

10 of the best modern art galleries in Istanbul

* [The Guardian](#)

Istanbul's art venues range from glamorous party spots to converted Ottoman power stations, and show everything from masters to multidisciplinary art. **Michael Hornsby** picks the best



Garaj, a backstreet performance space in the Istanbul district of Beyoğlu. Photograph: [basak senova on Flickr/Some rights reserved](#) Public Domain

Garaj

Tucked away in the backstreets of Beyoğlu, Garaj is a not-for-profit contemporary performance art space that feels stripped back to the very basics – all exposed concrete and cold lighting. It has a ballsy manifesto, and recently held a performing arts festival about dictators and corruption, called "political games". But these revolutionaries like to have a good time as well. In a neighbourhood mostly occupied by bars and clubs, Garaj lets its hair down with events such as B-Boy competitions and concerts from visiting indie bands.

• *Kaymakam Reşat Bey Sokak 11, +90 212 244 4499, [garajistanbul.org](#), prices vary according to the show*

Arter



Subtitled simply "Space for Art", Arter doesn't mess around. Just a few exhibitions old, and housed in a tastefully restored mansion on the city's busiest shopping street, Istiklal Caddesi, it is quickly gaining a reputation as an intelligent platform for Turkish art. Though large, bright and well-lit, Arter is set out more like a studio than a museum, and it encourages the production of site-specific exhibitions and performances. As a face of a large cultural foundation underpinned by one of Turkey's biggest business groups, Arter benefits from strong international connections, including its sister gallery, [Tanas](#), in Berlin.

• *Istiklal Caddesi, Beyoğlu, +90 212 243 3767, [arter.org.tr](#), entrance free. Open Tue-Thur 11am-7pm, Fri-Sun noon-8pm*

Istanbul Modern



Photograph: Alamy

This huge former warehouse on the shores of the Bosphorus is the most prominent of Istanbul's contemporary galleries. It is arguably the reason why so many smaller spaces have sprung up in the neighbourhood, and the [Biennale](#) is held next door. A permanent exhibition takes visitors through a history of modern Turkish art and there are increasingly important international shows, such as portraitist [Steve McCurry](#)'s photos from the last ever roll of Kodachrome film. But you sometimes have to wonder if the main attraction for many is really the restaurant, and its incredible view of the old city across the water.

• *Meclis-i Mebusan Caddesi, Liman İşletmeleri, Sahasi Antrepo 4, Karaköy, +90 212 334 7300, istanbulmodern.org, TL14 (£5). Open Tue-Sun 10am-6pm, Thur closes 8pm*

Galeri Manâ



Photograph: [Effect PR](#)

Respected Turkish-American curator Suzanne Egeran helped set up Galeri Manâ this year, taking the name from the Turkish for "meaning" and with the idea of integrating conceptual art from Turkey with more renowned international work. The inaugural show featured idea-led art from the likes of [Sol LeWitt](#) and [Robin Rhode](#), all within the exposed red brick walls of an old wheat mill that wouldn't look out of place in Brooklyn. The shows scheduled to coincide with the Biennale are some of the most exciting in the city and include Berlin-based multi-award winner [Nasan Tur](#), whose *Arms*, a series of photographs of political hand gestures cleverly removed from their context, was included in the first show.

• *Ali Paşa Değirmeni Sokak 16-18, +90 212 243 6666, galerimana.com, entrance free*

Rodeo



Photograph: [occasionallywhere on Flickr/ some rights reserved](#)

Rodeo is considered one of the most exciting art spaces in Istanbul, displaying high-quality art and an international, avant-garde awareness. Curator Sylvia Kouvali started off representing artists from Turkey, Greece and Cyprus before moving into more regional and then international shows. Here you'll find everything from original installations comprised of dozens of related water colours to re-contextualised, ready-made pieces taken from old books and photo albums. Know where to look and you might hear about extremely cutting-edge performances, like multidisciplinary artist Cevdet Erek, [rubbing a carpet hung on the wall](#).

• *Tütün Deposu/Lüleci Hendek Caddesi 12, Tophane, +90 212 293 5800, [rodeo-gallery.com](#), entrance free*

Galerist



No other building in Istanbul can claim to sum up the city today quite like Misir Apartmani, a beautiful 19th-century apartment block presiding over Beyoğlu. It boasts not only the chic 360 bar and club on the top floor but one of the city's best galleries. Over the past decade, Galerist has hosted fashion designer [Hüseyin Çağlayan](#)'s photography projects and stylish, hyper-realistic paintings by [Taner Ceylan](#), among many others. You might not be challenged to think very much here, but it all looks very, well ... cool.

• *Misir Apartmani 163/4, Istiklal Caddesi, Beyoğlu, +90 212 244 8230, [galerist.com.tr](#), entrance free. Open Mon-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat noon-6pm. 360 bar: [360istanbul.com](#)*

Galeri Nev



On the floor above Galerist is the latest venue for Galeri Nev. Taking a more considered approach than its downstairs neighbour, Nev – founded in Ankara in the 1980s – combines the new art coming out of Turkey with volumes of art history and catalogues. The art on show can vary from understated prints and drawings to outlandish sculpture and installations, but it seems to share a refined taste that doesn't need to shout too loudly. The gallery's other Istanbul venue is in the upmarket district of Maçka, maintaining its identity as a successful older brother to the city's more excitable art venues.

• *Maçka Caddesi 33, B Maçka, +90 212 231 6763; İstiklal Caddesi 163, Misir Apartment 5th Floor, Beyoğlu, +90 212 252 1525, galerinevistanbul.com, entrance free*

Pera Museum



Photograph: [mandymoran27 on Flickr/ some rights reserved](#)

The main collection might consist of Orientalist paintings, old weights and Ottoman tiles, but modern art fans should keep an eye on the Pera's top-notch travelling exhibitions by the likes of Picasso, Botero and Chagal. You experience the shows from top to bottom, working your way downwards over several floors of bright, white, well-polished museum space. Opening nights bring out paparazzi and camera crews, and the regular screenings of classic foreign films have as much style, romance and class as the converted Victorian hotel building and its location, a stone's throw from the famous [Pera Palace Hotel](#).

• *Meşrutiyet Caddesi 65, 34443 Tepebaşı, Beyoğlu, +90 212 334 9900, peramuzesi.org.tr, entrance £3.50. Tuesday-Saturday 10am-7pm, Sunday noon-6pm, closed on Mondays*

Santral Istanbul



Photograph: [Charkrem on Flickr/ some rights reserved](#)

In surroundings more green than Tophane and more peaceful than Beyoğlu, the gallery at Santral is a good bet for a cultural pit-stop on a boat trip up the [Golden Horn](#). The curators put together exhibitions on eclectic international subjects, from German architecture to Italian design and Colombian contemporary art, with the focus switching occasionally to subjects taught at Bilgi University, which occupies most of this enormous converted Ottoman power station. In daylight, the steel and glass cuboid blocks that make up the gallery space are dark and imposing from the outside, but at night, illuminated, they come to life.

• *Eski Silahhane Elektrik Santrali, Kazım Karabekir Caddesi 2, Eyüp, +90 212 311 7878, santralistanbul.org, entrance £3.50*

Yapi Kredi Kültür Merkezi



Photograph: Alamy

It might strike you as strange that a bank would have its own cultural centre and arts-book publishing house, but such things are relatively normal in Turkey. More surprising still, perhaps, is that the exhibitions here, though eclectic, are impressive. The gallery's two rooms usually host an odd but interesting balance of archaeology (text-heavy and educational) and photographic or contemporary art.

• *Istiklal Caddesi 161, Beyoğlu, +90 212 252 4700, ykykultur.com.tr, entrance free. Open weekdays 9am-10pm*