

FT WEEKEND

Frieze goes La La

The Art Market | Fair heads to LA; Outsider art comes to Basel; Eric Fischl clowns with Trump; Aboriginal art up for auction. By Melanie Gerlis

One of the art world's worst kept secrets is now officially out: Frieze is opening in Los Angeles. Organisers have found a spot in Paramount Studios to put up one of its trademark tents between February 14 and 17, 2019. With a planned 60 exhibitors, the newest event will be much smaller than the fairs in London (about 300 dealers across Frieze London and Masters) and New York (about 200 dealers) and will focus on contemporary art. Victoria Siddall continues to oversee all the fairs and has taken on Bettina Korek, founder of LA production company ForYourArt, as the LA fair's executive director.

Whispers of a West Coast presence for the London-born fair began in earnest in 2016 when the Hollywood sport and entertainment conglomerate Endeavor (then WME-IMG) bought an undisclosed stake in the fair and publishing business. Nearly two years later the rumour-mill went into overdrive when art world newsletter In Other Words first floated that an LA edition was on the cards.

"We didn't want to rush into something like this," says Siddall. "We needed to know we were adding something that people wanted to do it and in particular to get local support."

Basel is the next stop for the Outsider Art Fair, which opens in the Swiss city in June, its third location after New York (founded in 1995) and Paris (since

2013). Coinciding with Art Basel, the new fair (Hotel Pullman, June 13-17) will be around the corner from the Messeplatz, where most of the art action happens.

"Outsider art" is the rough translation of "Art Brut", a phrase coined by the artist Jean Dubuffet for work he described in his 1947 manifesto as "produced by persons unscathed by artistic culture". Outsider Art Fair gallerist Andrew Edlin, the fair's owner since 2012, defines the core characteristic as "a lack of conditioning by art history or art world trends". He finds this particularly pertinent today when "everything is constantly appropriated".

Wider interest in outsider art has grown considerably these past few years, marked by the watershed 2013 Venice Biennale exhibition, curated by Massimiliano Gioni. Called *The Encyclopedic Palace*, the title was from an unrealised work by the self-taught Marino Auriti (1891-1960), and the exhibition included several unknown artists. Christie's launched its first auction dedicated to outsider and vernacular art in 2016. Top price at its January 19 auction in New York was \$672,500 (with fees) for a trademark mythological watercolour by outsider art star Henry Darger (1892-1973), a hospital employee by day and artist by night.

Edlin recognises the irony of outsider artists increasingly attracting the



Above: Eric Fischl's 'Worry' (2017); below: Fra Angelico's 'Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin' (1424-34) — Skarstedt



attention of the insider market; it is, he says, a question of balance. "My job is to help dealers do well at the fairs, but it's important to remember that these artists didn't need any of that."

Life began at nearly 80 for Aboriginal artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1910-96), who after a lifetime of creating work for private ceremonies (including decorating bodies and making mosaics for floors) started painting acrylic on canvas in 1988. She quickly came to the world's attention, partly through the support of Australian businesswoman Janet Holmes à Court.

In 1995, Stefano Spaccapietra, a retired Swiss professor and collector, began buying her work and is now selling six Kngwarreye paintings at Sotheby's Aboriginal Art auction in London on March 14. These include the first one he bought, "Fertile Desert" (1992, est. £60,000-£80,000), and

"Kame – Summer Awelye II" (1991), which, according to specialist Tim Klingender, senior consultant to Sotheby's London, Spaccapietra bought in 1995 for about A\$100,000 – then a record price for an Aboriginal artist – and now comes to market with a £300,000 to £500,000 estimate.

Kngwarreye was prolific – Klingender says she painted every day – so there is "huge variation in her work". Those that sell for the most have generally been her pointillist, large-scale pieces from the early 1990s. At Bonhams Sydney last year, her "My Country" (1995) sold from Elton John and David Furnish's collection for an above-estimate A\$414,800 (with premium).

American artist Eric Fischl has been using his iPad to "paint" Donald Trump in a clown costume, complete with a red nose, and posting the images on social

media, an exercise the artist has described as "not art" (no doubt the US president would agree). Now the artist has incorporated the image into one of the paintings from his latest series, as a poster in a child's bedroom in "Worry" (2017).

"To put that image of Trump as a clown into the child's room brings out a persistent malevolence, which the print alone does not have . . . I removed it from political satire and gave it a more wounding presence," Fischl says.

"Worry" is included in Fischl's solo show that opens at Skarstedt gallery in London on Thursday (*Presence of an Absence*, to May 26), one of seven works priced between \$750,000 and \$850,000. For those on a smaller budget, the artist has produced a stack of posters of his original iPad work to give away during the show.

Fischl also has two works in a group show opening on Tuesday at London's The Arts Club (*Running Wild*, to May 19).

Shady dealings in the art market are not just a thing of the present. As Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum opened its *Fra Angelico: Heaven on Earth* exhibition this week (to May 20), its catalogue revealed one of the works has an intriguing history.

In 1899, "The Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin" (1424-34), one of four reliquaries restored for the current exhibition, belonged to British army officer Lord Methuen, who had agreed with Colnaghi gallery to sell his work. When Methuen seemed to hesitate – likely holding out for a higher price through a rival dealership – Otto Gutekunst, then director at Colnaghi, pretended to have a buyer, an art agent who agreed to the play for a 5 per cent commission of the £2,000 paid for the work.

The details have been unearthed by Jeremy Howard, head of academic projects at the Colnaghi Foundation, who found a handwritten letter of 1899 from Gutekunst to Bernard Berenson, art historian and agent to Gardner. "The sale will be entered in the ordinary way as a sale on commission and what follows will be in the private books and entirely between you and ourselves," Gutekunst writes. The tricky worked wonders, giving Berenson a little more time to sell the work to Gardner a few months later for £4,000, plus Berenson's 5 per cent fee.

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