

Brexit

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Brexit? What Brexit? The Art World Carries On Unfazed at Frieze London

Strong gallery shows and a weak pound attracted plenty of international visitors to the event.

By **Scott Reyburn**

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LONDON — Britain might be convulsed by Brexit, but the contemporary art world, and the 0.1 percent of the population that makes it go around, carries on as normal. At least, so it seems.

This week, thousands of international collectors, dealers and curators gathered here for the Frieze London and Frieze Masters fairs in Regent's Park, as well as a dizzying array of dealer shows, auctions and other satellite events.

“Geopolitically, it may seem as though the world is going sideways, but the art market chugs ahead,” said Wendy Cromwell, an art adviser based in New York, in town for “Frieze Week.”

“Primary sales are alive and well, as is the secondary market for top quality, rare, in-demand work,” added Ms. Cromwell, referring to the “primary” market for new works from commercial galleries and the “secondary” trade in re-offered pieces, such as at auction.

“Auction material is a little weak this fall with concerns around Brexit,” said Ms. Cromwell on Tuesday, unaware that a Banksy would sell at Sotheby's on Thursday for \$12 million. “But the pound is at a record low,” she added, “so these sales favor the bold.”

London's less than stellar auctions (Banksy apart) were balanced by a formidable lineup of dealer shows. Within just a square mile or so of the city center, there were new works by Mark Bradford available at Hauser & Wirth, Damien Hirst at White Cube and Peter Doig at Michael Werner.



From left: "Untitled" (1986), "Treppenhaus rund" (1982) and "Als hätte man mir die Muschel" (1982) by Albert Oehlen at Galerie Max Hetzler. Albert Oehlen; via Galerie Max Hetzler

A survey exhibition of old and new paintings by the admired German artist Albert Oehlen at the Serpentine Gallery coaxed discreet secondary market offerings of older Oehlen pieces at the Max Hetzler and Lévy Gorvy galleries. And there was even a show of new paintings and sculptures by the wildly popular American street artist KAWS at Skarstedt.

Boosted by recent exceptional auction results, the former graffiti tagger Brian Donnelly, a.k.a. KAWS, is the market phenomenon of the moment. Skarstedt offered 10 new vibrant acrylic abstracts by the artist, as well as two large-scale resin sculptures, all of which found buyers, according to the gallery. The unique paintings were marked at \$450,000 to \$575,000, while the sculptures, each available in a total edition of seven, were priced at \$850,000 each.



“TAKE,” a sculpture by KAWS, shown at Skarstedt Gallery in London. Jonty Wilde

“The problem is that if there’s a good show you get 200 people wanting to buy it,” said Candace Worth, another New York art adviser, who was also in London. “There’s a huge clientele for a relatively small number of artists. It’s a pressure cooker.”

A case in point was the show at the Stephen Friedman Gallery of 20 new paintings and works on paper by the South African artist Lisa Brice, who had a solo show at Tate Britain in 2018.

“Challenging and reinterpreting traditional depictions of the female nude from the perspective of a female artist,” according to a statement from the gallery, these politically charged images were perfectly in tune with mission of many museum curators and private collectors to widen the art historical canon. They sold out for prices ranging from 9,000 pounds — about \$11,000 — for drawings, to £175,000 for large-scale painted folding screens, said Mira Dimitrova, the gallery’s spokeswoman.



"Untitled," one of 20 new paintings and works on paper by the South African artist Lisa Brice at the Stephen Friedman Gallery.
Lisa Brice and Stephen Friedman Gallery

Works by female and African-American artists are immensely popular in today's art market. On Wednesday, at the preview for Frieze London, new paintings by Jack Whitten, who featured in the Tate's influential 2017 "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power" exhibition, and Kerry James Marshall were quickly snapped up.

Mr. Marshall's wryly observational "Car Girl 2," showing a woman leaning on a car from which a dog is leaning out, was sold by the New York dealer David Zwirner for \$3.8 million, while the London-based Lisson Gallery sold four new colorful geometric abstracts by Mr. Whitten, priced between \$350,000 to \$450,000, to buyers in the Middle East, Norway and the United States, according to Lisson. The dealership was concurrently hosting a show of Mr. Whitten's paintings, which also sold out.



"The Space of Possibility" (2019) by Stanley Whitney, presented at Frieze London by Lisson Gallery.
Stanley Whitney; via Lisson Gallery

While the Frieze London preview was busy, there was a distinctly more subdued atmosphere at its sister fair Frieze Masters, which presents a "crossover" mix of works ranging across 6,000 years.

Old masters have proved a hard sell at this elegant event, but so too have 20th century masters. Leading "secondary market" dealers in modern art such as Lévy Gorvy and Luxembourg & Dayan, both based in New York and London, and Galería Elvira González, from Madrid, were notable absentees from this latest edition.

But on Wednesday the New York dealer Van de Weghe did sell an elaborately detailed 1986 Jean-Michel Basquiat drawing with an asking price of \$2.2 million, and the London-based old master dealership Moretti Fine Art found a buyer for a little circa 1400 Florentine painting, "Christ at the Column," priced at \$200,000.

With Brexit beckoning, and major galleries such as David Zwirner, White Cube and Pace either opening or exploring options in Paris, can London maintain its long-held status as the international capital of the European art market?

Max Edouard Hetzler, a dealer in contemporary art who runs spaces in Berlin, Paris and London, said he thought the British capital wasn't going to give up that status anytime soon. Mr. Hetzler's gallery in the upmarket Mayfair district was presenting a show of seven 1980s "Spiegelbilder" (Mirror Paintings) by Albert Oehlen, from private collections. Some works were discreetly available for sale, priced between \$2 million and \$4 million.

"There are too many museums, art colleges and collections here," said Mr. Hetzler. "They're not going to go away."