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The curators shaping Frieze's London fairs

Art fairs must evolve to stay fresh. This year, outside experts are leaving their mark



Lynn Chadwick, 'Maquette II for R34 Memorial' (1958) at Frieze Masters © Blain Southern gallery/Todd White

SEPTEMBER 30, 2016 by [Melanie Gerlis](#)

How many curators does it take to organise a five-day art fair? For Frieze's London fairs this week, 10 outside specialists have been drafted in to oversee a range of sections. Their presence, a greater number than ever before, underlines how art fairs strive to stand out from the crowd, as well as the influence that commercially-focused events now command.

"Over the years the number of our curated sections has multiplied. We spend a lot of time talking to galleries, curators, artists and collectors about what they want to see happening," says Victoria Siddall, the director of the Frieze fairs.

Most of this year's specialists are directly involved with the commercial sections. The Geneva-based independent curator Nicolas Trembley joins Frieze for the first time to mastermind a new section dedicated to 1990s art; Toby Kamps, the curator of Modern and Contemporary art at The Menil Collection, Houston, also makes his Frieze debut with Spotlight in the Masters tent; and Clare Lilley, the director of programmes for the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, returns for the fourth year to organise Frieze's popular outdoor show.

Other curators' roles are outside of the fair's ostensible trade. Gregor Muir, director of the ICA, London, and soon to be a director at Tate, and Tim Marlow, the director of artistic programmes at the Royal Academy, are lending their expertise to the talks programme.

Sections that bridge the commercial-institutional gap — such as Frieze Sounds and Frieze Projects — boast Cecilia Alemani (High Line Art, New York) and Raphael Gygax (Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich).

“If a show is interesting, it doesn’t matter if it’s a commercial venture,” Trembley says, while accepting that “if the commercial aspect influences curatorial choices, that might be an issue”. It’s not something he levels at Frieze, however, which he describes as “genuinely content-led.”

Fairs can offer curators from the publicly funded world a freedom they may not otherwise enjoy. “I get to play with works that are not easy to get hold of,” Lilley says. When it comes to sculpture, for example, the cost of moving and installing works can limit even the most ambitious institutional show. At Frieze, “the galleries undertake to do that”.



Jean Dubuffet's 'Tour aux récits' (after maquette 1973) in Frieze Sculpture © Waddington Custot

The cornerstone of this year’s sculpture park is a 4m high, “Hourloupe” work by Jean Dubuffet (Waddington Custot gallery, \$1.9m), which will be seen across acres in Regent’s Park.

When it comes to “curating”, Lilley says her work is less about the selection and more about where to put the works. “People need to be drawn in. As much as anything, I am working with the trees and the shape of the land. The works ultimately don’t have anything in common except they share a space.”

Muir accepts that the term “curate” might be a bit of a stretch when it comes to organising a talks programme (which he does for Frieze London with Christy Lange, associate editor of Frieze Magazine and the fair’s curator of public programming.) “I prefer to see it as a form of organising, where the objects happen to be talks,” he says. But, he adds,

“It’s a genuine enterprise, which takes a lot of work. We are trying to engage the public through the positioning of certain talks that are relevant to our times.”

To this end, the talks programme at Frieze London has an overarching theme for the first time this year, “Borderlands”, which encompasses the ways in which contemporary art can address what Muir describes as “a world in turmoil”. As well as the artists and (more) curators, speakers this year include the comedian Jonny Woo and the music producer Lee “Scratch” Perry.

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Muir says that the audience that the Frieze fairs attract means “it’s very different to what we are able to achieve at the ICA in terms of Frieze being a landmark event crammed into just a few days.” Organisers say there were 60,000 visitors across five days last year. And it’s not just a numbers game. “If you see the Frieze tent at the weekend, you know that you are not preaching only to curators, but to the public at a level that is exciting,” Muir says.

It’s a public that cares enough to pay a potential £52 entrance fee to both fairs, though the sculpture park is free (plus it lasts until January). Lilley says that she targets “the schoolchildren, tourists and joggers” in Regent’s Park.

The relationship between the curators and an art fair works both ways. For Frieze, the outside specialists bring validation, expertise — and the connoisseur contacts to complement the broader audience. Siddall says that the curators “ensure an overall vision and quality of work” and “bring in work that may otherwise not be found in an art fair context.” She cites Frieze Live, for performance and participatory work, a section this year “advised” by Jacob Proctor (curator at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society in Chicago) and Fabian Schöneich (curator of the Portikus, Frankfurt).

Does it all detract from the relatively prosaic business of selling art from a stand? Most dealers also pull their socks up for an event as visible as Frieze, and outside curators are sometimes drafted in for an individual booth (Norman Rosenthal, who this year has again organised the Collections section, memorably recreated a fictional collector’s apartment for London’s Helly Nahmad gallery in 2014). This year, the London dealer Stephen Friedman has pulled together a booth named like a gallery exhibition — *Wool, Wire and String* — with four heavy-hitting artists from different continents who redefined sculpture between the 1950s and 1970s (Alexander Calder, GeGo, Eva Hesse and Jiro Takamatsu).

“With such a plethora of international art fairs, collectors become overwhelmed with imagery, so it is increasingly important to ensure that the stand’s presentation distinguishes itself,” Friedman says.

Of course, such developments don’t come cheap (Frieze’s outside curators are paid an undisclosed fee). But the theory goes that there is a virtuous circle effect: the higher quality the environment, the more people will be likely to spend. Ultimately, whatever the bells and whistles, “the fair’s economy is as a platform for galleries to sell works,” Trembley says. *October 6-9, frieze.com*

Frieze talks and events

FT Arts hosts the Chinese-born, New York-based artist Cai Guo-Qiang at the Frieze London Reading Room on Friday. Known for spectacular projects using gunpowder, “Sky Ladder”, which was the subject of a documentary by Kevin Macdonald this year.

Frieze’s first Art & Architecture Conference is at the Royal College of Physicians in London on Tuesday, tackling questions like: What makes a good space for art? Should the architecture make a statement? And how do the needs of public museums differ from those of commercial galleries, private museums and homes? Speakers include Peter Zumthor, Gabriel Orozco, Annabelle Selldorf, Martino Gamper and Francis Upritchard.



Frieze Masters’ talks kick off on Thursday with Philippe Parreno — who unveils his commission for Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall on Monday. On Friday, British painter Lynette Yiadom-Boakye is in conversation with Gabriele Finaldi, director of London’s National Gallery. Marlene Dumas discusses portraiture on Saturday and, on Sunday, Cornelia Parker talks to Maria Balshaw, director of the Whitworth in Manchester.

Over in the Frieze London tent, Julia Peyton-Jones, Wolfgang Tillmans and Jane and Louise Wilson discuss the evolution of contemporary art in London over the last 25 years, on Friday. The fair ends on Sunday with the “godfather of dub”, Lee “Scratch” Perry, looking back at his 50-year career.

Upcoming fairs in London: What to see during the city’s busiest artweek



‘Ve-sel’ designed by Zaha Hadid and Gareth Neil at PAD London © Sarah Myerscough Gallery

PAD London

October 3-9

Berkeley Square

The Pavilion of Art and Design (PAD) celebrates its tenth birthday this year. To mark the milestone, it’s trading in its black Berkeley Square tent for a white one. The fair’s mainstay is 20th- and 21st-century design, but it also encourages cross collecting. This year Japanese decorative arts feature prominently,

including works by Ryuhei Sako at Katie Jones and Takeshi Igawa at Adrian Sassoon. As was the case at Masterpiece earlier this summer, Italian modern art is well represented, including at Mazzoleni and Repetto. There are 14 new galleries exhibiting in 2016. Repetto is one of them, also avant-garde design-art space Sarah Myerscough, Hong Kong contemporary gallery Gérard Lasés and two jewellery designers, Suzanne Syz and Hemmerle.

pad-fairs.com/london

Frieze

October 6-9

Regent's Park

Over 160 contemporary galleries will be pitching up in Regent's Park for the 14th edition of Frieze London, with an additional 130 participating in Frieze Masters at the same time. The main fair has introduced some new sectors for 2016, including "The 90s", for which 14 galleries will revisit seminal exhibitions of the decade. Eighteen galleries are opting for collaborations this year, including Salon 94 (New York) and Bernard de Grunne (Brussels) who will juxtapose figurative works by feminist artist Judy Chicago with African and Oceanic sculptures at Frieze Masters. Also at Frieze Masters, an expanded Spotlight series has a focus on women artists and Collections, curated by Norman Rosenthal, returns for a second year with presentations including of Suprematist ceramics, east Christian art and a recreation of Jean Dubuffet's *Le Foyer de l'Art Brut*.

frieze.com/fairs



'Kaplica' (2014) by photographer Gina Soden, exhibiting at The Other Art Fair

The Other Art Fair

October 6-9

Truman Brewery

Held in an old brewery in Shoreditch, The Other Art Fair offers art without the middlemen — a place for unrepresented artist to sell their works, perhaps even find a gallery. This year's edition has had a busy run-up: the fair was acquired by Demand Media in September, and has already been rebranded as an arm of Saatchi Art, also owned by the company. Saatchi Art will be launching its Invest in Art series at the fair, presenting the work of 15 promising fine art graduates alongside the 130 artists already exhibiting. Also at the venue, The Guardian's popular virtual reality debut "6x9" — an immersive film about solitary confinement — will be available to experience. The Other Art Fair has established itself as a place for new buyers as well as new artists. According to founder Ryan Stanier (who has stayed on after the sale) 58 per cent of the buyers at last year's edition were picking up art for the first time.

theotherartfair.com

Moniker

October 6-9

Truman Brewery

More urban and more "poppy" than most art week options, Moniker shares a space with The Other Art Fair in Truman Brewery. The fair positions itself as at the intersection of the art market and street art. Prominent names this year include Jeff Gillette at Lawrence Alkin Gallery, whose 2010 series "Dismayland" is said to have inspired Banksy's "Dismaland" theme park. The events programme includes interactive spaces from artists Colin McMaster, Justine Smith and Mark McClure, daily releases of limited edition prints and street art tours. The Art on a Postcard scheme will be holding a lottery at the fair for the second year, with the opportunity to win original postcards by artists including Gilbert and George.

monikerartfair.com

Sunday

October 6-9

35 Marylebone Road

Sunday set up the same year as Moniker and fulfils a similar brief of providing space for galleries outside the mainstream, albeit from a less hip location — the University of Westminster's cavernous basement. This year's fair (organised by London gallery Supplement) will involve 25 exhibitors. The fair prides itself on the frequency with which its galleries graduate to booths at Frieze and its reputation as an early champion of artists including Ryan Gander, Benjamin Senior and Christian Jankowski. It has a no booth policy, which creates interesting juxtapositions — and the occasional confusion — between exhibitors.

sundayartfair.com

Photographs: Blain Southern gallery/Todd White, Waddington Custot, Sarah Myerscough Gallery

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