

ENTERTAINMENT & CULTURE

ART

Battle of the Fairs: Paris vs. London

In a troubled market, two major events fight for dominance and choosy collectors

By KELLY CROW

TO UNDERSTAND the current state of the art market, look to London and Paris. The Frieze Art Fair, unfolding in London next week, is known for showcasing the hottest, fastest-rising artists in the contemporary art scene. Paris's Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain, or Fiac, beginning the following week, is known for older, less buzzed-about works. This year, for the first time, many in the art world are placing their bets on Paris.

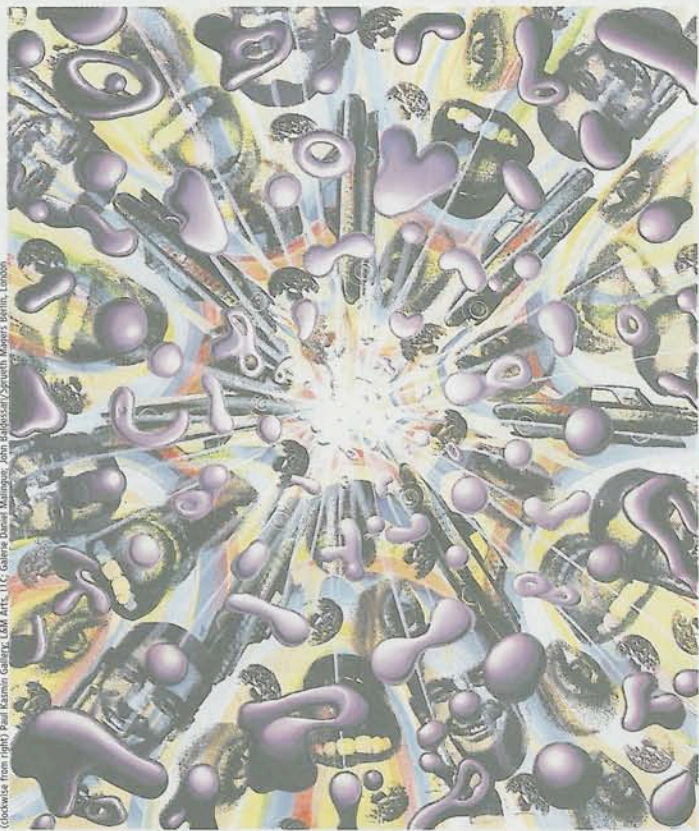
The stakes in this competition are high. The art world looks to these fairs, along with others in Miami and Basel, Switzerland, to gauge tastes and test markets for top artists around the world. London's major auction houses time their contemporary fall sales to coincide with Frieze every year. This year, many wary collectors who used to travel to a different fair every month are choosing to attend only one or two fairs.

The Paris fair is gaining ground by attracting Frieze defectors like the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, whose skull sculptor Matthew Day Jackson is a new favorite of French megacollector François Pinault. It also has won over galleries like Mitchell-Innes & Nash who sell modern and post-war classics. London's Frieze is sticking with its younger aesthetic.

Fiac's blue-chip strategy could pay off because prices for 20th-century masters haven't dropped as sharply this year compared with works made by the young and untested. During the first half of 2009, for example, Christie's sales of Impressionist and modern art fell 36%, to \$621 million, from the same period a year earlier, but its post-war and contemporary sales dropped 76%.

The fairs reflect the cultural power struggle between London and Paris for the art world's attention. London, with its bigger auction presence, had the upper hand before the recession. But Paris can take credit for hosting the most lavish auction of the year, Christie's \$443 million sale in February of the art and estate of designer Yves Saint Laurent and his business partner Pierre Bergé. "The big difference is that London crashed and everyone's broke there," says Johann König, a Berlin dealer who is exhibiting at both Frieze and Fiac this year. "But Paris is old money, and old money is almost always OK."

So far, Frieze's trajectory has followed that of the last art cycle. It launched in a white tent in Regent's Park in 2003 and gained prominence by inviting big galleries to sell their latest discoveries. Bankers in London and New York lined up to buy, as did wealthy newcomers from Russia, Asia



(Clockwise from right) Paul Kaganoff Gallery, LAM Art, LLC, Galerie Daniel Malingue; John Baldessari/Spreth, Maresca, Berlin, London.

and the Middle East decorating second homes in London. Much of that money has evaporated with the recession.

In contrast, Fiac, which launched in 1973, is just now taking off. Until three years ago, it was moldering in a convention center on the outskirts of Paris, but it got a huge boost when it moved into the renovated Grand Palais, the glass-domed exposition hall in the city center. There, it attracted collectors in Central Europe and powerful New York dealers like Paula Cooper. After the contemporary art market plunged last fall, dealers realized Fiac's old-fashioned reputation could be a selling point, says Paris dealer Éléonore Malingue. "We didn't go up that high on speculating, so we didn't fall as far."

As the competition heats up, organizers and curators on both sides are rushing to defend their local fairs—and take shots at the competition. Bernard Blistène, artistic director of the Centre Pompidou's New Festival, says Fiac is "respectful, serious and nothing like the fairs that surf on speculation." Neville Wakefield, curator of Frieze Projects, says collectors going to Paris "want less-interesting art but better food."

Both fairs claim at least 60,000 visitors a year, a third



more than Art Basel Miami Beach; both decline to divulge sales. But dealers say Fiac's footprint is much larger: It has 210 galleries this year, compared with Frieze's 165; Fiac charges around \$590 a square meter for its Grand Palais booths, compared with around \$400 at Frieze. Neither expects booths to sell out in the first hour, the way some did during the market heyday.

Frieze co-director Amanda Sharp said the London fair is taking the market's "uncertainty" in stride, filling in gaps with younger galleries and shoring up its edgy identity. Frieze even commissioned several new works that nod to the art crash, including four short films by the Danish artist team

Superflex featuring a hypnotist who promises to divulge the viewers' worst financial fears. Near the tent's front entrance, Polish artist Monika Sosnowska plans to install her untitled model of Poland's Palace of Culture, a three-story concrete structure that looks as if it had buckled the tent's roof. "It's toppling our own palace of culture," says Mr. Wakefield, the fair's curator.

Other highlights at Frieze, up through Oct. 18, include a chalk-white aluminum cast of a 2,000-year-old olive tree by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone; a new group of watercolors by New York artist Barnaby Furnas; and "The Dark Gate," a haunting, \$750,000 sculpture by Jim Hodges, featuring a

room containing metal spikes doused in perfume.

In Paris, expect to see plenty of works by strong-selling modern masters, led by a consortium of 10 blue-chip galleries exhibiting in a shared booth dubbed the Modern Project. The group—including the Acquavella Galleries in New York, Thomas Amman in Zurich, Galerie Beyeler in Basel, and Malingue in Paris—is offering a couple dozen works by artists like Constantin Brancusi, Piet Mondrian and Fernand Léger, including Léger's 1921 "Le Grand Déjeuner." These choices, added to the fair's roster in June, echo some of the same artists who sold well during the Yves Saint Laurent estate sale.

The fair will feature upscale events, like a brunch at Versailles and the Palais de Tokyo, and a fireworks display over the Tuileries Garden on Oct. 20. Ray Leary, a trustee of the Whitney Museum of American Art, says Fiac is harnessing some Paris "sizzle" at a time when "the rest of the Anglo-Saxon world is still grim."

New York dealer Per Skarstedt says he joined Fiac this year because he realized he was selling 40% of his offerings to European buyers, twice as much as he sold there two years ago, and he "needed even more exposure to Europe." His booth at Fiac will

have works by Cindy Sherman and Christopher Wool priced at around \$1.5 million; a Rosemarie Trockel knitted canvas for around \$250,000 and a Fischli/Weiss photograph of the Eiffel Tower for around \$150,000. Other highlights at Fiac, up through Oct. 25, include Babette Mangolte's fevered dance photographs from 1970s' New York, one of 80-odd galleries in the courtyard of the Louvre Museum.

To keep growing, the Paris art scene will likely try to strengthen ties to potential collectors from the Middle East, particularly Iran. Emmanuel Perrotin will unveil a new show of pop-culture mosaics by Iranian artist Farhad Moshiri during fair week. On Oct. 24, the auction house Artcurial will hold its first sale of Iranian and Arab modern and contemporary art, led by Mr. Moshiri's 2001 "La jar," priced to sell for around \$73,000.

For now, Belgian collector Mark Vanmoerkerke would rather double up than choose between the two fairs. "I live in a small city outside the world's large art centers," he says, "so if I can go to a fair and see 200 galleries in a single day, I'm still going."

► See a slideshow of works to be shown at the Frieze Art Fair and Fiac at WS.com/Lifestyle.



At Fiac: Constantin Brancusi's 'Mile Pogony I', 1913, right, and Fernand Léger's 'Le Grand Déjeuner', 1921, below.

