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Frieze London and Masters Find a Common Future for Contemporary Art

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Installation view of Sprüth Magers's Frieze London booth, 2017. Photo by Tom Carter for Artsy.

Since it was founded in 2003, Frieze London has prided itself on being an art fair dedicated to the leading edge of the contemporary art conversation, a position that grew from its roots as a magazine. In the past, that made for aisles filled with still-wet paint and a focus on the newest emerging artists for most of its 15 editions in Regent's Park. Frieze took this uber-contemporary distinction a step further in 2012, when it launched the complementary Frieze Masters fair, dedicated to artworks and collectible objects created before 2000 (and some dating back millennia) in a separate set of tents. But while the two fairs, which together welcome some 300 galleries, still played well to the extremes of their official billing during opening day here on Wednesday, much of the work on display was at the crossroads of the two, a reflection of the

critical dialogue and market trends that have increasingly blurred the distinction between “old” and “new.”

Take “Bronze Age c. 3500 BC – AD 2017,” Hauser & Wirth’s thematic booth at Frieze London, curated in collaboration with hipster feminist hero and University of Cambridge classics professor Mary Beard, whose fairly tongue-in-cheek descriptions of the works are worth a look. The mock museum brings together historic works by artists like Marcel Duchamp, Louise Bourgeois, and Henry Moore with contemporary artists from the gallery’s program (Phyllida Barlow, who currently represents the U.K. at the Venice Biennale, made her first-ever piece in bronze, *Paintsticks*, 2017, for the occasion). These are interspersed with antiquities Beard helped source from regional museums and around 50 purported artefacts that Wenman bought on eBay.

“Part of the irony is that it looks like a Frieze Masters booth,” said Hauser & Wirth senior director Neil Wenman. “I wanted to bring old things but the lens is contemporary. It’s about the way we look at objects,” and how a given mode of display can ascribe value to those objects.

The gallery hasn’t leveraged the gravitas of its ethnographic museum vitrines to sell Wenman’s eBay finds at a steep margin, but it is offering 80 artworks for sale (out of the roughly 180 objects on display). For those on a budget, they’ve also created souvenirs sold from a faux museum gift shop that will run you £1–£9; proceeds will go to the four museums that lent pieces for the show.



Installation view of Hauser & Wirth's Frieze London booth, 2017. Photo by Tom Carter for Artsy.

As of Wednesday evening, the gallery had sold a Hans (Jean) Arp sculpture for \$1.1 million, Subodh Gupta's set of 13 bronze potatoes (*Food for Others*, 2013) for €150,000, one of two bronze panels in the booth by Rashid Johnson for \$125,000, and Martin Creed's bronze rose *Work No. 1649* (2013) for \$75,000.

The gallery also reported selling, among other works, a Richard Artschwager triptych for \$2.8 million, a sculpture by Bourgeois for \$2.6 million, and a seven-piece stainless steel Fausto Melottisculpture for €220,000 from its booth at Frieze Masters, for which the gallery collaborated with Moretti Fine Art.

Following curator Nicolas Trembley's recreation of seminal exhibitions from the 1990s at Frieze London last year, the fair's special section this year drifted back even further in time from its stated post-2000 focus. Curated by Alison Gingeras, "Sex Work: Feminist Art & Radical Politics" features nine women artists —Dorothy Iannone, Marilyn Minter, Judith Bernstein, Betty Tompkins, Mary Beth Edelson, and Birgit Jürgenssenamong them—who emerged in the 1960s and '70s with practices at the far edge of feminist expression at the time, and whose works were

often subject to censorship due to their sexually explicit nature (at Frieze, the section still bears a disclaimer that it may not be suitable for children).

Works within the section by Iannone and Edelson were acquired for the Tate's collection on opening day from Paris's Air de Paris and New York's David Lewis, respectively. (The purchases were funded by a new acquisition fund supported by WME | IMG, the sports and entertainment conglomerate that acquired a stake in the Frieze fairs in April 2016.) The Tate's first female director, Maria Balshaw, who took the helm from Nicholas Serota in July, called the section "tremendously exhilarating."

"Sex Work" follows a strong year for female artists at Frieze last year and also inspired Sprüth Magers's Frieze London booth. The gallery reopened its expanded London location last week, having increased its exhibition space from one floor to three. At Frieze, it is showing an intergenerational selection of women artists from the gallery's program: Jenny Holzer, Astrid Klein, Barbara Kruger, Pamela Rosenkranz, and Kaari Upson.

"We wanted to dedicate the booth to this female perspective," said gallery director Silvia Baltschun.

A 1989 LED from Holzer's "Survival" series, which features her iconic phrase "Protect me from what I want" was quick to sell on opening day for \$350,000. Upson's drawing *Psychic trash* (2016–17) also sold for \$70,000.

Holzer and Kruger have been a fixture of Spüth Magers booths at recent fairs, at least in part due to their works' direct and indirect engagement with the Trump administration and other recent social upheavals. But Baltschun said the gallery made a special effort to bring early works from the '70s and '80s to Frieze to create a dialogue with Gingeras's section. Klein, Holzer, and Kruger are part of the same dialogue as those included in "Sex Work" but found acclaim early on because their work was less sexually explicit compared to artists like Iannone, Minter, and Tompkins.



Installation view of Cheim & Reid and Thomas Dane Gallery's booth at Frieze Masters, 2017. Photo by Tom Carter for Artsy.

At Frieze Masters, a joint booth by Cheim & Read and Thomas Dane Gallery highlighted a range of works from another artist, Lynda Benglis, who also made it into the canon despite some works that were explicit in nature. Perhaps most famous among those is the ad, on view at Frieze, that Benglis purchased in *Artforum* in 1974 featuring her posing nude and holding a dildo. With its works spanning 1968 to 1990, the presentation is reminiscent of a miniaturized version of the artist's 2011 retrospective at the New Museum, and required borrowing around half of the works on view.

“It was important that we had all of the different aspects of Lynda’s work, which is so multifaceted. She really is the original material girl,” said Cheim & Read partner Adam Scheffer, listing off the media (video, bronze, welded metal, glitter, prints, and polyurethane foam) present at the fair.

He said no sales had been confirmed by midway through Wednesday afternoon but that foot traffic had been strong, in part thanks to artist Rachel Whiteread’s selection of some of Benglis’s works from the Tate Britain’s collection to be exhibited alongside

Whiteread's current show there. Gingeras's section's influence was less of a factor thus far, he said, and in fact he hadn't known about it.

"Lynda is so much a generation before most of that," he said. "Showing her within the history of 20th-century sculpture is really where she belongs. She stands alone outside of classification."

Permeating both Frieze London and Frieze Masters was the influence of Tate Modern's current show "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power," the first major exhibition in the U.K. to highlight the role that black artists have had in shaping art in America. Eleven of the show's artists are included in Michael Rosenfeld Gallery's Frieze Masters booth, his second showing at the fair and first in its main section. Rosenfeld said that Frieze organizers had told him not to expect to get a larger booth this year but were swayed when he applied with such a large swath of artists from the Tate show, and all works from the same period.

"It's had a tremendous impact," he said. "Every work really is as good as the works in the Tate exhibition. We pulled out all the stops really to create an opportunity for collectors and museums to acquire some works that normally aren't available."



Among the highlights are pioneering abstractionist Alma Thomas's *Snoopy Sees a Day Break on Earth* (1970), a large William T. Williams, *Mercer's Stop* (1971), on offer for \$875,000, and a series of collages by Romare Bearden from the '60s priced at \$400,000 and \$450,000. Rosenfeld said that the Tate exhibition was igniting a conversation but that the artists within it are still very new to the U.K. audience, so he was not surprised that sales were still developing.

“We have to pay special attention to the education process,” he said. “What’s gratifying is that there’s a visceral reaction to the works themselves without having any knowledge of who the artist is. It shouldn’t matter that they’re African-American; they’re just great works.”

Jack Shainman said that the Tate show was the tipping point that brought him to Frieze London for the first time this year after a number of years being on the fence. He echoed Rosenfeld in saying that the exhibition was bringing “a lot of attention to artists and to ideas that maybe weren’t at the forefront here,” among them Barkley L. Hendricks, who passed away at the age of 72 this past April and whose work *Icon for My Man Superman (Superman Never Saved any Black People – Bobby Seale)* (1969) fronts the marketing materials for “Soul of a Nation.”

“We never imagined that Barkley wouldn’t be here with us today. That was really shocking,” he said.

The Hendricks painting on Shainman’s booth (*Anthem*, 2015) hadn’t yet sold by Wednesday evening, but a number of other works, including Kerry James Marshall’s *Untitled (Bathers)* (2017) for \$875,000 and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye’s *The Measures* (2017) for \$80,000, had. Titus Kaphar’s large, unstretched painting on canvas *Shifting the Gaze* (2017) sold for \$80,000 to an unnamed institution.

London’s Stephen Friedman Gallery devoted its entire Frieze London stand to 80-year-old African-American sculptor Melvin Edwards. Three works from his long-running “Lynch Fragments” series are on view at Tate Modern, and 12 works from

the series, for which he welds together found steel objects ranging from chains to springs to bullets, are on offer at the fair.

Gallery associate Dora Fisher noted that Edwards had three major museum shows early in his career: He was one of the first African-American sculptors to have a solo show at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and was in the second show at the Studio Museum in Harlem, which subsequently led him to a solo show in 1970 at the Whitney.

Nonetheless, “he only got rediscovered in the last 20 years,” she said, something she attributed to audiences’ too-narrow expectations of black artists. “Maybe there was a pressure on African-American artists to not be part of the abstract movement,” she said.



Installation view of Blum & Poe's booth at Frieze Masters, 2017. Photo by Tom Carter for Artsy.

The cross-pollination between past and present, Frieze London and Frieze Masters, continued with artists like Julian Schnabel and Alfredo Jaar. Schnabel, an artist more immediately aligned with Frieze London, has eight abstract landscapes from 1994 at

Blum & Poe's Frieze Masters booth. Jaar's early works from the 1970s and '80s are on view in a joint Masters presentation by Goodman and Galerie Lelong. Meanwhile, a not-insignificant amount of secondary market material is on offer at Frieze London, with Sigmar Polke's *Laterna Magica* (1988–96) selling from Thaddaeus Ropac's booth there on opening day for \$2.5 million.

That is a natural reflection of where the market and critical conversation is currently, with attention distributed evenly among old, young, and established (if not mid-career) artists and dealers more freely mixing among them. But it also means that treating them as two separate fairs—whose tents happen to be 15 minutes apart, necessitating a 2 p.m. jog for dealers who show at both—makes a lot less sense now than it did in 2012.

—Alexander Forbes