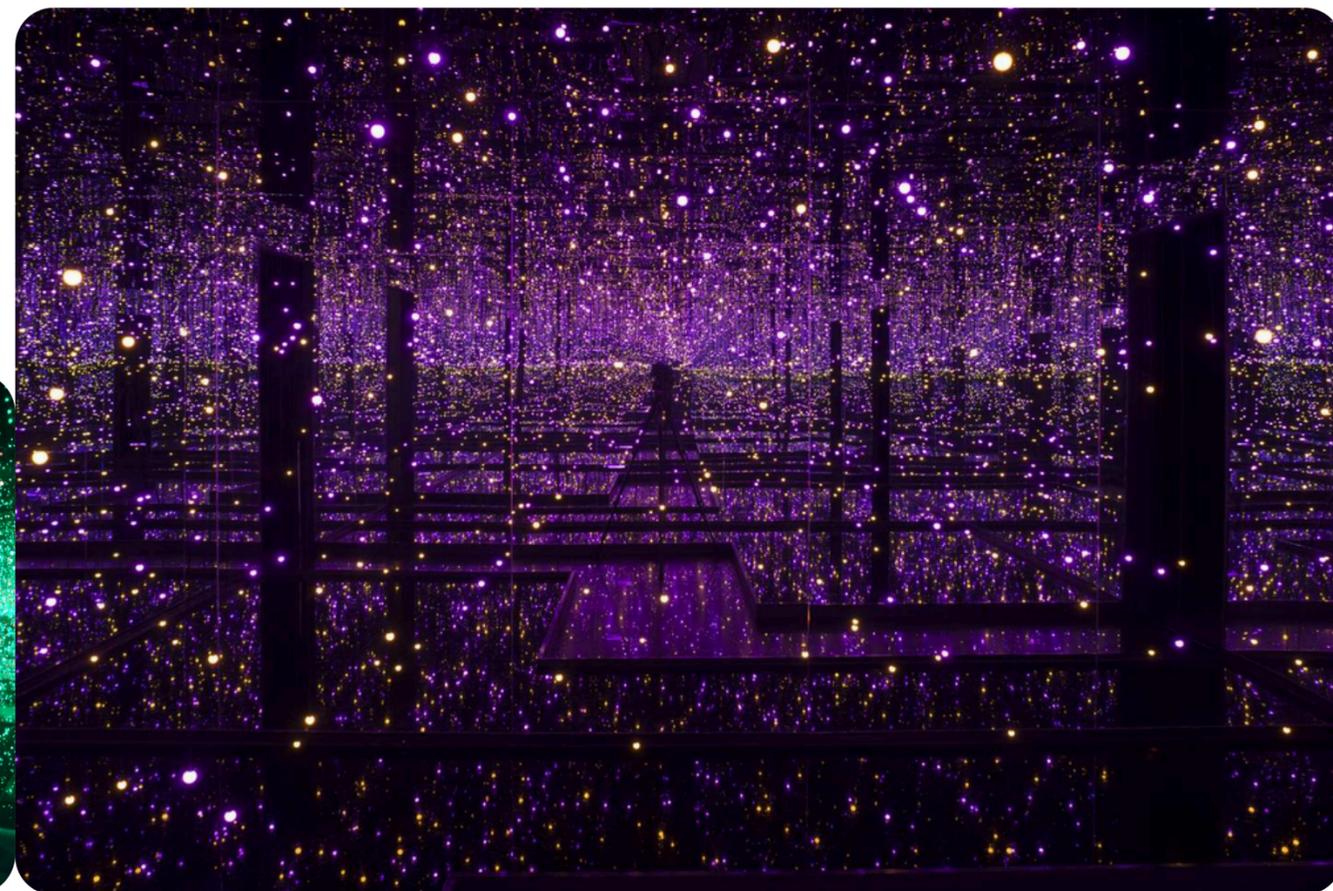
6. "Damien Hirst: Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable" (Venezia, 2017)

Held at Punta della Dogana and Palazzo Grassi, It was the most talked-about exhibition-event of recent years due to its budget, ambition, and narrative complexity created by the artist. **~200,000 visitors**

7. "Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors" (Tour USA, 2017-2019) Kusama record attendance everywhere, up to **800.000 visitors** in Washington, it reached 9.3 million users with #InfiniteKusama. In **Bergamo** nov2023-apr2024 it had **93.000 visitors** and generated **€7.6 millions of impact** on the city.

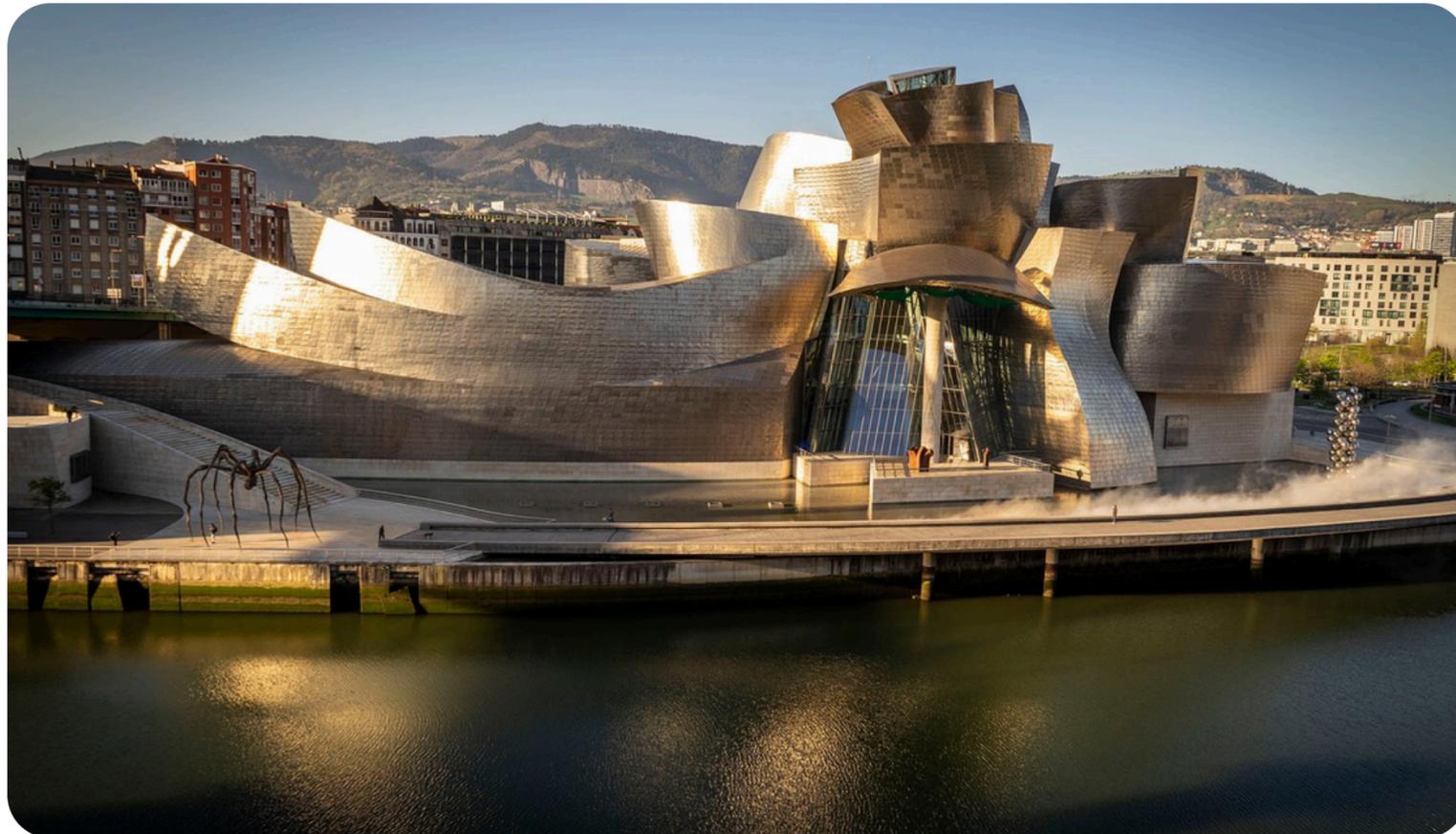
8. "The Floating Piers" - Christo e Jeanne-Claude (Lago d'Iseo, 2016) curated by Germano Celant set over **1.2 million people** walk on the lake's waters in 16 days. It generated an economic impact of over **€280 million**, demonstrating that environmental curation is the most powerful tool for territorial marketing.

9. "dOCUMENTA (13)" - Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (Kassel, 2012) With **860,000 visitors**, it is considered one of the most influential editions ever for having introduced themes such as ecology, post-humanism and interdisciplinarity to the heart of the curatorial debate.



01

Destination branding case



the **Guggenheim Museum Bilbao** completely transformed the Basque city's fortunes when its Frank Gehry-designed museum opened in 1997. Since then, it has hosted exhibitions of artworks belonging to the Guggenheim Foundation, as well as traveling exhibitions.

In the 1990s, Bilbao transformed a declining industrial port into a thriving cultural tourism hub, with the museum receiving over 25 million visitors since opening. 83% of visitors say the museum is the main reason for visiting Bilbao, and at the end of 2011 the number of visitors reached a total of 962,358, reaching a peak in **2023 of 1,324,000 visitors**.

Under the new **Director General, Miren Arzalluz**, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao drew **1,305,003 guests** in 2024 with summer peaks, digital surges, and an **€782M economic impact**, affirming its cultural powerhouse status.

CULTURAL TOURISM ABROAD

The **United Arab Emirates** is attempting to do the same attracting european main museums: Jean Nouvel's **Louvre Abu Dhabi** inaugurated in 2017, in 2024 saw a **1.4 million visitors**, setting a new all-time attendance record and bringing its total visitor count to **over 6 million** since opening. While Frank Gehry's **Guggenheim Abu Dhabi**, located on Saadiyat Island, is scheduled to open between 2025 and early 2026

The **AIUla project in Saudi Arabia** is transforming **Desert X AIUla** to an international, open-air art exhibition of site-specific installations inspired by its landscape and heritage since 2020. *'Space Without Measure'* is inspired by the spiritual insights and poetic language of the LebaneseAmerican poet and writer Kahlil Gibran.

AIUla will transform into a **Wadi AlFann**, or Valley of Art: a permanent site entirely dedicated to land art in 2028.

Desert X AIUla has seen rapid growth in popularity: over **9,000 visitors** during its inaugural **2020** exhibition, **24,000** in 2022, and **70,000** by the **2025** event.



Destination branding case

02



Dana Awartani's Where the Dwellers Lay (2022)



THE ART MARKET

The contemporary art market is a complex system in which economic, cultural, technological, and geopolitical factors interact.

The contemporary art market in Italy is a dynamic ecosystem that, in 2023, generated a **direct turnover of €1.36 billion**. In 2026, the sector appears to be undergoing consolidation, characterized by greater selectivity and a strong tension between cultural value and global dynamics.

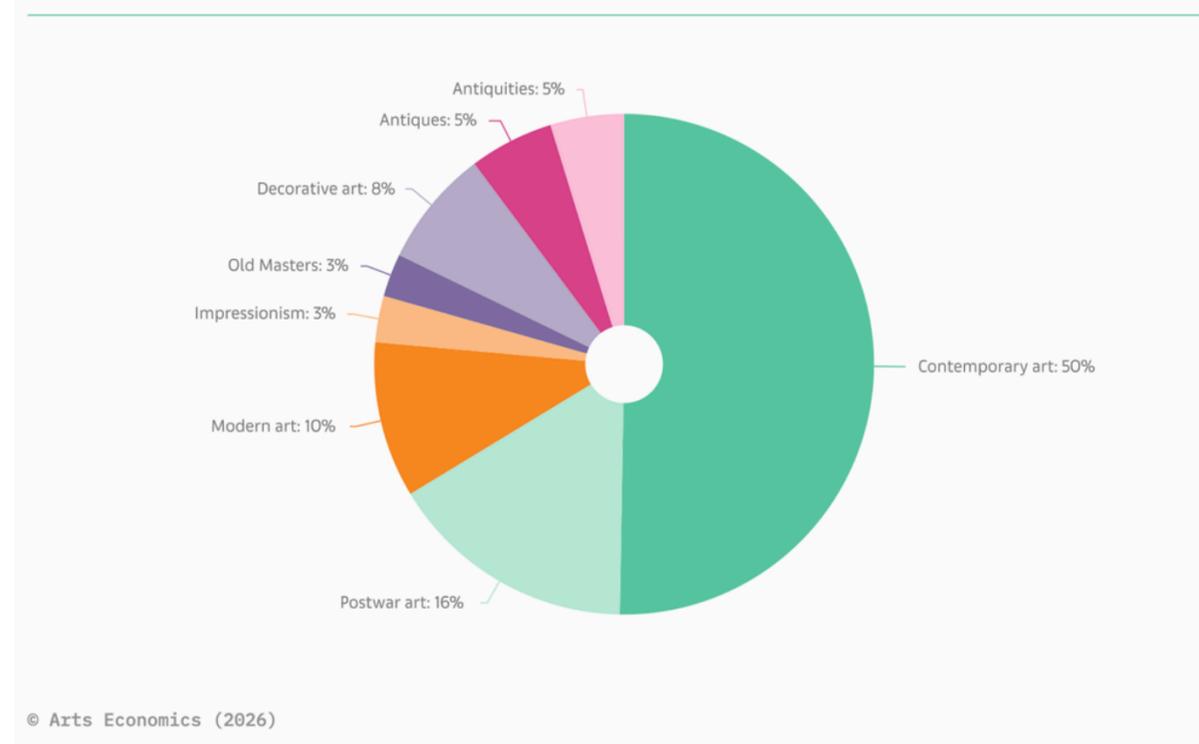
Sales improved, with a growing by 9%, at auctions a total of **\$20.7 billion** in value generated, and for galleries by 2%, to **\$34.8 billion**, in 2025 compared to 2024. **Online sales declined** by 9.2 billion from 2024 to 2025 and fell to **16% of total dealer turnover**. **Art fair sales increased to 35% of dealer turnover**.

Women have growing attention: from 41% in 2024 to **45% in 2025** of women represented globally.



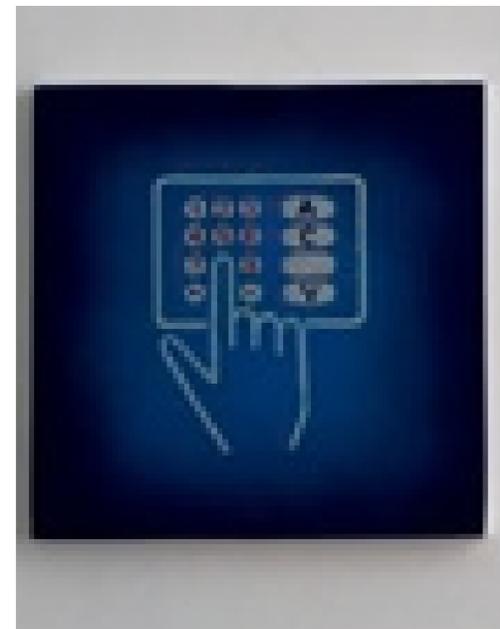
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Figure 2.8 Sectors Operated in by Dealers 2025



CONCLUSION

My project is to move toward itinerant, invitation-only exhibitions. That are going to create immersive, private experiences where collectors are treated as participants, not just consumers. I'm going to work with artists on a project basis rather than locking them into long-term, extractive contracts. This model reduces overhead, centers meaning, and allows for deeper, more focused engagement with both artists and collectors rooted on the territory.



"The curator is someone who cares: for the work, the artist, and, above all, for the viewer's gaze."





THANK YOU!

www.contemporaryarttravellers.com

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