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Art Fair Crowd Moves Across the Channel

As Frieze Fair Closes, FIAC in Paris Draws the Art Crowd

By Scott Reyburn
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PARIS — On Wednesday, just four days after the Frieze Art Fair closed in London, the 41st edition of the rival Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain opened to V.I.P.'s in Paris.

Since its debut in 2003, Frieze has gained a reputation as one of Europe's leading fairs dedicated to new art. But in recent years, particularly since returning to the Belle Epoque splendor of the Grand Palais in 2006, the older FIAC has upped its game.

This year's list of 191 exhibitors included a full line-up of international mega-galleries, as well as dozens of younger dealers who introduce the sort of fresh talent that makes wealthy collectors get on planes. FIAC further reinforced its cutting-edge credentials this year by inaugurating (Off)icielle, a satellite fair of 68 emerging galleries, at Les Docks, Cité de la Mode et du Design next to the Gare d'Austerlitz in the east of Paris.

"If you go to fairs two weeks in a row there's a danger of burnout," said the New York art adviser Judith Selkowitz, who chose to attend FIAC this year rather than Frieze. "You see a different crowd in Paris. There are more Belgians and Scandinavians, more people who are really serious about collecting. And there's a certain style in Paris you don't see anywhere else."

One of the key reasons dealers exhibit at FIAC is the possibility of selling work to the French billionaire collectors François Pinault and Mr. Arnault. Both businessmen were given a private view of the fair two hours before the opening. Although the fair's organizers divulged that Mr. Pinault bought more than 30 pieces at FIAC and (Off)icielle, exhibitors were reluctant to disclose which works went to him or Mr. Arnault.

Given that the Louis Vuitton Foundation was being inaugurated with an immersive installation by the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson — who designed Christmas windows for the company's stores in 2006 — Mr. Arnault would surely have been interested in the mesmerizing 2013 Eliasson work,

"The New Planet," featuring a rotating steel and colored-glass lantern, that was shown by the Berlin dealer Neugerriemschneider. This remained reserved during the early hours of the preview at a price revealed by dealers to be 375,000 euros, about \$475,000. Unlike the London fair, which separates new art at Frieze and older, resold works at Frieze Masters, FIAC brings both together under one steel-and-glass roof. But the number of dealers specializing in early and mid-20th-century modernism — the traditional strength of the Paris art scene — has dwindled to less than 10 percent of the exhibitors.

Once the doors opened at 10 a.m., the Grand Palais filled up with a well-to-do crowd that included the New York collector Peter Brant, the London jeweler Laurence Graff, the Swiss media magnate Michael Ringier and the Greek financier Dimitri Mavrommatis, plus hundreds of Parisians simply enjoying a day out.



Courtesy M+B Gallery, Los Angeles

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FIAC included some older rarities, like an oversized 1971 “matchbook” sculpture titled “Saffa” by the French artist Raymond Hains, which was sold for €200,000 by the Berlin and Paris dealer Max Hetzler.

But, as usual, abstract paintings by “investment grade” living artists remain most in demand.

The New York dealer Van De Weghe, unfazed by blips in the auction market for Gerhard Richter, quickly found a buyer for Mr. Richter’s four-foot-high 1985 “Untitled (S78-1),” priced at \$2.8 million. A much larger 2001 Christopher Wool silkscreen ink-on-linen abstract, also “Untitled,” was among more than a dozen early sales at the booth of the London dealer Simon Lee. That work was priced between \$3 million and \$3.5 million.

FIAC, unlike Frieze, also showcases approachable paintings by more mainstream artists, such as Marc Desgrandchamps of Lyon, France, whose 2014 oil-on-canvas of curtains blowing through an open window, “o.T.,” was sold for €42,000 by Galerie Eigen+Art. That German dealership exhibits at three Art Basel fairs, Frieze London and Frieze New York, as well as FIAC, and Eigen’s director, Gerd Harry Lybke, said he was hoping to exhibit next year at FIAC’s new offshoot fair in Los Angeles, considered by many to be the art world’s current center of creativity.

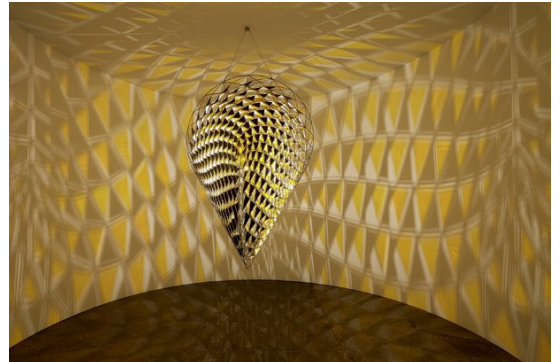
A taste of what might be in store at the event, set to run from March 27 to 29, was provided by a Los Angeles artist at the booth of the Berlin gallerist Isabella Bortolozzi. Wu Tsang’s LED light and Swarovski crystal “dress” sculpture, inspired, he said, by local transgender communities, was being offered in an edition of three, plus one in situ in a mirrored installation. At least one of the editioned pieces, priced at €30,000 to €45,000, sold at the preview.

M+B in Los Angeles was one of the most successful dealers at the previous evening’s packed private view of (Off)icielle, which mostly had lower price points.

Half a dozen of Dwyer Kilcollin’s chair and vase sculptures, made out of solidified sand, sold out, priced from \$3,500 to \$7,000 each. Mr. Pinault was identified by several dealers as the buyer of a “flying carpet,” made from a drone and a Muslim prayer mat, by the Corsican artist Moussa Sarr. It was priced at €40,000 at the booth of the Paris dealers Martine and Thibault de la Châtre.

At the moment, with the supply of new works and of dealers willing to display them seemingly limitless, and the global “1 percent” becoming ever-richer, big-brand contemporary fairs like FIAC, Frieze and Art Basel are a successful business model.

“It’s not like the 1980s,” said Ms. Selkowitz, the New York art adviser. “Now if 10 collectors were to drop out, another 20 would come in. People realize art is status. But if the stock market keeps going down, people will become more cautious about lesser works.”



Danish artist Olafur Eliasson’s 2013 installation “The New Planet,” featuring a rotating steel and colored-glass lantern. On view at FIAC. Courtesy the artist and neugerriemschneider, Berlin.



A 1971 “Saffa” sculpture by Raymond Hains. Credit Galerie Max Hetzler