



A camel trader arranges his belongings as others look on near their camels at the Pushkar Camel Fair in Pushkar in the northeastern Indian state of Rajasthan. — AFP photos



A camel trader stands in front of his camels at the Pushkar Camel Fair in Pushkar.

India's Pushkar Camel Fair returns after COVID hump

Hundreds of herders and their animals gathered in the desert city of Pushkar yesterday for India's biggest camel-trading fair. The northern city typically attracts thousands of Hindu pilgrims, cattle traders and herders for the annual event, but it was called off in 2020 because of the pandemic. The gathering in the desert state of Rajasthan sees traditional camel breeding communities trek some-

times hundreds of kilometers (miles) from their remote villages to trade their animals.

The 13-day fair, which opened on Monday, coincides with several auspicious days in the Hindu calendar, adding to the crowds thronging the revered lakeside city. "Pushkar is about both cattle trading and religious rituals," Prafull Mathur from Rajasthan's animal husbandry department told AFP. "The COVID-19 situation hasn't

fully normalized but we still expect a good attendance," Mathur added. Organizers usually hold competitions for camel herders, which are a major attraction for domestic and international tourists, but the government hasn't yet clarified if the contests will be allowed this year.

The fair is the only time of the year when camel breeders-most of whom live in remote, nomadic communities in the

desert-can earn cash income that helps sustain their way of life. The camels are mostly purchased by people from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to use on their farms or as transport. Other animals, including horses, are also bought and sold at the event. India's security forces deployed along the international border with Pakistan also use camels extensively to patrol remote stretches.

To help remote camel breeding communities diversify their income, the government has been trying to promote camel milk, camel leather and camel bone products. The region's prominent camel herding community, Raikas, believe that the Hindu god Shiva handed them the responsibility to rear camels.-AFP

Indian star Kamal Haasan to launch metaverse avatar

Film superstar Kamal Haasan is set to become the first Indian actor to launch an avatar in the "metaverse" as celebrities seek to expand their fan base into the virtual world. Haasan, who turned 67 on Sunday, said in a statement on his birthday that he was "excited to explore the emerging intersection of the digital and physical world". He added that he planned to auction virtual memorabilia in the form of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) at an unspecified time.

Celebrity NFT platform Fantico will create a metaverse game where the actor will have his own world, the statement added. It will allow fans to interact with his digital avatars, buy memorabilia and participate in meet-and-greet sessions within the game. "To have a legend such as Kamal Haasan on our platform will only set the trend for more creators to adapt to the future of fan engagement," said Fantico founder Abhayanand Singh.

The announcement comes a week



In this file photo Indian cinema actor and founder of 'Makkal Needhi Mayyam' party Kamal Haasan speaks during a media conference in Chennai. — AFP

after Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan raised just under \$970,000 from an auction of his digital memorabilia-the first for an Indian celebrity-according to NFT trading platform Guardian Link. NFTs-digital works of art, music, animation, images or video with a certificate of authenticity created by blockchain technology-have soared in popularity in recent months. The metaverse meanwhile has recently gained attention after Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said last month that the tech giant saw the virtual reality version of the internet as the future. Veteran screen icon Haasan, who also produces, directs and sings in many of his movies, is a massive star primarily in India's Tamil-language film industry. — AFP

Taika Waititi to adapt 'The Incal' comics for big screen

Taika Waititi will direct the first big-screen adaptation of best-selling and highly influential sci-fi comic book series "The Incal." The New Zealander who directed Marvel superhero hit "Thor: Ragnarok" and won an Oscar for his "Jojo Rabbit" screenplay-will also co-write the movie, said publisher Humanoids Associates. Waititi said he was "stunned to be given the opportunity" to bring the creation of cult Franco-Chilean comics writer Alejandro Jodorowsky and French artist Moebius to life.

"The Incal" has sold millions of copies around the world since its debut in the late 1970s, and is one of the highest-selling sci-fi graphic novels in history. A sprawling space opera, it follows bumbling intergalactic private eye John Difool as he finds a mystical artifact which is coveted by powerful factions across the galaxy. He is compelled to save the universe, while undertaking a spiritual journey that takes in questions such as the meaning of existence. Jodorowsky-a filmmaker in his own right-famously tried to make a highly ambitious movie version of "Dune" in the 1970s, but ended up using elements of that failed



In this file photo New Zealand director Taika Waititi arrives for the L.A. premiere of "Last Night in Soho" at the Academy Museum in Los Angeles. — AFP

project to write "The Incal" soon after.

"The films and graphic novels of Alejandro Jodorowsky have influenced me and so many others for so long," Waititi said in a statement. The movie is Humanoids Associates' "first of many forays into film production," the French publisher said in a press release, and comes as comic-book adaptations continue to dominate Hollywood and the global box office. Waititi is also directing the eagerly awaited Marvel sequel "Thor: Love and Thunder," due out in June, starring Natalie Portman, Chris Hemsworth, Matt Damon and Christian Bale. "When Humanoids' CEO Fabrice Giger introduced me to Taika Waititi's work, it became obvious to me that he was the one," said Jodorowsky, 92, in the statement. "I fully trust Taika's creativity to give 'The Incal' a stunning take, intimate and at the same time of cosmic proportions." — AFP

Baldwin calls for police to watch guns on set after 'Rust'

Police officers should be stationed on all film productions where guns are being used, Alec Baldwin said Monday, weeks after he fatally shot a crew member in a tragic on-set accident in New Mexico. The US actor and producer fired a Colt .45 he had been told was safe on the set of Western "Rust," striking and killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins. "Every film/TV set that uses guns, fake or otherwise, should have a police officer on set, hired by the production, to specifically monitor weapons safety," Baldwin tweeted.

A police investigation into the tragic incident is in progress, with prosecutors refusing to rule out criminal charges against anyone, including Baldwin. Ahead of a rehearsal involving a shooting scene, Baldwin had been handed a firearm and told it was a "cold gun"-industry speak for a prop that was deemed cleared and safe to use. Baldwin has described the "incidental accident" as a "one in a trillion episode." Calls have grown since the incident for better control of weapons on Hollywood sets, and Baldwin previously said the effort was "something I am extremely interested in." — AFP



Nuit Balneaires, an artist represented by Dada Gallery, poses for a picture in front of his artwork at the ArtX annual art fair at the Federal Palace Hotel, Victoria Island, in Lagos. — AFP photos



Ayoola Gbolahan, an artist represented by Kanbi projects, poses for a picture in front of his artwork.



Art enthusiasts look at an artwork by Barry Yusufu titled "Home Girl".

Nigeria takes early steps into international art world

Nigeria's elite sipped champagne and splashed thousands of dollars on contemporary paintings at a fair in Lagos this week, an early step into the international art world for Africa's most populous nation. In front of major players from cinema, fashion and finance, about 30 art galleries from across the African continent-but also from Paris, London and Barcelona-showed off their best pieces at the ArtX fair.

"Nigeria's art collectors are not well known globally, and when we arrived here we didn't realise the potential," said Lea Perier Loko from the Paris-based gallery Septieme. "When collectors fall for something, they don't hesitate to spend!" The pieces they sold first were two gigantic blue paintings by Kenyan artist Kaloki Nyamai that represent "a part of history that isn't found in books". The two paintings, each measuring 2 metres square, were sold separately for \$20,000 (17,300 euros). "In Paris, it's much more difficult to sell paintings of this size.

It really shows the difference in scale with Lagos," said Perier Loko. Among its 210 million residents, oil-rich Nigeria has some of the world's wealthiest people, with bankers and traders now becoming important contemporary art collectors. For a long

time, Nigeria's art scene was known for looking inward, with its collectors buying colourful, local figurative art. "Things have changed a lot," said Delphine Lopez from one of the continent's best-known galleries, Cecile Fakhoury.

'Bold, energetic' Lagos

Her gallery has decided to bet on three Ivorian artists and two others from Benin at its stand. Visitors stop, intrigued by a tapestry made from raffia sprinkled with

seashells and pieces of string, created by Franco-Ivorian Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien. "There is an ancient culture of textile art and tapestry in West Africa, and yet it's different to what you find here in Nigeria," said Lopez.

ArtX founder Tokini Peterside launched the project in 2016 to open up collectors in Nigeria to other markets, as well as to bring international galleries to the country. "I wanted the world to understand the city in the way that I did, and to see the city for

what it truly is... a very dynamic place with incredible, passionate, bold, energetic people," said the 36-year-old. And she hoped that the fair could also "counter the alternative, more negative image that usually is used to portray Lagos and Nigeria". Africa's most populous country is known for being home to Boko Haram, one of the world's most violent jihadist groups.

Its dynamic creative industry, miles away from the northeast insurgency, is often less known. "When we announced

that we were coming to ArtX in Lagos, some people asked us why, if there was even an art scene in Nigeria, and if it was not too dangerous," said Perier Loko of Septieme gallery. Yet many of the country's artists, singers and designers are powerhouses on the continent and globally. For those who made the trip, coming to Lagos was a winning bet, and many hope to come back and continue exploring the Nigerian art market. — AFP



Malong Sanb, founder of Galerie Mam, poses for a picture in front of her gallery's booth.



Alduphina, an artist represented by Pacers Gallery, poses for a portrait in front of her work.