

Pursuits

Brad Pitt Joins Billionaire Collectors in Show That Tests L.A. Art Market

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February 14, 2019, 7:45 PM PST

Updated on February 14, 2019, 8:01 PM PST

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At 11 a.m. on Thursday, a crowd of art collectors and celebrities including Jodie Foster and Brad Pitt huddled under umbrellas in a rainstorm to get inside the inaugural day of Frieze Los Angeles.

“It’s about time we had a fair here,” Pitt said in an interview. “I hope they keep it going.”

The fair, which runs through this weekend on the lot at Paramount Pictures in Hollywood, is something of a test for an audience that, according to conventional wisdom, prefers to buy in New York or London rather than locally. It anchors a week of at least six art trade shows and numerous star-studded openings at galleries, museums and private homes.

“Los Angeles collectors are very knowledgeable -- I just think we haven’t had a fair where the galleries have been comparable to the level of collectors,” Nancy Lainer, an executive at her family’s closely held commercial real estate company, said as she stood inside the booth for Marc Selwyn Fine Art. “They’ve traveled the world for other fairs, and so now I think that a lot of people are interested in what a fair in our own backyard looks like.”

Lainer, who exclusively collects black-and-white contemporary art, didn’t see anything that fit her criteria.

Miami ‘Energy’

“I have a very specific collection, and this is a lot of big, colorful contemporary art,” she said. “Having said that, it’s good to see what people are bringing.”

The L.A. version of Frieze is smaller than its New York or London editions, with 70 galleries in a space only six booths wide. As a result, the VIP opening day was both intimate and busy, even though fire codes kept the visitor count tight.

The event has “the same kind of energy” as the opening of Art Basel Miami, said Donald Johnson Montenegro, a dealer

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at New York's Luhring Augustine Gallery, which is showing works by Jeremy Moon and Ragnar Kjartansson at its booth. "The scale of the fair helps. When you put 10 people in a small room it feels like a huge party."

Michael Keaton, Amy Poehler, Leonardo DiCaprio and Sylvester Stallone were among Hollywood types rubbing shoulders with billionaire collectors including Maja Hoffmann and Eli Broad.

Kelley Quickly

Hauser & Wirth quickly sold a room-size installation by the late Mike Kelley, priced at \$1.8 million, to a European foundation.

"It happened sooner than we thought," said Iwan Wirth, the global gallery's co-founder. "It came with the sun."

L.A.'s David Kordansky Gallery sold almost its whole booth - a solo presentation by Kathryn Andrews. Prices started at \$40,000 and reached \$110,000, including \$85,000 for her sculpture featuring a hand prop from "Terminator 2: Judgment Day."

The gallery Kayne Griffin Corcoran said the Hammer Museum bought a charcoal drawing by Mary Corse, with the asking price of \$150,000. A light piece by James Turrell, priced at \$350,000, also went quickly.



Midnight Sun (distant view with pools), 2019 by Doug Aitken Source: Doug Aitken via 303 Gallery, New York

"If people had doubts about the fair they don't have them any longer," said Lisa Spellman, owner of New York's 303 Gallery. She sold two works by L.A. artist Doug Aitken, including a \$250,000 lightbox depicting a blue swimming pool glowing against hills in black silhouette.

Felix, the fair co-founded by former Walt Disney Co. executive Dean Valentine, drew a mob at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel starting in the afternoon. An international roster of galleries set up shop in hotel rooms, with paintings and sculptures spread across beds, hung in showers and propped up on desks.

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“It’s attracting a lot of out-of-town collectors who are looking to Los Angeles for the cultural resources,” said David Daniels, a sales director at L.A. gallery Morán Morán, which co-organized the event. “There’s a lot of people who are involved in creative businesses here, and I think they often overlook art because they’re involved in other creative endeavors.”

Still, this week’s events showed the city is, in its own way, an art hub.

Collector Michael Ovitz opened his home in Beverly Hills, where works by Mark Rothko, Jasper Johns and Pablo Picasso competed for attention with emerging artists, tribal pieces and Ming dynasty furniture.

In Brentwood, NPR Chief Executive Officer Jarl Mohn greeted guests to his mansion filled with minimalist art by Donald Judd and Carl Andre as well as gems by California “Light and Space” movement practitioners such as Doug Wheeler.

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“For creators, L.A. is the singular most important place on the planet,” Mohn said. “The problem is that as a business and commerce center, we have a long, long way to go. Having Frieze here is going to help.”

(Adds Ming dynasty era in third-from-last paragraph.)