

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Vice
Frieze London is Feisty and On Point
Hettie Judah
5 October 2017



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This year's edition of juggernaut art fair Frieze London finds space to tackle sexual politics, institutional racism, and environmental angst but—customary brain Frieze aside—still manages to leave us feeling upbeat.



Image: Galerie Perrotin, Frieze London 2017. Photo By Mark Blower, Courtesy Of Mark Blower/Frieze

By mid afternoon on VIP day, Frieze Face sets in. Not the Botox-ed rigidity of the plastic surgery enthusiast (though that, too, is plentiful) but the glazed-and-confused look that descends after five hours spent looking at art and its

merchants in a neon-lit maze. Overloaded with visual stimuli, the mind feels numb (brain Frieze?). You become unsure whether anything you've seen is important, or good, or even collectible. Fairs are notoriously poor places to look at art: they're too big, too bright, too disorientating. Yet as the art world's inescapable marketplaces, there's a certain weird honesty to them. Read attentively, they point to where the influence lies, and to the current mood. Frieze London felt particularly woozy this year, perhaps because of a prevailing seriousness. There were few of the moments of outrage, flamboyance and celebratory oddness that have gee'd the spirit in years past.

Which is not to say all was po-faced. Salon 94 was alive with dancing color, with a Betty Wodman ceramic collage twirling up the wall and Anton Alvarez's brightly hued extruded pots arranged on the floor beneath a rough grid of small, gem-bright abstract paintings by Marina Adams. At Esther Schipper, Daniel Steegmann Mangrané's *Summer Clouds* (2017)—huge iridescent chainlink curtains set with cloud-shaped apertures—would have looked just dandy at an Ibiza beach party Oslo's VI,VII gallery transformed their little Frieze Focus booth into a tiny couture atelier for artist Than Hussein Clark, who measures up wealthy visitors in plain sight for bespoke wearable artworks.

Overall, though, this was a year in which the art world faced up to some uncomfortable home truths about its history, most notably those chapters of it that have only recently been sketched in. Here the influence of spirited museum curators worldwide was powerfully felt; recent exhibitions like *Soul of a Nation* at Tate Modern in London, *The Place is Here* at Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven and Nottingham Contemporary, and Kerry James Marshall's *Mastry* at New York's Metropolitan Museum have had an enormous impact on the prominence of work by artists of colour at the fair. Now in his eighties, Melvin Edwards—whose sculptures are featured in *Soul of a Nation*—is the subject of a solo display at Frieze London with his gallerist, Stephen Friedman.

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Showing at the London fair for the first time, New York's Jack Shainman Gallery looks like an executive digest of the Tate and Met exhibitions, with works by Barkley Hendricks (visible around town on the Soul of a Nation poster), Kerry James Marshall, Hank Willis Thomas, Titus Kaphar, and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. The Marshall work *Untitled (Bathers)* (2017), sold during

the private view for \$875,000. Hollybush Gardens are showing works by Lubaina Himid, an artist this young gallery started representing when she was in her late fifties and who has since had two major institutional solo exhibitions. She's also hotly tipped to win this year's Turner Prize.

A number of artists explicitly call out the forces that have seen work by people of color underrepresented institutionally in Europe and the US. Anna Boghiguian, an Egyptian-born artist, who, like Lubaina Himid, has received a burst of attention comparatively late in her career, has a fierce wall of text and pastel drawings showing at Sfeir Semler, touching on hot-button themes of institutional racism and white privilege. At the redoubtable São Paulo gallery Mendes Wood DM, Paulo Nazareth's arrangement of acrylic blocks carrying cheap consumer goods make a sideways dig at Brazilian Concretism, regarded by the artist as a movement of the white elite.

In Nazareth's film *Oi Ori Buruku* (2015), a Nigerian man standing on the top of a building in São Paulo flings heartfelt curses at the city in Yoruba, a language spoken by many of the slaves brought from Africa to Brazil. In this and in other works, the artist traces lines of shared culture and influence between particular communities in Brazil and Africa, which he has explored through a long series of extended walks and sea voyages.

This year's curated section *Sex Work* likewise identifies institutional prejudice: this time in the marginalisation and even censorship of works by female artists from the 1960s onwards who have addressed female sexuality in frank and at times outrageous ways. In an episode of delectable poetic justice, one of the works acquired for Tate at this year's fair was Dorothy Iannone's painting *Wiggle Your Ass For Me* (1970). A typically exuberant and explicit painting, it was made the year after the artist's works were notoriously confiscated from an exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland. Once the object of institutional censorship, her work is now being purchased for museums.



Image: Frieze London 2017. Photo By Mark Blower, Courtesy Of Mark Blower/Frieze

Tate is, by international standards, unusually diligent in its attempts to redress the historical imbalance in the number of works by male and female artists in its collection. Current director Maria Balshaw, as well as the director of Tate Modern, Frances Morris, have both long actively championed the work of

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female artists, works by whom still sell for less than those of their male contemporaries. By making high profile acquisitions such as this, Tate has an important impact on the attention afforded work by female artists within the market.

A number of the artists featured in Sex Work, which was curated by Alison Gingeras, have featured in recent group shows. Natalia LL's frankfurter fellatio was shown in Tate's The World Goes Pop; Penny Slinger's surrealist-inspired collages featured in Room at Sadie Coles HQ earlier this year, and photographs by both Renate Bertlmann and Birgit Jürgenssen were shown as part of the international touring exhibition Woman. The Feminist Avant-Garde Of The 1970s.

The selection made for Sex Work pulls no punches, however. Here, Slinger's collages are not merely suggestive, but actively explicit in their depiction of female sexual organs. Ditto large black-and-white paintings by Marilyn Minter based on images scaled up from porn magazines.

Even decades after they were made, such works remain contentious, and the issues they address find fellow feeling in the oeuvre of younger artists. Kandis Williams, showing with L.A's Night Gallery, shares Slinger's use of collage, grimly updated to show pornographic photographs of skeletal anorexic women, all displaying themselves beneath a canopy of figures from the white patriarchy: from the founding fathers to Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. Swedish artist Anna Uddenberg, showing at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, likewise looks at the way the online world and competitive sexual/wellness industry has created impossible and damaging expectations. Upholstered in automotive leather, with patches of fake fur, handles and medical-grade plastic, her sculptural work looks, at first glance, like some kind of sex chair. Yet however gymnastically one imagines the positioning of bodies might be within it, the contortions appear impossible (or is one simply not up to the task, or, god forbid, too vanilla?).



Image: Richard Saltoun, Sex Work Section, Frieze London 2017. Photo By Mark Blower, Courtesy Of Mark Blower/Frieze

This year also saw the slight return of an environmentalist sensibility. Inspired, perhaps, by the 1970s community movements investigated at this year's Venice Biennale, LA gallery Various Small Fires brought a miniature iteration of eco-artists Helen and Newton Harrison's 1972 work Survival Piece #5: Portable

Orchard: a clutch of potted fruiting trees, appropriately lit, accompanied by instructions for plantings that might sustain a community group. Lucy + Jorge Orta's project Antarctica issued visitors new Antarctic passports, each numbered and registered to the bearer. In accepting the document, new Antarctic 'world citizens' pledge to fight against intimidation and poverty, to support social progress, to protect the environment, and otherwise defend liberty, justice, and peace.

British artist Jeremy Deller made a more starkly worded and specific environmental statement—"Do Not Eat Octopus"—in an aquatic blue graphic at Modern Institute. Deller's recent poster work trolling Britain's ruling Conservative party, which featured the mocking take on their current slogan in the form of "Strong And Steady My Arse," caused a sensation when it was pasted up across North London ahead of last summer's elections. When this artist starts taking a stand for sensitive sea creatures it's probably time to drop the tentacle habit.

But the burning question, of course, is which booths are winning the battle for Instagram. Where last year selfie fans took repeated advantage of mirrored sculptures, Frieze London 2017 has seen a trend

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in visitors searching out works that match their outfits. At Hauser & Wirth's booth, celebrity historian Mary Beard was consulted for a Bronze Age-themed local museum-styled display. It comes complete with a mini gift shop selling pencils, bookmarks, and coins imprinted with Iwan Wirth's profile: it's been Instagram heaven, particularly for those who manage to get the popular professor in shot. Star prize, however, goes to Renate Bertlmann's row of dildo cactus statues, shown as part of Sex Work by Richard Saltoun gallery: short and to the point.



Image: Salon 94, Frieze London 2017.
Photo By Mark Blower, Courtesy Of
Mark Blower/Frieze