The Telegraph

Art Sales: gearing up for Frieze New York


Joe Goode, Untitled, 1968

By Colin Gleadell

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The Frieze Art Fair in New York this week coincides with the 25th anniversary of the first issue of frieze, the contemporary art magazine founded by Matthew Slotover, Amanda Sharp and artist Tom Gidley. Curiously, for a magazine that did not discuss the art market,

its founders pitched into the market with the launch of the eponymous fair in London in 2003.

From the start, the Frieze fair was competitive; it showed no mercy to one of the leading European fairs, Art Cologne, by choosing a date close to Cologne's and muscling it out of its normal slot in the calendar. Frieze was clearly a brand with ambitions and, in May 2012, it launched its first fair in New York, challenging the city's long-standing Armory Show and Art Basel Miami Beach, probably the biggest contemporary fair in America. The following October, in an attempt to expand into the modern art market – already covered by rivals Art Basel and FIAC in Paris – and into Old Masters and antiquities – challenging the preeminent European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF) in Maastricht – it launched Frieze Masters with many of TEFAF's exhibitors.

But things haven't always gone its way. In 2013 Frieze was beaten to the punch in Asia by Art Basel, which set up in Hong Kong. And any thoughts of opening a Frieze Masters in New York have been pre-empted by TEFAF, which has bought two existing fairs in New York and will transform them next year into TEFAF brand fairs, one for Old Masters and the other for modern. In London, meanwhile, the attempt to bring contemporary art buyers into the Old Master market at Frieze Masters has not been universally deemed a success.
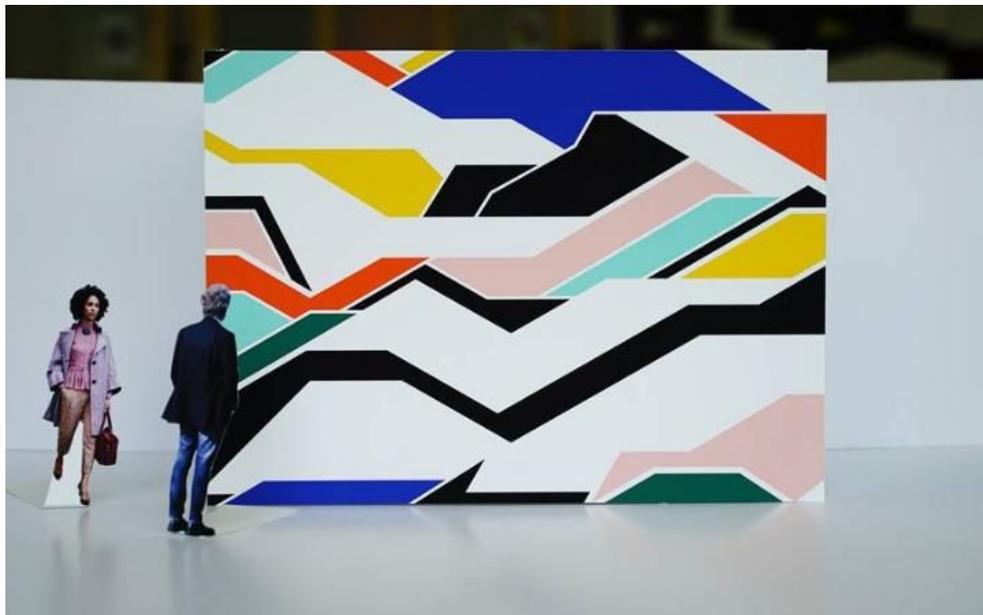
Sarah Morris, Dr. Caligari 2016

This year, Frieze New York will be directed for the first time by Victoria Siddall, who previously led their development programme, but has been running the two London Frieze fairs since Slotover and Sharp stood back to concentrate on "other things". In this she has been assisted by some of the world's top curators – Cecilia Alemani, who will curate the Italian pavilion at the next Venice Biennale, and Clara Kim, who has been appointed as a curator at Tate Modern.

And behind the scenes, Slotover and Sharp have cemented a partnership with Hollywood talent agency giant WME-IMG that could add a new dimension to the art fair and

magazine, and bring virtual reality to their online platforms.

Highlights this year are a recreation of a 1994 installation featuring a donkey in a room with a chandelier, by Maurizio Cattelan, and a pickpocket who, instead of taking something out of your pocket or handbag, will put something in, hopefully unseen.

Maurizio Cattelan, Warning! Enter at your own risk. Do not touch, do not feed, no smoking, no photographs, no dogs, thank you, 1994 CREDIT: INSTALLATION VIEW:DANIEL NEWBURG GALLERY, NEW YORK, MAY28-29, 1994

If there is any change this year, it is that there will be more American art and food, and more works by women artists than before, says Siddall. There is also an impression that, for a fair that distinguished itself from the start by focusing on the new, there will be more 20th-century art than usual.

This may reflect a Frieze policy to broaden its appeal to compete with Art Basel and the Armory Show, but it may also be a sign of the times. Galleries will be aware that sales have been thin in Europe this year, and that the New York auctions to be held after Frieze have fallen in value. In situations like this, historically tested art can be easier to sell than the latest thing.

Meanwhile, my inbox has been filling up with details about Art Basel in Switzerland next month and an overhaul for the Armory in New York next year, just to make sure that Frieze doesn't get all the attention.

Frieze New York is at Randall's Island Park from 5 - 8 May
frieze.com