

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Artnet News

'It's Great to Be Back': International VIPs Flock to Frieze London, Ready to See—and Spend—After a Year's Hiatus

Naomi Rea

13 October 2021

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The art fair opened to VIPs today and will be on view through October 17.

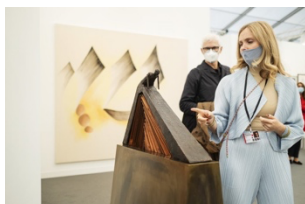


Image: Director Marlene von Carnap with work by Enrico David at the Michael Werner booth at Frieze London 2021. Photo by Linda Nylind. Courtesy of Linda Nylind/Frieze.

Frieze London opened its first in-person art fair in two years today, October 13, to invited VIPs. There was a feeling of excitement as people filed into the white tents in Regent's Park, buoyant that the fair had pushed ahead despite numerous challenges, including a fuel crisis and continued difficulties transporting goods due not only to travel restrictions, but also to Britain's exit from the European Union.

Safety procedures required a wristband proving vaccination, but it wasn't welded to your wrist like it was in Switzerland at Art Basel. Masks definitely felt optional inside the fair—which was, despite timed entry slots and harder-than-usual-to-acquire VIP cards, crowded from the moment it opened its doors at 11 a.m.

"It's great to be back!" Neil Wenman, partner at Hauser and Wirth, told Artnet News. "Basel was a reunion, and now we're really up and running, and more people are coming. I think the fair has been very well planned, very well organised. It just feels really buzzy." Unsurprisingly for the mega-gallery, Wenman reported they had sold 17 works in the first hours of the fair, including a Günther Förg painting for €1.5 million and a work by Charles Gaines for \$350,000.

Collectors with a local base were out in force, with Theo Danjuma, Lonti Ebers, Paul Ettlinger, Valeria Napoleone, Frances Reynolds, and Muriel Salem spotted roaming the aisles. As with Art Basel last month, there was a strong European presence, thanks to appearances from collectors Bob and Renée Drake, Füsün Eczacıbaşı, Andreas and Ulrike Kurtz, Frédéric Jousset, Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Alain Servais, and Mercedes Zobel.

But the flavour of Frieze London was far more global, with Bangladeshi collectors Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani, Tarini Jindal from India, as well as Tiqui Atencio, Jay Smith and Laura Rapp, and Othman Lazraq in attendance. And, in contrast to the Swiss fair, there were a number of high-level American collectors on the ground, including Jimmy Iovine and Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz. U.S. buyers were actively making their presence felt through acquisitions, with a major American collection securing Kerry James Marshall's painting *Black and Part Black Birds in America: (Pigeon and Black Capped Chickadee no 2) (2021)* for \$2.2 million from David Zwirner. Another American collector bought a painting by Rose Wylie for \$250,000, while Wylie's sculpture *Pineapple (2021)*, which features in *Frieze Sculpture*, sold for the same price.

"A lot of Americans are here, and I think a lot of them came here on the way to FIAC and Paris," Maureen Paley told Artnet News. Indeed, it seems that London benefited from moving its dates one week closer to the Paris fair, which opens next week. Paley's booth saw a lot of action in the early hours of the opening day, selling a Wolfgang Tillmans inkjet print for \$95,000, with proceeds going to benefit the Gallery Climate Coalition. The gallery also sold a unique photogram by Anne Hardy for £18,000, a photo print on mirrored Perspex by Jane and Louise Wilson for £14,000, and closed a sale on a Rebecca Warren sculpture for £170,000 to a German collector.

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Image: Lehmann Maupin, Frieze London 2021 Photo by Linda Nylind. Courtesy of Linda Nylind/Frieze.

Asian buyers were again largely absent, with concerns about public health as well as travel restrictions continuing to keep collectors away. But many stayed active, buying over FaceTime or through surrogate art advisors on the ground. “Most of my clients are Asians based in Europe, and some of them did go to Art Basel with me. But after seeing the PDFs sent by the galleries, many of them have decided a couple of days ago to forgo Frieze because they don't think it's worth the hassle of traveling to the U.K.,” art advisor Aliza Lan told Artnet News.

Strong sales were reported in the first hours of the fair, although they happened at a slower clip than in previous years. Some suggested the timed-entry process could have played a role, and others said buyers were slow to commit, being spoiled for choice between the fairs and the London auctions this week. Gallerist Ben Brown reported that the presale grind was tougher in London than it had been in Basel, although he had already sold a José Parla ahead of the fair in the high \$200,000 range. “There are obviously far more galleries concentrated on the same number of people, so it's been a little bit fewer people pulling the trigger...I think everybody wants to come to see everything and then make their minds up,” he said.

Still, by mid-afternoon, the sales reports were pinging into inboxes. Gagosian sold out its solo booth by Jennifer Guidi, priced at \$350,000 for the paintings and \$40,000 for the works on paper. Stephen Friedman Gallery also sold out its booth dedicated to Deborah Roberts, with prices ranging from \$125,000 to \$150,000. Meanwhile, Lehmann Maupin sold more than 15 fabric versions of household objects by Do Ho Suh for a combined total of \$1.4 million. Xavier Hufkens's first-day highlights included two works on paper by Louise Bourgeois that were priced between \$100,000 and \$250,000, and three editions of a Thomas Housego bronze sculpture for \$200,000 each.



Image: Installation view of Lucy Bull at David Kordansky Gallery. Photo: Mark Blower. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

A suite of large-scale abstractions by Lucy Bull at David Kordansky Gallery proved a talking point, with several people remarking on a growing appetite for female abstraction in the wake of the boom for figurative artists. The booth sold out to prominent private collections and museums in Asia, Australia, and North America in the first hours of the fair, for prices between \$25,000 and \$85,000. “Bull's sensorial paintings speak to the chaos and anxieties—and escapist fantasies—of our current times, captivating audiences who are drawn to the works' visceral complexities,” gallery director Kurt Mueller said.

Austrian gallerist Thaddaeus Ropac said the fair was going “tremendously,” although sales were generally being made to the usual suspects, rather than new clients. “It's slower, yes, but we've placed our main things already,” he said. Among these were a €1.2 million Georg Baselitz, which is bound for a private museum in Berlin, and a painting by Alex Katz for \$950,000.

Pace Gallery sold a number of works, including a 2019 charcoal work by Robert Longo (who joined the gallery's roster this past summer) for \$650,000 and a Loie Hollowell painting to a museum for \$175,000. White Cube, which focused its presentation on artists with a relationship to Eastern aesthetics or philosophy, also reported strong early sales, including a work by Mona Hatoum for £175,000 and an Antony Gormley sculpture for £400,000. Almine Rech also reported a nearly sold-out booth of work priced between €50,000 and €250,000. Sprüth Magers sold a piece by Rosemarie Trockel €120,000 to a European collection, as well as several paintings

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by Karen Kilimnik, tagged between \$60,000 and \$130,000. Meanwhile, Marianne Boesky Gallery was nearing the finish line with a striking solo presentation by Gina Beavers, at prices ranging from \$20,000 to \$60,000.

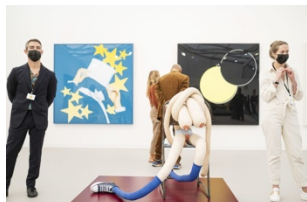


Image: The Sadie Coles HQ booth at Frieze London 2021. Photo: Linda Nylind. Courtesy of Linda Nylind/Frieze.

Amid eagerness to report swift sales and the reflection on the seismic market shifts during lockdown, there was nary a word spoken about Brexit, which in 2019 was the talk of the fair. Thaddaeus Ropac, who maintains a large London space, admitted that the process of leaving the E.U. hadn't been as bad for business as he had initially feared. "It made it more complicated to move works back and forth, but otherwise no impact," he said. "London is a critical mass, the auction houses are here, there is so much interest in contemporary art here, and major collectors."

Oliver Evans, senior director of Maureen Paley, posited that Brexit may, in fact, have a silver lining: "I think that we have found through the hurdles a lot of creative possibilities and new ways of doing things," he said, noting that clients abroad no longer have to pay the 20 percent VAT. "So every conversation has its own hurdles, but its own solutions, too."

The director of London's Delfina Foundation, Aaron Cezar, remarked on the resilience of the international galleries in attendance. "We have a crisis in the country, shortages of raw materials, difficulties getting goods across the border. Yet the fair happened! I can't get my kitchen from Italy for my flat—which has been ready since mid-July—but all the international galleries managed to get work here. So art thrives, art pushes beyond all these challenges," he said.



Image: Installation view of Gina Beavers at Marianne Boesky Gallery, Frieze London 2021. Photo: Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery.

The energy only grew as the day went on, with a sense of optimism that this could be a moment where galleries resurge and the economy recovers from some of the damage of the last two years.

"Since I arrived last Sunday, I have seen London full of action and energy," said Guillaume Sultana, whose Paris-based Galerie Sultana was showing in the main section of the fair for the first time. The sentiment was echoed by collectors and dealers who had made the trek from abroad, with many looking forward to enjoying some of London's cultural offerings beyond the white tents.

"Frieze London feels like a home game, and all the U.K.-based collectors are celebrating that they're here," said art advisor Sibylle Rochat. "It proves you don't need to go somewhere else to buy."

French collector Frédéric de Goldschmidt bought a work by Sammy Baloji, priced at €45,000, from Galerie Imane Farès of Paris. He said he was looking for younger, less established artists, and praised the "Unworlding" section of the fair curated by Cédric Fauq, which grappled with current events from Black Lives Matter to Brexit by examining how challenging moments can actually drive creative imagination.

"In Basel I was hoping to see something different from two years ago, and I did not," he said. "Here I found several artists and galleries who are trying to deal with themes which have been important during these two years."