

BIG SALES AT FRIEZE PREVIEW—\$2.75 M. KOONS, \$2.5 M.
POLKE—POINT TO CONTINUED STRENGTH IN LONDON MARKET

by Nate Freeman



The David Zwirner booth at Frieze London 2017.

ARTNEWS

A year after a Frieze Week that was steeped in fear and uncertainty about what effects the then-fresh Brexit vote would have on the market, the VIP previews for Frieze London and Frieze Masters today saw a swell of patrons who showed up early to stroll through the muscular offerings that galleries brought to sell. Collectors were out in force—including Steve Cohen, Dasha Zhukova, Don and Mera Rubell, Martin Eisenberg, and Beth Rudin DeWoody—and they snapped up work priced solidly into the seven figures.

Sigmar Polke's *Laterna Magica* (1988–96) went for \$2.5 million from Thaddaeus Ropac's booth. At Hauser & Wirth's at Frieze Masters, a Richard Artschwager triptych sold for \$2.8 million and a Louise Bourgeois sculpture for \$2.6 million. Gagosian Gallery sold Roy Lichtenstein's *Grey Head* (1986) for an undisclosed amount in a booth that paired the Pop artist with Georg Baselitz.

Dealers said that the city is as much of an art capital as ever and that those involved in art commerce have no reason to worry, especially given that Prime Minister Theresa May has effectively delayed Brexit until 2021.

"I think Brexit is a very stupid idea, and my theory is that it's going to just fade away and be abandoned," Lisson Gallery's founder, Nicholas Logsdail, told me during a recent interview. "Hopefully everyone will forget about it, until it's just forgotten."

London's continued power as an art-fair city has much to do with the critical mass of big-wattage museum exhibitions it can offer in more than a dozen institutions around the city, a slew of must-see gallery shows, and an auction week that has only been bolstered by the decision of Christie's to cancel its July sales and double down on its Frieze Week sales.

This has all transpired as a host of other major fairs have weathered a variety of issues that have dissuaded collectors from visiting. Art Basel Miami Beach was haunted by the Zika virus last year, and some hotels will be closed this year because of damage sustained during Hurricane Irma. This past spring, Frieze New York was the victim of a crowded moment for the art world jet set, as it was scheduled right before the Venice Biennale and two weeks before the May sales in New York, forcing collectors to pick and choose when to come stateside. The fair brass for Frieze New York even cut the festivities from five days to four.

(Some here in London mentioned that the idea of going to an art fair in the United States now, given the events last Sunday in Las Vegas, is unsettling. Governmental bodies have implemented gun control across the pond, and, annually, there are two gun deaths per 1 million people in the U.K.—in the U.S., there are more than 100 gun deaths per 1 million people.)

With the summer's Grand Tour over and not a drop of rain in sight, London seems like a solid bet for where the market is strongest right now. Thaddaeus Ropac opened a new gallery in London this past April—instead of opening a first space in, say, New York—and said he chose the location based on the art infrastructure already in place. He has up at his Mayfair gallery Robert Longo's first-ever solo show in London. He said picking the British capital for his next outpost was "the natural next step."

"You don't really need an argument for London—it's here, it's vibrant, it's present," Ropac said at his booth. "It has the most successful museum in the world for international art, the Tate Modern. And it's very international—everyone passes through London."

And there's the fact that he can make very substantial sales very early at this London fair. This year, in the opening hours, along with the \$2.5 million Polke, he sold Robert Rauschenberg's Orange Squeeze (Urban Bourbon), 1992, for \$1.5 million, and Georg Baselitz's Zero Mobil (2014) for €1.1 million (about \$1.29 million).

David Zwirner is another dealer who has branched out to London in recent years, having opened in 2012 in a townhouse just a few steps from Ropac's pad on Dover Street. James Green, one of the directors at the London outpost, did the predictable thing today and told me that this was Zwirner's "best first day at Frieze ever." One hears this type of thing from dealers often at fairs, but the sales he quoted were impressive. The booth was sold out, and Jeff Koons's Gazing Ball (Giotto the Kiss of Judas), 2015–16, had sold for \$2.75 million. Another Koons, Gazing Ball (Little Boy), 2013, went for \$600,000. Wolfgang Tillmans agreed to let Zwirner ship to London four chromogenic prints to be sold as a set, and the decision paid off: they sold together for \$220,000. Green chalked up these quick sales to the bevy of free-spending collectors in the city at the moment.

"It's a credit to where Frieze is in general that someone like Wolfgang Tillmans wants to put inventory in the fair," Green said. "Jeff Koons has never given us work for Frieze. Luc Tuymans has never given us a new primary market work. They realized this is a fair I want to have a work in."

Green also noted that, with all of London's institutions putting up their biggest exhibitions of the year during Frieze Week, it's easy to tie a work in the booth to an important show, for a final push in making a sale. Outside the Zwirner booth was a work by Thomas Ruff, who has an exhibition that just opened at Whitechapel Gallery.

Being a mega-gallery with a London joint is not the only way to capitalize on the city's market strength. Phil Grauer runs New York's Canada gallery, and his fiefdom extends not beyond one cobblestoned block of Broome Street in Manhattan, off the Bowery. Still, he said he's been doing Frieze London for years, as it's still propped up nicely by the local scene.

"This fair has a good art community attached to it—the other fairs have more of a

corporatized flavor,” Grauer said, adding that he sold work by Sarah Braman in the range of \$35,000. “Plus, the lighting is great.”

(Somehow, even though it’s always cloudy in London, the lighting beneath those big tents in Regent’s Park really is always wonderful.)

Elsewhere at Frieze London, Pace Gallery sold 16 drawings by Loie Hollowell to different collectors, Jack Shainman sold Kerry James Marshall’s *Untitled (Bathers)*, 2017, for \$875,000, and David Kordansky nearly sold out his booth, which featured the work of Will Boone.

Over at Frieze Masters, the sales came at a slightly more deliberate pace, which befits the more serious vibe of the fair—the serious collectors come later in the week when the frenzy has subsided, or they come check out a piece and sleep on it before committing. Blum & Poe hadn’t found a buyer for any of its eight works by Julian Schnabel, all made in 1994 and priced between \$325,000 and \$525,000. And this despite the fact that Schnabel had taken time off from pre-production on his Vincent van Gogh biopic to come by and, in true Schnabel fashion, dramatically sign the booth’s wall.

“I love this fair because it’s so slow,” gallery co-owner Jeff Poe said. “People come and really take their time to consider the work.

Zwirner was still looking for a buyer for Dan Flavin’s 1963 work *the diagonal of May 25, 1963* (to Constantin Brancusi), which has the distinction of being the first neon work Flavin ever made, with the other two editions residing with Dia and a private collection.

“It’s kind of like the birth of Minimalism with this object,” Zwirner director David Leiber said, casually. He added that he could not reveal its price, but that it was in a range appropriate for an institution or a serious collector of Minimalist work.

Elsewhere at Frieze Masters, Nahmad Contemporary had sold a work by Daniel Buren, *Enamel Paint on Cotton Canvas* (1965), for €1.5 million (\$1.76 million) and had a reserve on a Philip Guston priced close to eight figures.

Most dealers stressed that, at Frieze Masters especially, it was still very early. There was, for instance, little concern at New York’s Van de Weghe that there was not yet someone taking home *Big Sun* (1984), a work by Jean-Michel Basquiat it has priced at \$4.2 million.

It’s all a matter of finding the right buyer, especially when it comes to certain art. The *Venus Over Manhattan* booth at Frieze Masters had works by John Dogg, a fictional artist reputed to have been created by Richard Prince and the late art dealer Colin de Land who showed at de Land’s East Village gallery in 1980s. The booth took five years to assemble—the work is hard to track down—and the tire at its center is priced at \$250,000. (There is also a very real catalogue raisonné for the fake artist, and it comes with Prince’s approval. Printed in the back it says: “Upon review of this publication, John Dogg commented: ‘Handshake drugs I bought downtown.’ September 26, 2017.” A Wilco reference, perhaps?)

Setting aside elusive artists, the fair’s most elusive object has to be Darren Bader’s *Proposal for a Fragrance* at the booth of Sadie Coles HQ. The work is activated when its buyer combines at least 37 perfumes to create a fragrance that the owner will then try to sell. When I asked about it, a gallery rep took a bottle of perfume on the table and gave it a pump to send a plume of odor into the air.

It can be yours for \$12,000.