

DESIGN & INTERIORS

Inside MAZE Design Basel the city's new design fair

With only 11 exhibitors and the backdrop of a Swiss Gothic Revival church, MAZE Design Basel is a new intimate art fair for those in the know



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MAZE Design Basel 2025, Galerie Jousse

(Image credit: Studio Shapiro)

BY BRIAN NG PUBLISHED 18 HOURS AGO IN [NEWS](#)

'This is because of the Basel collector and the Basel effect,' says Charlotte Ketabi-Lebard, founder and director of Ketabi Bourdet, as well as the instigator of Basel's new design fair, MAZE Design Basel. Installation had run smoothly enough and expectations were varied inside the Offene Kirche Elisabethen, a Swiss Gothic Revival church in central Basel, as the idea for the fair had come together quickly, and exhibitors weren't sure if the people who'd come for Art Basel knew this was happening – or if the big-time collectors were even coming to the city this year.

The highlights from MAZE Design Basel



MAZE Design Basel 2025, Ketabi Bourdet
(Image credit: Studio Shapiro)

Design Miami cancelled its Basel edition only four months ago. While no official reason has been given by the fair, it boils down to the fact not enough good galleries were applying to show: Some didn't because of the astronomical booth fees (around six figures), but others stayed away because they didn't want to associate with those they deemed of lesser quality, whom Design Miami was letting in.



MAZE Design Basel 2025, Galerie kreo
(Image credit: Julien Gremaud Courtesy Galerie kreo)

'When we got the call,' Ketabi-Lebard says, 'I was, of course, quite disturbed, as Basel is a very important fair for us.' She started looking for spaces to do a pop-up for her gallery and found out this church, where Perrotin famously used to hold its annual rager (it did not do any large-scale events this year), was available. It is, of course, rather large for a single gallery – well, one that has only been around for a few years — so Ketabi-Lebard and her business partner Paul Bourdet decided to ask a few other galleries (Laffanour Galerie Downton, Jousse Enterprise, and Galerie kreo) they're close with to see if they'd be interested in doing a collective show. It was on a call with François Laffanour the thought of doing a fair occurred to her.



MAZE Design Basel 2025, Mitterrand
(Image credit: Studio Shapiro)

But organising a fair is not Ketabi-Bourdet's usual day job. Just before she went to see the MAZE Gstaad art fair, Galerie kreio director Didier Krzentowski – who was already there – suggested she meet with MAZE founder Thomas Hug, and see if he'd help with logistics. Not only was he eager, Hug agreed to let dealers have final approval, and to have the inaugural edition's participants only pay the cost to put the fair on – around €15,000 each; MAZE would make its money through bringing in sponsors.



MAZE Design Basel 2025, Galerie Meubles et Lumières
(Image credit: Ivan Erofee)

The fair itself was intimate inside the church: Booths wrapped themselves around the columns and the pulpit. 'It's a bit of a do-it-yourself fair,' says Galerie Mitterrand director Sébastien Carvalho. Exhibitors hadn't realised until the fair opened that they were showing in the same space Design Miami/Basel begun – Krzentowski was there and remembered Pearl Lam effectively closed up her booth back then because she didn't think it auspicious to sell in a church.



MAZE Design Basel 2025, Laffanour Galerie Downtown
(Image credit: Studio Shapiro)

Ketabi-Bourdet brought a Philippe Starck table made for New York's Royalton hotel, a Garouste & Bonetti chair (with its original silk upholstery) made for French clothing designers Marithé and François Giraud's New York brownstone, and a Bull Kitchen chair by Tom Dixon – which was sold to a Middle Eastern collection.

While Galerie Mitterrand is more known as an art gallery, Art Basel isn't open to having designers like Lalanne being shown within its event space, so taking part in MAZE made more sense: It brought a whole flock of Lalanne sheep – some fluffy, some not – and a Roberto Matta bronze throne.

'There are lots of our artists who do design,' Carvalho says. Salon 94 also followed this, bringing a booth full of Urs Fischer objects, from chairs to a tea set to a lamp he patinaed himself (he'll patina all of them). The gallery didn't even get to presell any as works weren't finished until the day before the fair's opening, yet numerous editions of every piece had sold. 'I was surprised that we sold so much,' says Salon 94 director-at-large Fabienne Stephan.



MAZE Design Basel 2025, Galerie Gatstou
(Image credit: Studio Shapiro)

Collectors came from the usual European suspects – France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, the UK – and even Czechia. But the pleasant surprise were the Americans (whose presence wasn't a guarantee this year). 'All of us know the collectors,' Krztentowski says, 'they had to spend half an hour in each booth; they couldn't escape.' Some collectors said they spent the longest they had in Basel there, taking hours to get through the 11 exhibitors. 'In no art fair have I ever seen as many extreme high-quality collectors – super, super, mega blue-chip – in one space' Ketabi-Lebard says. ★