



# Frieze Los Angeles Heats Up the Local Art Market

By Jordan Riefe | February 21, 2019



Bettina Korek. Johnny Le.

In the lead-up to Frieze Los Angeles, discussion centered on knowns and unknowns. While L.A. is known for its rich community of artists, its strength as a market remained in question. The ghosts of art fairs past lingered on the Paramount Pictures backlot where Frieze wrapped up on Sunday, February 17, including Paris Photo L.A., which ceased operations after three years in 2016, and indie fair Paramount Ranch, which closed the same year.

But the Frieze name brings a cachet bolstered by a star-studded welcoming committee including Salma Hayek, Serena Williams and Tobey Maguire, courtesy of Endeavor Agency, a major stakeholder in the fair since 2016. On display were old and new works by blue-chip practitioners such as Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelley, Judy Chicago, Doug Aitken, Ed Ruscha and Karon Davis; the latter's installed sculptures at the fair were acquired by the Hammer Museum.

"Fundamentally, at the heart of a fair there needs to be commercial success," says Victoria Siddall, director of Frieze Fairs, summing up her winning formula. "So, galleries need to sell art. So, we need to bring collectors, and museum directors need the galleries to bring fantastic work."

Waking last Thursday morning to a storm of biblical proportions, it was easy to conclude that God had it in for Frieze (or perhaps art fairs in general). Yet the crowds came, having bought out the entire allotment of timed-entry tickets almost immediately on their release.

Opening night saw familiar bold-type names including Brad Pitt, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jane Fonda, Annie Leibovitz, James Corden, Jodie Foster, Amy Poehler, Michael Keaton, John McEnroe, Sylvester Stallone and Beck. But the real buyers in Hollywood tend to be producers and agents such as former CAA chief Michael Ovitz and current Paramount Studios head Jim Gianopulos, who rubbed shoulders with the likes of uber-collectors Maurice Marciano and Eli Broad.

While movie moguls have deep pockets, they're not nearly as deep as those of the bankers who drive the world's biggest markets in New York and London. But they were deep enough to get the weekend off to a robust start. Hauser & Wirth announced the sale of Mike Kelley's 1999 installation *Unisex Love Nest*, to a private European foundation for \$1.8 million. Yayoi Kusama's 2001 piece *Infinity Nets (B-A-Y)*, sold for its asking price of \$1.6 million. **David Kordansky Gallery sold out most of its booth on the first day, with 11 new works by Kathryn Andrews selling for \$40,000 each.** Local artist Gajin Fujita sold three of five paintings through Venice-based L.A. Louver for \$40,000, \$45,000 and \$250,000.

"I always feel the ultimate compliment when your work finds a home," Fujita says. "Haven't figured out who all the works have sold to but I'd imagine they're passionate, serious collectors of art. I haven't got any plans but to keep doing what I've been doing, which is trying to practice making art every day."

Lehmann Maupin sold a total of \$1.37 million worth of works by artist Shirazeh Houshiary with an additional \$1.5 million of sales on top of that, with *Lunate*, a helix-shaped sculpture by Houshiary taking in \$479,000. Pace Gallery sold works in a wide range of prices, including a 1967 painting by Alex Katz that fetched seven figures and a 1967 work on paper by Alexander Calder for \$200,000.

"I don't think there's any place like L.A. on the face of the Earth right now," Mayor Eric Garcetti said on the eve of the fair. "We're so used to it being here 365 days a year — do we need a festival? I think the market is there. But when you have an embarrassment of riches, sometimes a festival is the moment."



Victoria Siddall. Benjamin McMahon.

For a turning point in L.A.'s development as an art center, many point to the blockbuster 2011 show "Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980," which highlighted the city's singular mid-century contributions in more than 60 cultural institutions across Southern California and featured many artists that showed at Frieze L.A., like Ruscha and Chicago. According to the fair's executive director, native Angeleno Bettina Korek, part of what grew out of the Getty's PST initiative was a spirit of collaboration among art institutions, funders and art schools, and an elevated general consciousness on a civic level.

"People who lived through that moment in L.A. were seeing in museums that, 'Oh, I was living in an important art city,'" Korek says. "That in conjunction with how much scholarship was published — I think it was 40 catalogs — you can't underestimate the impact that has. The catalogs travel around the world, and I think it sort of validated the postwar art history in L.A. that has a halo effect on what's going on right now."

Early works by Judy Chicago were for sale at Jeffrey Deitch's booth, following a major retrospective at ICA Miami coinciding with Miami Basel in December. This fall, Chicago will enjoy another retrospective at Deitch's space in Hollywood. Chicago is best known for her 1970s installation *The Dinner Party*. Celebrating prominent women in history and literature, it features a triangular banquet table set with servings of what appears to be female genitalia. In the early '60s, she struggled to join Ferus Gallery but was ignored by iconic gallerist Walter Hopps.

"For the longest time I was only known for *The Dinner Party*. That began to change with PST, when my body of work was rediscovered," Chicago said by phone from her home in Belen, New Mexico. "Even though I was part of the Los Angeles scene

in the 1960s, it was incredibly inhospitable to women. But still there was an incredible spirit of self-invention that definitely impacted my career. Because how else could I arrive at a new form?"

While no one would argue that a successful fair is a bad thing, artists and even organizers have become concerned that such events are becoming a place where commerce overshadows the enjoyment of art. On the heels of her successful showing at Miami Basel, Chicago says the fair has introduced programs, conversations and interviews, which stream on its website, in order to keep Basel from becoming a mere carnival of commodification.

Frieze Los Angeles has done likewise, with curator Hamza Walker setting up a series of conversations throughout the fair, including panels at the studio's Paramount Theatre pairing artists like Cauleen Smith with Sondra Perry, Ron Athey with Rafa Esparza, and harpist Zeena Parkins with composer Susan Alcorn. On Friday night, Tom Sachs and Werner Herzog sat for a Q&A following a screening of their latest collaboration, the short film *Paradox Bullets*.

"There are many different roads traveled simultaneously in contemporary art," says Venice-based artist Doug Aitken, whose new works at 303 Gallery's booth complement his recent Frieze Week installation, *Don't Forget to Breathe*, in a Hollywood storefront across from his gallery, Regen Projects. "One of those roads is very capitalistic. It's about assigning value to the kinds of art that you can obtain, that you can hold and store. But there's another line that's moving faster, a parallel trajectory that's more about experimentation and really searching for a language that's more of the present and has depth and gravity.

"At times," Aitken says, "those two synchronize, but I think most of the time the work that's truly innovative is living on its own. That will be the work that we look to 20 or 30 years from now, when we look back on 2019."

In the meantime, with dozens of millions of dollars changing hands, it's safe to assume two things: People do buy art in Los Angeles, and Frieze will be back next year.