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Los Angeles Frieze fair: city bids to become the next art capital

More than 70 galleries will participate in the showcase as LA aims to put itself on equal footing with New York and London

By Matt Stromberg | February 13, 2019

Frieze launches its first Los Angeles art fair this week, a highly anticipated event in a city long viewed as a second-tier art capital compared with New York and London.

More than 70 galleries will participate in Frieze Los Angeles, which takes place on the Paramount Pictures Studios lot in Hollywood. A tent designed by the architect Kulapat Yantrasast will house the gallery booths, 10 of which will be subsidized spaces for emerging galleries. Among the exhibits, visitors can expect to find blue-chip galleries showing the conceptual art icons John Baldessari and Lawrence Weiner, and Unisex Love Nest, a 1999 work by the late hometown hero Mike Kelley that has never been exhibited in LA. Several spaces will show work by artists with an LA focus, including Doug Aitken, who captures a certain cinematic vision of the city, and Kathryn Andrews, who will be revisiting the infamous Black Dahlia murder of the 1940s.



Kathryn Andrews, Sunbathers I & II, 2016 - 2017. Photograph: Timothy Schenck/Courtesy of Friends of the High Line, New York and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

"For new collectors who may be intimidated by an art fair, it's a great access point," the executive director of Frieze Los Angeles, Bettina Korek, told the Guardian.



Lisa Anne Auerbach, Readings by Dorothy, from *American Magazine* 2, 2014. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist and Gavlak, Los Angeles and Palm Beach

Thanks to the opening of several international art galleries and the founding of new private museums such as the Broad and the Marciano, the city's art scene has been coming into its own over the past decade. But a world-class art fair has been elusive.

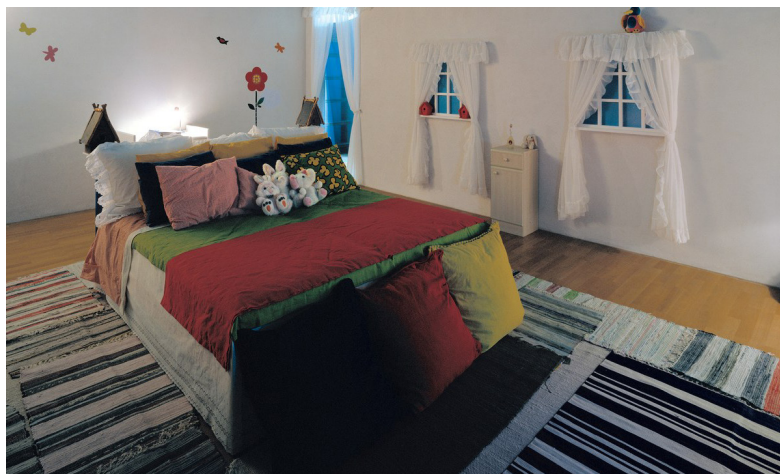
Now Frieze, which began as a London-based art magazine in 1991 before branching out into art fairs, is betting that the time is right.

"The aim is to form a week where the global eye is on LA," Victoria Siddall, director of Frieze Fairs, told the crowd last month at a press event at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

In addition to the gallery program, Frieze will take over the Paramount backlot, a small-scale city set that has been featured in countless films, for a series of individual art-

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ist projects. Curated by Ali Subotnick, these Frieze Projects will transform the faux streets and storefronts into a surreal cityscape. They range from a giant serpent slithering out of the subway by Trulee Hall to a giant Ketchup bottle by Paul McCarthy, master of the abject. Some artists will create interactive interventions: Lisa Anne Auerbach, for instance, will offer her services as a psychic reader/art adviser to patrons, while Tino Sehgal's project forces two dealers to work together to sell one artist's work, each gallerist uttering every other word in their combined sales pitch.



Mike Kelley, Unisex Love Nest, 1999. Photograph: Nic Tenwiggenhorn/Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

The backlot will also showcase several not-for-profit and artist-run organizations, including the Women's Center for Creative Work; Acid Free, which will be holding a mini-book fair; and the artist Andrea Zittel's desert compound, A-Z West.

"Through the non-profits, we're bringing the city to the fair," says Korek, "but we're also bringing the energy of the fair out into the city." As part of this expansive campaign, she cites Frieze Week, an editorial component that includes interviews with artists and gallerists giving their inside tips about the city, as well as arts-focused walking tours.

The local website CurateLA has also partnered with the Institute of Contemporary Art LA to offer artist and comedian-led bus tours of Hollywood hot spots. Tickets for the three-hour event, cheekily titled *Ceci n'est pas un Bus Tour*, aren't cheap at \$250 a piece, but proceeds go to benefit the ICA's free community programs and exhibitions.

"I hope this is a draw to more than one lot, a cultural draw, so more boats can rise," said Kristin Sakoda, executive director of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

Despite the broad programming, not everyone is as excited about the fair's prospects. Writing for *Artnet* last February, Tim Schneider opined on *Why Frieze Los Angeles Would be Dead on Arrival*, citing the city's sprawling geography and limited collector base as reasons for the fair's expected failure. Korek and company aren't fazed, however.

"The general consciousness has grown, and people realize they live in an art city," Korek said. "The tempo of the art community has accelerated in the past decade." She pointed to a range of sources contributing to this momentum, including the first Pacific Standard Time, a citywide series of exhibitions that canonized the postwar history of art in LA, the Hammer Museum's *Made in LA* biennial of contemporary art by Angelenos, the Broad and Marciano museums, as well as *Lacma's Art & Film Gala*, a wildly successful annual event that brings together the worlds of Hollywood and the Museum. "Patrons and collectors are ready to host this moment," she said.

"There are a lot of folks here that are amazing collectors," echoed Sakoda. "There's great wealth and the potential for philanthropy. We're poised to grow that here."

Sakoda also noted that, counter to the outdated stereotype of LA as a cultural wasteland, Los Angeles county actually has more museums than San Francisco or New York.

While the international art community will be waiting to see if Frieze can get a foothold on the west coast or will fade away like other ambitiously minded fairs, Sakoda sees it as a perfect fit.

"It's not a surprise to those of us who have seen the continued evolution and growth of arts, culture and the creative industry in LA," she said.