

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Financial Times  
Alarm sounds for art fairs across the world  
Melanie Gerlis  
11 March 2020

# FINANCIAL TIMES

## Alarm sounds for art fairs across the world

Events face uncertain times; Armory Show reschedules; Marron exhibition postponed; Sotheby's offers rare textiles



Image: Jessie Homer French's 'Oil Platform Fire' (2019)

Tefaf Maastricht bravely went ahead with the opening of its 33rd edition on March 7. But in an unprecedented move on March 11, the management had to cut short the fair — which was due to run until March 15 — after news that one of its exhibitors had tested positive for Covid-19. Their statement made

no mention of the exhibitor who was taken unwell but The Art Newspaper reports that the person in question was an Italian modern art dealer and had left the fair on March 9.

Before its closure, dealers said they were pleasantly surprised with the level of sales and visitors — albeit based on recalibrated expectations. The fair reported VIP attendance down 20 per cent to 10,000 across its two opening days.

Emma Ward, managing director at Dickinson Gallery, speaking midway through the fair, put a brave face on it: “Yes, numbers were down, but terrific people came and they had more space to look at the art.” Her sales included one of the standout works in the booths, Vincent van Gogh’s “Paysanne devant une Chaumière” (1885), reportedly priced between €12m and €15m.

Officials in New York declared a state of emergency during last week’s Armory Show, as the number of confirmed cases of coronavirus in the US grew.

Visitor numbers were down — from 57,000 last year to 41,000 — with plenty more hand sanitiser around. That said, there was still enough of a crowd, at least on the VIP day, for dealers to make sales, including for above \$100,000 — a high level for this fair. These included Yinka Shonibare’s fibreglass mannequin “Skipping Girl II” (2019) for about £125,000 (Stephen Friedman), Kehinde Wiley’s “Portrait of Tahiatua Maraetefau II” (2019) for \$240,000 (Galerie Templon) and a Luc Tuymans painting, “In The End You’re Just Dad” (2010) for \$700,000 (Zeno X Gallery), the highest reported sale from the fair.

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Image: Yinka Shonibare's fibreglass mannequin 'Skipping Girl II' (2019) © Yinka Shonibare CBE. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

The art market talk in New York wasn't just about the virus. Midway through, The Armory organisers announced that they were moving dates and location for next year, potentially throwing so-called "Armory Week" under a bus. The next edition will run September 9-12 2021 in the Javits Center in Hell's Kitchen, which is currently undergoing an expansion and revamp. New York's cultural elite don't love the space, but it's more centrally located than the West Side piers that have hosted the Armory for the past 19 years, and certainly more structurally secure.

"We like convention centres," says dealer Josh Lilley, who is on the fair's selection committee. "The facilities are good, the space is effective and

so business happens." His sales last week included paintings by Celeste Rapone (up to £22,000). Other exhibitors, particularly those showing on Pier 94 — a short trek from the main section on Pier 90 — welcomed the opportunity afforded by the Javits Center to be under the same roof.

Fairs that currently coincide with the Armory Show include Independent and Volta, while the ADAA's Art Show falls the week before. At time of writing, none was planning to September. The Frieze New York team is also believed to have scoped out the Javits Center for their own 2021 event — it currently takes place in Randall's Island Park in the East River — but a spokeswoman suggests only that they are "always exploring opportunities".

Covid-19 has also nipped an exhibition of the late Donald Marron's collection in the bud. Three galleries — Acquavella, Gagosian and Pace — shocked the art world by winning the prestigious consignment away from major auction houses last month and had planned an in-depth showing from May. The collection of more than 300 works is said to be valued around \$450m and includes prime pieces by Picasso and Rothko, some of which have already sold.

That exhibition has now been postponed, with no alternative dates confirmed. A spokeswoman for the galleries says, "Given the current climate of uncertainty, it seems that it will no longer be possible to secure the loans from international private lenders and institutions that would be required to present the true scope and influence of Don Marron's collection. Our priority is on creating an exhibition that will honour Don to the fullest, and which will celebrate his legacy for local and global audiences."

Even amid all this, a fast pace of sales was recorded at this year's Independent, the most curated and crisp of the New York fairs (March 6-8). Several of its 68 exhibitors use it as an outing for lesser-known artists. "We know that amazing people come here," said the gallerist Javier Perés. "New Yorkers are brave." This was a reference both to their taste and the high number of visitors at the fair's opening, despite the health concerns. His Berlin gallery, Peres Projects, brought performance-based work by the Ohio artist Richard Kennedy, whose opera *Black Rage* runs at London's Zabłudowicz Collection on March 27. Other popular discoveries included the 80-year old American artist Jessie Homer French,

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whose work sold out of LA's Various Small Fires (\$12,000-\$25,000) and, at Karma International, works by the 20th-century Japanese painter Zenzaburo Kojima (\$30,000-\$100,000).



Image: Celeste Rapone's 'Timekeeper' (2020)

Sotheby's will offer a rare selection of Ottoman and Mughal Empire textiles from the collection of the late H. Peter Stern, co-founder of the Storm King Art Center, a 500-acre sculpture garden in upstate New York. Among the 35 lots for sale in London on April 1 are about a dozen 17th-to-18th-century velvet Qanat (tent) panels from India, used as decorative moveable screens for hunting parties. Stern hung these in his Hudson Valley home for 35 years. "You don't see tent panels on the market that often," says Benedict Carter, Sotheby's head of Middle East auctions. "They make for good interior hangings if you have the space, and could be interesting to museums too."

The top lot — a Mughal court hanging with flowering shrubs set in cusped arches — measures more than four metres wide (est. £25,000-£40,000). In 2017, a smaller pair of Mughal panels sold from the collection of the artist Howard Hodgkin for £30,000, while in the same year, a mounted silk velvet piece sold for £1.1m — a record for an Ottoman textile (both including fees). Sotheby's shows a group of Stern's textiles in New York this week (March 12-16).