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# Five Most Exciting Art World Collaborations



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As self-involved as the art world may be, most of our exciting art and exhibitions have been produced by people connecting with each other and working together. Check out our list before dashing out the door to find your creative partner in crime.

TEXT: Reena Devi

IMAGES: Courtesy of various

While working in an art museum a few years before becoming

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Shanmuga

an arts journalist, I noticed a distinctive phenomenon—where there is high creative synergy and collaboration, there is always more innovative creative output. From curators to artists to writers, the idea of the lone genius is clearly a myth.

Retnam is a  
Singaporean

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As most of the world goes into self-isolation, quarantine, and lockdown, it is timely to remember that even in an insular art world, partnerships and collaborations are essential for creative breakthrough. This list, although far from exhaustive, offers a glimpse at some contemporary art world collaborators who stole our imagination and piqued our interest.



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Ali-Subotnik-Massimiliano-Gioni-and-Maurizio-Cattelan.-Via-Artlinkart.jpg>)

Portrait of Ali Subotnik, Massimiliano Gioni and Maurizio Cattelan.  
Image courtesy of Artlinkart.

### **Ali Subotnik, Massimiliano Gioni and Maurizio Cattelan**

In addition to their acclaimed individual trajectories, New York's New Museum Artistic Director Massimiliano Gioni, Los Angeles' Hammer Museum curator Ali Subotnick, and Italian artist-prankster Maurizio Cattelan are also renowned for their collaborative "hijinks (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/dec/21/art>)" in the early 2000s. In 2002, editors-turned-curators Gioni and Subotnick founded the infamous The Wrong Gallery in Chelsea, New York with

Cattelan. The gallery was a one metre square space with a permanently locked glass door and frontage that did not differ greatly from the white cube galleries surrounding it. Clearly poking fun at its neighbours, the gallery showcased works by internationally renowned artists such as Adam McEwen (<https://gagosian.com/artists/adam-mcewen/>) for three years, with none of the works for sale. The space became a work of art on its own merit, exhibited (<https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/tate-modern-launches-wrong-gallery-orgasm-box>) at London's Tate Modern, in 2005. Copies were also sold online. (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/maurizio-cattelan-ali-subotnick-massililiano-gioni/>)

The origin of this partnership is just as tongue-in-cheek, with Gioni becoming Cattelan's official impersonator (<https://hyperallergic.com/372044/maurizio-cattelans-latest-prank-is-a-documentary-about-his-life-and-work/>) when they met in Italy, before the two crossed paths with Subotnick in New York. The trio were also appointed directors of the critically lauded 2006 Berlin Biennale. Their playful approach was visible from the get-go, with a fake Berlin Gagosian gallery, reportedly (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/dec/21/art>) "a cheap knock-off of the New York, London and Los Angeles versions, housed in a shabby former plumbers' merchants." More recently, in 2012, Gioni and Cattelan, who could no longer rightfully claim to be the art world outsiders they had been a decade earlier, attempted to reclaim the essence of their collaboration with Family Business (<https://nymag.com/arts/art/rules/family-business-2012-4/>), a now closed space within another renowned New York gallery.





(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Elmgreen-Dragset-standing-with-Statue-of-Liberty-at-Hamburger-Bahnhof.-©-Staatliche-Museen-zu-Berlin-Nationalgalerie-Mathias-Völzke.-©-Elmgreen-e1586160995865.jpg>)

Portrait of Elmgreen & Dragset standing with Statue of Liberty at Hamburger Bahnhof. Photography by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie Mathias Völzke. Image courtesy of the artists.

### **Elmgreen & Dragset**

Since 1995, popular artistic collaborators and former lovers Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset have been creating art that dives into the heart of society while being characteristically (<https://www.wallpaper.com/art/elmgreen-dragset-bent-pool-city-of-miami-beach-public-art>) witty and multi-faceted. They created a diving board that stuck out of a window at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in 1997, as well as a silicone mannequin floating face down in a swimming pool at the 2009 Venice Biennale.

The Berlin-based, Scandinavian artists met in a nightclub in Copenhagen, Denmark and started creating art exploring homosexual identity and mirroring, such as *Marriage* (2004), featuring a pair of matching sinks linked by wildly contorting pipes. Their public art projects continue to be the most exciting, as they never shy away from hot-button issues. Most recently, they installed *Bent Pool* (<https://www.wallpaper.com/art/elmgreen-dragset-bent-pool-city-of-miami-beach-public-art>) (2019), an approximately six metre tall curved swimming pool, at the Pride Park, Miami Beach Convention Center (home to Art Basel Miami Beach) to spotlight issues such as climate change, luxury real estate, and travel. They had their first US survey show (<https://frieze.com/article/elmgreen-dragset-hold-queer-mirror-art-world>) last year at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas.



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ruangrupa-2019-Reza-Afisina-Indra-Ameng-Farid-Rakun-Daniella-Fitria-Praptono-Iswanto-Hartono-Ajeng-Nurul-Aini-Ade-Darmawan-Julia-Sarisetiati.jpg>)

Portrait of ruangrupa in 2019. (Left) Reza Afisina, Indra Ameng, Farid Rakun, Daniella Fitria Praptono, Iswanto Hartono, Ajeng Nurul Aini, Ade Darmawan, Julia Sarisetiati. Image courtesy of ruangrupa.

## **ruangrupa**

The idea of artistic collaboration and creative partnership is commonly epitomised by artist collectives. Currently the most talked about artist collective in Asia is ruangrupa. This Jakarta-based, Indonesian collective was tapped (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/documenta-15-curator-1472137>) last year to direct the 2022 edition of documenta, the prestigious international exhibition held in Kassel, Germany. With a name loosely translated from Bahasa Indonesia as “a space for art,” the 10-person collective was founded (<https://universes.art/en/documenta/2022/ruangrupa>) in 2000 and participated in the Gwangju Biennale 2018, Cosmopolis at Centre Pompidou in 2017, and documenta 14, among various other international exhibitions.

Founding member, artist and curator Ade Darmawan is known for his quixotic artworks that boldly encapsulate social commentary, as well as for raising the profile of the Jakarta Biennial in 2013, 2015, and 2017 as executive director. From

2015 to 2018, ruangrupa co-developed cultural platform Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem in collaboration with other artist collectives in Jakarta, creating a cross-disciplinary space in a city warehouse that attempted to provide a support system for creative talents, diverse communities, and various institutions. In 2018, this was transformed into a public learning space. It will definitely be interesting to see how this community-based approach is used by ruangrupa at an established international platform such as documenta.



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Till-Fellrath-and-Sam-Bardaouil.-Photo-NPUAE-e1586161235920.jpg>)

Portrait of Till Fellrath and Sam Bardaouil. Image courtesy of National Pavilion United Arab Emirates.

### **Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath**

Guest curators for the recently postponed Art Dubai, Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, who specialise in Middle Eastern art, will be curating (<https://www.artforum.com/news/sam-bardaouil-and-till-fellrath-to-curate-2021-lyon-biennale-82373>) the sixteenth edition of the renowned Biennale de Lyon, slated to run from September 2021 to January 2022. Bardaouil and Fellrath, previously an actor and an economics professor respectively, are founders of Art Reoriented, a multidisciplinary curatorial platform launched in 2009 in New York and Munich, where they are based. Unattached to any major gallery or institution, they have made full use of their flexibility as independent curators by collaborating on diverse projects over the span of a decade, from “Art et Liberté: Rupture, War, and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)” at the Centre Pompidou, Paris in 2016, to the Lebanese and United Arab Emirates pavilions at the Venice Biennale in 2013 and 2019 respectively.

There was reportedly (<https://www.galeriemagazine.com/meet-two-curators-making-waves-in-the-art-world/>) quite a bit of talk about their “searing (Venice Biennale) installation addressing the conflict between Lebanon and Israel” in 2013. Since then, they have gone on to make a name for themselves as a curator duo, with a 2016 *The New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/08/arts/international/art-reoriented-a-curator-duo-is-in-high-demand.html>) profile describing Bardaouil and Fellrath as being “in high demand.” Given the hype surrounding them, it will be interesting to see what they get up to in the upcoming Biennale de Lyon.



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Marina-Abramović-The-Artist-Is-Present-2010-Museum-of-Modern-Art-New-York.-Abramovićs-former-partner-Ulay-joins-her-during-her-performance-a-e1586161358241.jpg>)

Abramović's former partner Ulay (1943–2020) joins her during her performance *The Artist Is Present*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010. Photography by Scott Rudd. Image courtesy of the artists.

## Marina Abramović and Ulay

We cannot talk about long-time artistic partnerships and collaborators without talking about the most important couple in the history of performance art: Marina Abramović and the late Ulay who passed away (<https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/ulay-marina-abramovic/>) just last month. Even at their most acrimonious state (when Ulay took Abramović to court regarding a contract violation (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ulay-sues-marina-ambramovic-amsterdam-362099>) about their shared work in 2015) they made headlines and grabbed the imagination of the art world. Their most famous works are emotionally resonant in a highly potent way, such as *Incision* (1978), in which Ulay ran fully nude towards a clothed Abramović only to be tugged back by an elastic rope, and *AAA-AAA* (1978), during which the lovers, who met in Amsterdam in the 1970s, scream at one another for fifteen minutes.

A personal favourite is *The Lovers* (1988), which marked the end of their relationship and took three months to complete. In the performance, Abramović and Ulay walked from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China to meet in the middle and say farewell. In addition, who can forget the viral moment from Abramović's performance *The Artist is Present* (2010) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, when Ulay unexpectedly sat across from Abramović and they grew teary-eyed while staring at each other? It proved that their artistic and emotional connection still holds sway over our collective imagination.

- #Ali Subotnick (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/ali-subotnick/>)
- #Elmgreen & Dragset (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/elmgreen-dragset/>)
- #Marina Abramovic (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/marina-abramovic/>)
- #Massimiliano Gioni (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/massimiliano-gioni/>)
- #Maurizio Cattelan (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/maurizio-cattelan/>)
- #Reena Devi (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/reena-devi/>)
- #Ruangrupa (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/ruangrupa/>)
- #Sam Bardaouil (<https://www.cobosocial.com/tag/sam-bardaouil/>)
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