

Art News

Frieze Masters, Ben Austin, Helly Nahmad



Friezing day 3: Inside Frieze Masters Ben Austin's Diary

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I took myself off to Frieze Masters, the other day, everyone's favourite fair, for this is the place that dreams are made of. This is the crème de crème of art fairs, subdued and stylish. This is not a place for us mere mortals to buy, who can only admire and fantasize, but a fair for the uber wealthy, objects of desire for oligarchs, Chinese industrialists, Middle Eastern oil barons and the European old money elite.

I bumped into the artist, Michal Cole and wandered the fair with her. She is great fun and was yearning after an 18th Century Madonna in a glass case she spotted.

Here you find, granted not first-rate work but fine examples of some of the biggest names in art. The range of the work and objects here is quite staggering, from Rembrandt (must-see show at National Gallery) to Picasso, Warhol to religious icons and tribal artefacts.

So, what caught my eye and I would buy, if I won the lottery? Well, there was a pretty decent Philip Guston at McKee Gallery and a set of three pieces by Yves Klein (Untitled Blue Monochrome 1959) at Dominique Levy, which looked sensational. A striking purple Donald Judd (1988) at David Zwirner, a must have for any serious collector. I also wouldn't mind a set of photographs by Bern & Hilla Becher on show at Spruth Magers, something about

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these black and white industrial post-war images of factories I find haunting. British painters at Hazlitt, Holland and Hibbert (a gallery not a firm of solicitors) would make an attractive addition to any Penthouse, in particular a Bridget Riley or the thick impasto portrait by Frank Auerbach (Head of Helen Gillespie VI – 1966). Over at Marlborough Fine Art, they had devoted their booth to Francis Bacon, with three very impressive paintings, (I liked the energy of the bull fighting one) and prints on offer, a snip at £20K edition 280.

In terms of photography, I would happily take home a Horst P. Horst (also a must see show at V&A) Odalisque (1943) from a solo presentation booth at Colnaghi and Cheim & Read had a series of work from that pioneer of colour photography – William Eggleston. They also had a large Sean Scully, not one of his best, but still quite strong in its colouring and construction.

Being a Ritcher fan, it was nice to see a couple of his painting abstractions from the 80's at Pace. At Gagosian I would not mind the Warhol – Jackie O in blue and the Barbara Kruger at Skarstedt Gallery was a good one, if you are into text art.

I couldn't really get my head around too much of the Old Master work, although I did spot an El Greco that was very appealing.

But the real star turn, was the installation booth at Helly Nahmad Gallery who delivered a clever mock up of a collector's apartment from the 60's. it was decked out to resemble a shabby Parisian apartment, complete with piled high magazines and books crammed into cases. Everything had been cleverly thought through in this imagined recreation.

It had a genuine 'lived-in' quality with the detritus of daily life scattered around from the authentic Gitanes cigarette butts, to the plates stacked up in the sink. The whole assemblage/installation resonated with life or even the absence of a life with the TV on showing period newsreel and the radio in the kitchen blaring out music from the era. Dotted around the debris and bric-a-brac were some incredible pieces, including a Giacometti sculpture, a Fontana above the missing occupant's desk and the lucky chap also had a Picasso in the living room and a Debuffet by the kitchen, as you do. I could be cynical and that even in the 60's this must have been some kind of eccentric collector, living in a tiny cluttered apartment with such priceless works but that would be unkind as the whole spectacle worked so well and drew all the crowds around it.

Helly Nahmad, a Courtauld Institute graduate is not to be confused with his New York cousin, also a successful gallerist. Last spring Helly NY, was jailed for organising high stakes gambling events, with the Russian Mafia. He was given a year in prison and is expected out in the spring.

I headed off, walking to my car I passed Matthew Slotover co-founder of Frieze, he looked as ever calm and relaxed. I greeted him and said something stupid like 'great job'. He smiled though at the compliment.

Off East, battling the traffic on City Road. I slowly reach Shoreditch and park up on Redchurch St. and make my way over to The Truman Brewery on Brick Lane for the opening of Moniker and The Other Art Fair.

On arrival I was hit by the heat and the music, the room was packed and the booth lighting made it swelteringly hot. I saw my old colleague and friend Hobby who was showing here as TAG Fine Arts and he was wilting already so I offered to get him a drink. The bar was four deep of thirsty impatient people, but I got stuck in and was eventually served. I bumped into Maria of KidsofDada, she is super nice and always fun to chat to.

After giving the grateful Hobby his beer, I had a look around, urban art has its place and there were as expected raw and slightly subversive pieces and prints dotted around. A stand was devoted to Obey and there was live printmaking at Jealous and Moniker Projects. There was a party-like atmosphere, quite the contrast to the hushed tones of Frieze Masters. Frankie and Kristophe of Moniker do a great job every year in producing a lively and fun fair. It is cool and definitely down with the kids.

I bumped into Ryan Steiner, the director of The Other Art Fair, which occupies half the space. I think it is great that independent artists have the opportunity to represent themselves, take a booth and show their work. We are not talking about great or innovative talents here, but there is an enthusiasm for their own practice, which must be commended.

I bumped into John Marchant here, a lovely bloke, who has moved to Hove and specialises in Jamie Reid's work and others. We had an interesting chat about Richter as he is also a fan.

So, that is it for Frieze week until next year, of course I didn't get to see as much as I would liked to, nor did I get to go to the society parties hosted by the auction houses, or be on

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Larry's list for a private dinner party at Scott's in honour of Richard Serra (maybe next year?) But I dipped in and out of it, was selective and ultimately enjoyed it rather than chasing one event after another.

One fair that I regret not seeing was the Sunday fair on Marylebone Rd, which is always good and refreshingly different from all the bling and big bucks at the tents in the Park.

The big dealers are all packing up and setting off to Paris for FIAC, which opens on 23rd. For those who are not part of the art world elite and wants something that looks good over a sofa there is always the Affordable Art Fair which opens in Battersea next week.

Words/Photo Ben Austin Artlyst 2014

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