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Jean-Paul Riopelle
Est. US \$75,000-135,000

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The crowd at SOFA West



Joan B. Mirviss booth



Suzuki Osamu (Kura)
Untitled
1991
Joan B. Mirviss Ltd.



Lino Tagliapietra
Madras
n.d.
Holsten Galleries

SANTA FE SCENE by Brook S. Mason

While the Chelsea art world grinds to a halt and New York City swelters in 90-degree heat, the Santa Fe art district in marked contrast is surprisingly buoyant. A total of 250 galleries line the streets of the New Mexico state capital, and empty shop fronts are few.

Signs of new growth include **Bullseye Gallery** from Portland, Ore., opening a 4,000-square-foot "Resource Center," which will be just that to both emerging and established glass artists. On offer will be all the requisite materials for making glass art, classes and an on-site kiln. This new facility should boost that category of the decorative arts here even more. Local gallery **Charlotte Jackson Fine Art** just added a second venue in the Railyard.

Overall, a big draw for Santa Fe visitors is the totally different esthetic, a vernacular architecture with small-scale adobe buildings, masses of local craft from Native Americans hawking turquoise jewelry on the town square to up-market boutiques sporting native dress, and a relaxed vibe devoid of pretension. In terms of growth, the city remains pleasingly frozen with only 60,000 in population, scant sprawl and no skyscrapers.

Even the new Santa Fe Convention Center is designed with the Pueblo look, and it earned the gold standard in environmental correctness, LEED certification. All of the interior timbers were rescued from a forest fire. That environmentally friendly aspect coupled with the region's early history of pottery and weaving, along with the city's broad arts base (including a first rate opera company), make the city an on-target venue for the newest version of **SOFA**, the **Sculpture Objects & Functional Art** fair. The second edition of **SOFA West**, the brainchild of the Art Fair Company organizers **Michael Franks** and **Mark Lyman**, is cleverly timed to coincide with the **Santa Fe International Folk Art Market**, the largest such event globally, which draws upwards of 26,000 visitors.

SOFA West opened July 8-July 11, 2010, at the Santa Fe Convention Center, with a preview for **Museum of New Mexico Foundation** upper-level members. Opening-night attendance shot up 40 percent over last year, and hovered at the 2,800 range.

Although the fair roster is 24 strong, it is down ten dealers. Even so, new dealers included **Joan B. Mirviss Ltd.**, of New York, with contemporary Japanese ceramics; **Lyons Wier Gallery**, also of New York; **browngrotta arts** of Wilton, Connecticut with fiber artists; **Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA)** of Santa Fe, made up of four contemporary Native American jewelers; and **Linda Durham Contemporary Art** and **David Richard Contemporary**, both of Santa Fe. In all, nine participants hail from Santa Fe.



Andrew Edlin



TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY



FISHER LANDAU CENTER FOR ART



Stefano Marchetti necklace at Charon Kransen Arts



Marian Hosking vessel at Charon Kransen Arts



Geoffrey Gorman Galgupha & Saldula n.d. Jane Sauer Gallery



Lia Cook Translucence 1978 browngrotta

Early sales were clinched. Joan Mirviss racked up substantial sales to collectors from San Francisco and the Bay Area, Seattle and Greenwich, Conn. "All were new clients -- the level of sophistication is high here and by 7:30 of opening night, I decided to sign up for next year," says Mirviss.

Pounced on immediately were a 1991 **Suzuki Osama** sculptural object drenched in a fiery red glaze, and a Wada Morihiro vessel. The Morihiro with its textile references, from its kimono shape to design patterns, was snapped up by a collector who sits on the board of two East Coast museums, reports Mirviss.

The venerable **Holsten Galleries**, which recently relocated from the Berkshires to Santa Fe, is front and center at the fair. There **Ken Holsten** quickly sold five **Lino Tagliapietra** glass vessels including *Riverstone* (2010), for \$40,000, with bundles of black cane stacked vertically. It's the textile-like character of Tagliapietra's work that seems right in sync with collectors' taste here. One work is titled *Madras* and replicates that preppy fabric. Boosting sales of Tagliapietra is the artist's strong visibility in museum permanent collections. His work is represented in the **Palazzo Grassi, V&A Museum, Detroit Institute of Art** and the **Tokyo National Modern Art Museum**.

Also moving briskly were early **Dale Chihuly** vessels at the stand of New York and Manalpan, Fla., dealer **Donna Schneier**.

New York artist jewelry specialist **Charon Kransen Arts** was also witnessing spirited sales, but then gems and precious metals have a strong appeal against a shaky stock market. "I have a number of clients just buying gold," says **Charon Kransen**. "They feel safer. But overall my clientele looks beyond the material," he says. The exquisitely hand-hammered work by Padua, Italy, goldsmith **Stefano Marchetti** is dazzling. A necklace of tubular forms costs \$25,000. The artist **Marian Hosking** produces small silver vessels with surfaces meticulously hand drilled, hand hammered and inlaid with niello, used on Japanese swords. The works are pegged at only \$6,000. They have to be the ultimate bargain.

Santa Fe dealer **Jane Sauer** is sporting the quixotic sculptures of **Geoffrey Gorman**. He fashions animals, cats and foxes out of wood branches, cloth, rusted clamps and other found objects like snippets of bike tires for feline ears. "They're comforting because they look familiar," says Sauer, who red-dotted a number of Gorman's critters.

On view at browngrotta, arguably the largest fiber arts gallery worldwide, is **Lia Cook's** *Translucence* (1978), for \$35,000. Its hand-woven abstract design has enormous depth. With Cook's newer work being figurative and computer-generated, this earlier example is bound to be prized for its significance historically. Also of note is **Simone Pheulpin's** *Megalith IV* (2001), composed of umpteen folds of cotton fabric held in place with thousands of pins and priced at a modest \$4,400. **Tom Grotta**, who reports seeing clients from New Jersey at the fair, notes that part of the appeal of Pheulpin's work is the lack of dyes, eliminating the risk of fading, a local condition concern. The Pheulpin is priced at a modest \$4,400.

Higher-priced fare was spotted at **Habitat**, where



Klaus Moje
Where is the Light 3
2010
Bullseye



Diego Romero
Sky Spirit
2010
Clark + Del Vecchio



The crowd at SOFA West

a **Howard Ben Tre** cast glass column, *The Lightness of Being* (2010), was tagged at \$180,000. Nearby was a nod to the kitsch, a chandelier composed of three blown-glass acrobats clasping hands in vermilion and purple by **David Bennett**, for \$110,000. Vegas is just over 100 miles away, which explains the presence of such figurative work. The kiln-formed glass of the German-born, Australia-based **Klaus Moje** at Bullseye gallery displays a more artistic bent. Moje turns to the Bauhaus school, Russian Constructivism and Op Art for visual cues, and his work runs up to \$180,000.

Then there is the Santa Fe-based **Clark + Del Vecchio**, which is really a new guise of **Garth Clark Gallery** which has relocated Southwesterly from West 57th Street. Featured are **Diego Romero**'s 2010 terracotta vessels with white and brown designs, an update of the local Pueblo tradition. Pictured on the pottery are vodka bottles, SUVs and other lifestyle accoutrements. Prices for vessels by Rivera, who could be considered the **Grayson Perry** of the Southwest, run around \$16,000. Romero's *Sky Spirit* (2010), went to an East Coast collector. As to the collector's identity, Mark Del Vecchio responds, "They're Goldman Sachs and own work by Rauschenberg."

With sales like that coupled with 325 days of sunshine annually, this city is poised to become a fixture on the global art shopping circuit.

BROOK S. MASON is U.S. correspondent for the *Art Newspaper*, and also writes for the *Financial Times* and other publications.

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