

STATE

FREE

16 HOT & COOL ART

DAYDD JONES: JONAS BURGERT AT BLAIN SOUTHERN GALLERY

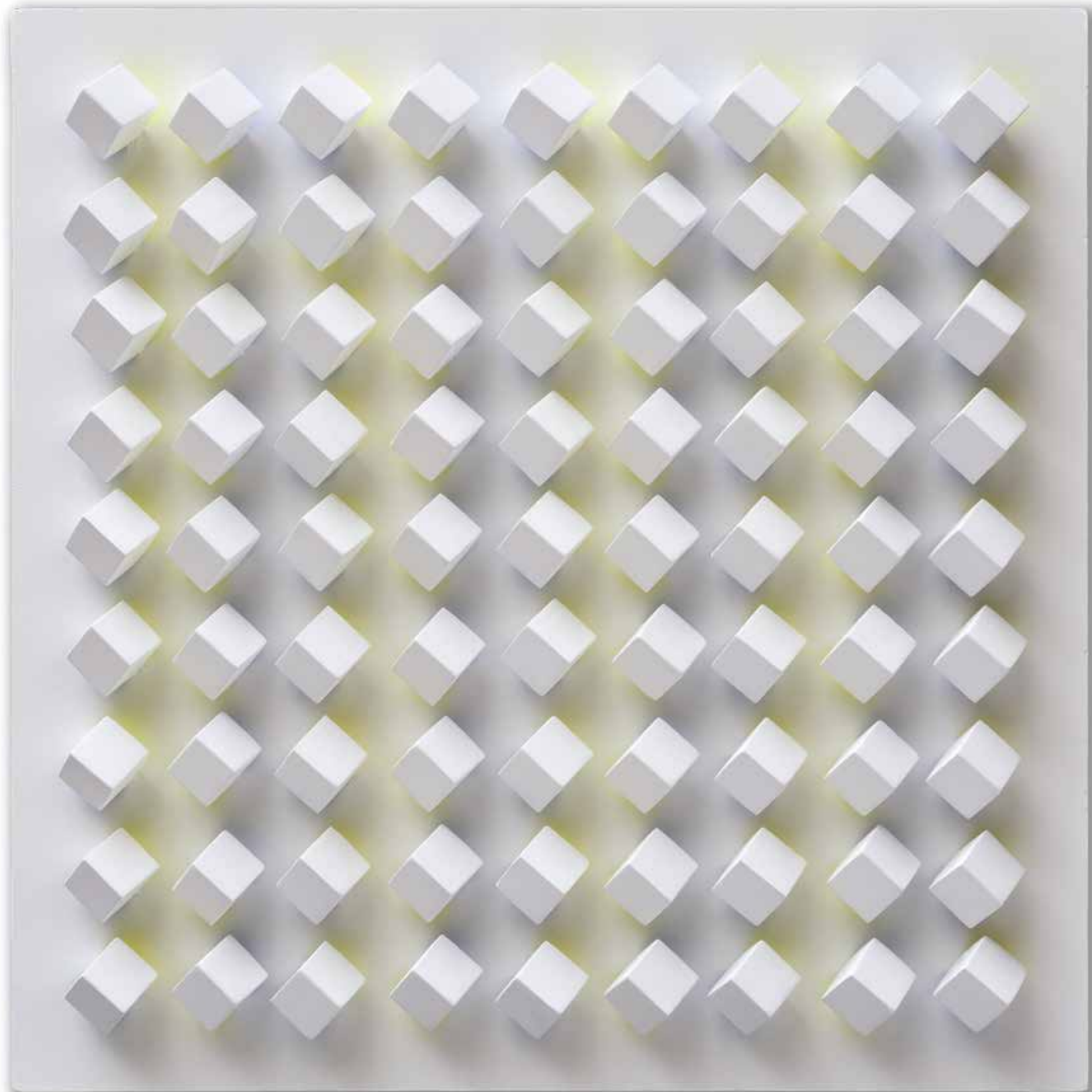
Sturm und Drang
JONAS BURGERT | BERLIN



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Luis Tomaseello (b. 1915 La Plata, Argentina - d. 2014 Paris, France) Atmosphère chromoplastique N.1016, 2012, Acrylic on wood, 50 x 50 x 7 cm, 19 5/8 x 19 5/8 x 2 3/4 inches

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Floating in Pyramidal Space 1988
Oil on canvas
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COVER IMAGE



Dafydd Jones

Jonas Burgert, 2014
Photographed at Blain|Southern
Hanover Square, London

The Berlin painter, **Jonas Burgert** (born 1969), was Blain|Southern's intriguing counterpoint to the blockbuster Royal Academy show (**Anselm Kiefer**) some 10 minutes walk from their Hanover Square space. Burgert's large-scale paintings are equally epic and concerned with the legacy of history as understood and interpreted by a younger generation of German born artists who still confront the challenge of identity and purpose of existence – but who freely utilise the imagery of the post-Pop, digital age. Profile on page 18.

STATE

HOT & COOL ART

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It is not a review magazine – it is about PEOPLE worth serious consideration, PLACES that are hot and happening and PROJECTS developing in the international art world.

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ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR



IT IS A FACT that the creeping dominance of the art fair in the business of trading art and artists is becoming a hot issue. Increasingly, wary articles on the art fair phenomenon have given way to panel discussions and heated arguments about the ethical impact these huge bazaars have had on the traditional art world – made up as it was of galleries, dealers and artists with hard won reputations and perceptible career paths.

Back in 2012, **Will Gompertz**, the arts correspondent at the BBC, used his influential position to attack the all-pervasive obsession with 'show business' and money within leading UK museums and institutions. 'The art world has become an increasingly self-sustaining economic eco-system in which the interests of all parties – museums, curators, auctioneers, collectors, dealers and artists – are best served by jointly establishing and maintaining the reputation of "brand name" artists,' he noted. And perhaps more memorable was his revelation that 'leading curators' within our major institutions really despised the art of a whole raft of household names that they were otherwise obliged to praise publically. And Gompertz should know. Before his controversial 2009 appointment to the top BBC job (he had no journalistic experience; school drop-out with no degree; buddy of **Alan Yentob** and the then DG **Mark Thompson**; hired over incumbent arts staff; etc.) Gompertz was media director at the **Tate** museum group. Another key point in Gompertz' short, perceptive article was about the insidious relationship between cash strapped public institutions and the art trade. A prestigious museum exhibition can consolidate the reputation of a living artist – and raise the value of the work overnight – but at the same time it has, perforce, a commercial relationship with the source of those works. Wealthy collectors and high profile dealers are an integral part of the institutional fabric in every key art venue – providing finance, acquisitions, gifts and facilitating prime exhibitions that will attract a paying public. Today, those that control the strategic international art fairs also, by extrapolation, dictate the art and artists that will enter national collections and earn a place in art history. For the art fairs are currently monopolising the essential trade routes of contemporary art.

In 1970 there were just three main events – Cologne, Basel, and Art Actuel in Brussels. In 2012, **Georgina Adams** wrote: 'I'm currently counting every art fair in the world and among fairs that show *only* contemporary art, I'm up to 220.' Today the number is significantly more. The **TEFAF Art Market Report**, compiled by **Clare McAndrew**, declared 33% of total dealer sales were made at art fairs in 2013. The TEFAF report of 2014 found that 75% of sales at art fairs take place at art fairs in the USA. And 91% of dealers around the world told TEFAF they needed to participate in just as many or more fairs in the United States as a result of this. But from the very application process, the editing and acceptability of individual galleries is a make or break affair that can have negative ramifications for the rejected. Established and strategic fairs like Frieze or Basel have a limited number of spaces and these are already filled with approved incumbents. And with a prime stand at Frieze costing around \$80,000, the mid-tier and cutting edge dealers take a huge financial gamble in participating – *if they can get in*.

It is not unlikely that the meteoric rise in art fairs relates directly to the changing profile of the 'major collector'. Previously, the collector/dealer relationship was intimate and convivial, an exchange of passions and knowledge and built on integrity and loyalty. The new 'collector',

stereotyped by the Wall Street hedge-fund supremo or media tycoon, is time-poor and no scholar of art history outside of auction records. The art fair is essentially a money making machine, familiar territory for this breed of speculator, which simplifies the acquisition of new work and provides the correct level of ego strokes and fawning to make the experience appear socially dynamic. When gallerist **Ed Winkleman**⁽¹⁾ interviewed Basel's **Annette Schönholzer**, she recollected the subtle handover of power to the fair management through VIP facilities and access. Tired of duplications, whereby participating galleries regularly invited the same key collectors, it evolved the practice of exhibitors submitting their lists of essential guests to the organisers for a unified inclusion in the VIP programmes. Thus, art fair managements acquired the quintessential buyer list – the ultimate leverage to get top tier galleries to sign up. There is also the herd element, which can alleviate collector confusion – with new trends being immediately affirmed through red dot sales – and offering the comfort of interacting with a global community of recognised and fêted 'VIPs' in a glittering mish-mash of fashion, art and parties. What's not to like for the prince of pork belly futures and his trophy princess?

Of course, it is all fine and dandy until something goes wrong. Art fair organisers are responsible to no one but themselves. Dealers, away from their increasingly irrelevant bricks & mortar galleries, are subject to local laws. That is: Dutch law will govern TEFAF; Swiss law Basel; and Hong Kong law will govern Art Basel Hong Kong (unless specific contractual provisions have been made). So a German buyer in dispute with a British gallery over a purchase at Frieze Manhattan will be subject to the arcane laws of New York. And the eye-watering expense of US litigation. Furthermore, impulse buys at an art fair leave little time for due diligence, a more gentle affair altogether when transacting in a private gallery environment. With the ongoing issue of 'looted' art in mind: if you unknowingly buy a stolen painting in the USA and the original owner claims it back, it can be seized from you forthwith (a thief cannot pass on *good title* under American law). In Cologne or Maastricht, the 'in good faith' purchaser would keep the work. Complicate this example by proposing that a looted work had previously been claimed in, say, Geneva but this had been dismissed under the 'in good faith' purchase understanding. If that same looted work is then later offered in America, a second claim for restitution would fail because the seller has an *adjudicated good title* to pass on.⁽²⁾ A similar catalogue of judicial confusions might be extended to losses, damage, accidents and insurance claims. It is easy to see how commentators (like **AA Gill**, at Frieze for *Vanity Fair*) are finding more and more art fair insiders willing to disparage the experience: 'You know, no one enjoys this. No one in the business likes doing business this way,' said one Frieze dealer. Searingly honest, just so long as they remain – as with Gompertz' confidants – strictly anonymous! But as **Matthew Slotover**, undisputed Emperor of the art fair legions, told **Artspace** in an interview in 2013: 'Art fairs really exist for the galleries – the galleries are our clients, and we're there to serve them. It's up to them whether art fairs exist; if they don't want them to exist all they need to do is stop participating and art fairs would immediately not exist.'

Is that the opening or the closing of a debate...?

Mike von Joel Editor

NOTES

1. **Ed Winkleman**. *Selling Contemporary Art: How to Navigate the Evolving Market*.
2. I am indebted to an essay by US Art Law Litigator **Nick O'Donnell** for examples of these international legal anomalies.



*'I have seized the light.
I have arrested its flight.'*

LOUIS DAGUERRE



Stella Kesaeva © Stella Art Foundation

RUSSIANS IN VENICE

THE RUSSIAN collector, **Stella Kesaeva**, is director of the **Stella Art Foundation**, set up in 2003 to help educate young artists and build a bridge between Russia and the West. The wife of tobacco tycoon **Igor Kesaev** – number 422 on the Forbes rich list – she has been able to put this to good use as Commissioner for the Russian Pavilion at the **Venice Biennale** through 2011, 2013 and 2015. She has already shaken things up by taking just one artist with her each time – to avoid, she says, it looking like a people's market. In 2015 her chosen artist, **Irina Nakhova**, will be the first female artist to represent the country, working alongside a female curator, **Margarita Tupistyn**. 'I select an artist who is worthy of being shown – regardless of gender,' says Kesaeva. 'For the **Russian Pavilion**, it's very important to show today's agenda. The state is behind us and gives us money so we can carry out very good quality projects.'



Inna Bazhenova

RED ALL OVER

THE ART Newspaper has been sold to **Inna Bazhenova**, publisher of the Russian edition since 2012. She says: 'When I started collecting art I realised it was absolutely essential reading [...] *The Art Newspaper* will retain complete editorial independence.' Founded in 1990, it is an online and paper publication based in London and New York with editorial offices in London, Turin, New York, Paris, Moscow, Beijing and Athens. The first paper in the network was started in 1983 by **Umberto Allemandi** in Turin. **Anna Somers Cocks** founded the English version in London in 1990. Businesswoman and art collector Inna Bazhenova (born 1968) has interests in a number of medium-sized businesses, all Russian based.

SEE ROME AND DIE



Rome, from Mount Aventine at Sotheby's

TURNER NOW ranks as the most expensive of any pre-20th century British artist. Four bidders competed for *Rome, from Mount Aventine*. The £30.3 million JMW Turner topped **Sotheby's** Old Master & British Paintings Evening sale, which totalled £53,972,000. Painted in 1835 and exhibited at the **Royal Academy** in 1836 when Turner was 61 years old, the large-scale oil is in an exceptional state of preservation. It was acquired in 1878 by the **5th Earl of Rosebery**, later Prime Minister, and remained in the Rosebery collection thereafter.

NEW BACON FOUNDATION



Francis Bacon

BASED IN Monaco, **The Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation** is a private non-profit institute founded by **Majid Boustany**. The artist lived in Monaco from 1946 to the early 1950s. Located on the ground floor of the Villa Elise, 21 Boulevard d'Italie, in the heart of Monaco, the institute will be open to scholars and art historians throughout the year – and to the general public from March 2015 by appointment only. Boustany has a selection of paintings by Bacon from the late 1920s to the early 1980s and work by key peers and influences; a unique photographic archive on the artist by leading photographers and pictures by his friends and lovers. Also a wide selection of the artist's graphic works, a unique array of working documents from Bacon's various studios, a number of rare items from Bacon's furniture and rug design period and an extensive library on the artist offering an essential resource for scholars. artdaily.org

QUOTEUNQUOTE



SAGE ADVICE

'Art is not an investment. Art is something you buy because you are financially solvent enough to give yourself the pleasure of living with great works rather than having to just see them in museums. People who are buying art at the top of the market as an investment are foolish.'

Arne Glimcher (76) chairman of *The Pace Gallery*, probably the number one private gallery in the Western hemisphere, talking to Bloomberg.



MY WAY

'You need a big ego to do anything properly. Big ego and a thick skin!'

Hayden Kays (30) talking to Hunger.tv – the Fearless Issue.



SET & MATCHED

'At one point, a scene required [Sophia Loren] taking a bath or a shower. She cried like a little girl who had been spanked because the director wanted her to shave her armpits. She did it, but she cried for about two days.'

Phil Stern, Hollywood photographer who died on 13 December 2014, aged 95, recalls being on set in Libya.



STILLE NACHT

'I think a retrospective for an artist is difficult because it is boring. It is your own work. I prefer to look to the future.'

Anselm Kiefer (69) on his majestic blockbuster at the Royal Academy which took four years of planning.



{ 'I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way — things I had no words for.' }

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE



{ 'Art disturbs, science reassures.' }

GEORGES BRAQUE



LIFE SENTENCE

JOHN DUNBAR

The 'pop' explosion of art and artists in the 1960s seemed to retain an essence of joy and integrity. Today's equivalent art boom is poisoned with greed and avarice and, beneath the surface, is deeply cynical. Does it matter anymore?

'We have gone back to the future 100 years and more. We have our own thoroughly modern robber barons & plutocrats filling the coffers of galleries and artists, so with \$millions on offer it is no surprise to find plenty of ersatz art around as everybody wants a piece of the action. 50 years ago, London had a tiny contemporary art scene, three or four forbidding Mayfair shops, the Royal Academy was perceived as very much for old farts. We knew art was rock, film, words... whatever. The art scene has grown a thousand times since then and I am delighted to still be part of the on-going cultural explosion. London is a great art town and I love it... and all who sail in her! And I still get a buzz from making stuff!'

John Dunbar: Remember when Today was Tomorrow, at England & Co, October 2014

John Dunbar was born in Mexico City in 1943, but his first memory is of Moscow where his father was the British Embassy's cultural attaché. Husband of Marianne Faithfull, friend of Paul McCartney and all the 60s faces, Dunbar opened Indica, the experimental art gallery in 1965. John Lennon met Yoko Ono there on the eve of her show; Barry Miles ran the bookshop side of Indica — it opened and closed within two years but became a legend.

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NEW DIRECTOR FOR FRIEZE FAIRS



VICTORIA SIDDALL has been appointed as Director of **Frieze London** and **Frieze New York** in addition to her existing position as Director of **Frieze Masters**. **Amanda Sharp** and **Matthew Slotover** will focus on developing new projects for the organisation.

FRIEZE NEW YORK 2015

FOR THE fourth consecutive year, **Frieze New York** is sponsored by **Deutsche Bank**. Bringing 190 of the world's leading contemporary galleries (with 62 participants from New York) to **Randall's Island Park**, Manhattan from 14-17 May 2015. The fair introduces **Spotlight**, a new section for participating galleries that has been a critically acclaimed feature at **Frieze Masters** in London, advised by curator **Adriano Pedrosa**. Frieze New York will feature galleries from 33 territories. Founders, **Matthew Slotover** and **Amanda Sharp**, have announced they are retiring as directors this year.



Hugo Boss Prize winner **Paul Chan** (centre) holds the tetrahedral trophy, Guggenheim director **Richard Armstrong** (left) and Hugo Boss CEO **Gerrit Rützel**

BOSS PRIZE 2014

THE **GUGGENHEIM** Foundation administers the biennial \$100,000 **Hugo Boss Prize** — given to an artist whose contributions to contemporary art are considered outstanding. The 10th award went to **Paul Chan** (born 1973, Hong Kong) whose work encompasses animated film projection, anti-war video and experimental publishing. An exhibition of Chan's work will be at the Guggenheim, NY, in Spring 2015. Artist **Steve McQueen**, a finalist, withdrew his candidacy because of commitments to *12 Years a Slave*.

DON'T MISS

GAGOSIAN BRITANNIA STREET



Richard Serra *Backdoor Pipeline*, 2010

Richard Serra's last UK show was again at **Gagosian** in 2008. Britannia Street will exhibit four large-scale steel sculptures: *Backdoor Pipeline* (2010); *Ramble* (2014); *Dead Load* (2014); *London Cross* (2014). Almost every wall in the gallery had to be destroyed and rebuilt in order to allow the installation.

Serra says: 'I wanted to make a show with different aspects of compression and circulation, intervals and elevation, different ways to approach a field or a space or a context.' **Gagosian Davies Street** will exhibit a 5-metre long work on paper, *Double Rift #2* (2011). Richard Serra was born in San Francisco in 1938. He studied at the University of California (Berkeley and Santa Barbara) and at Yale University. He has lived in New York since 1966. A brilliantly courageous exhibition by Gagosian — and a unique and exceptional experience.

Richard Serra until 4 March 2015

Gagosian 6-24 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9JD

ROYAL ACADEMY



Anselm Kiefer *Winter Landscape* (Winterlandschaft), 197
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art © Anselm Kiefer

THE ESSENTIAL show for anyone engaged with the art of painting. Majestic in its scope, breathtaking in its scale — the sheer power of painting, embedded within the glorious main rooms of the RA will refresh even the most jaded of *art-niks*. Alongside Kiefer's sculpture and installation, all works with an uncompromising intellectual rigour. A once in a lifetime opportunity to embrace the collected works of **Anselm Kiefer**, one of the 20th century's greatest post-war artists. Kill for a ticket.

Anselm Kiefer until 14 December 2014

Royal Academy Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BD

THE SAATCHI GALLERY

THE SPIRIT of Pop, a universal movement for the modern world: 250 works by 110 artists from China, the former Soviet Union, Taiwan, the UK and the USA, examined through the framework of six themes: Habitat; Advertising



Alexander Kosolapov *Hero, Leader, God* 2007

and Consumerism; Celebrity and Mass Media; Art History; Religion and Ideology; Sex and the Body. Western Pop Art, *Sots Art* in the Soviet Union and *Cynical Realism* in China make a brilliantly combustible mix. Co-curated by **Andrey Erofeev**, critic and writer, formerly at the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; **Marco Livingstone**, independent curator; and **Chang Tsong-zung**, who co-founded the Asia Art Archive and the Hanart TZ Gallery in Hong Kong. Includes: **Michael Craig-Martin**, **David Mach**, **Lisa Milroy**,

Marc Quinn, **Gavin Turk**, **Bill Woodrow**, **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, **Keith Haring**, **Jenny Holzer**, **Jeff Koons**, **Sherrie Levine**, **Richard Prince**, **Andres Serrano**, **Cindy Sherman**, **Ai Weiwei**, **Vitaly Komar**, **Alexander Melamid** and **Boris Orlov**.

Post Pop: East Meets West until 23 February 2015

Saatchi Gallery Duke Of York's HQ, The Duke Of York Square, King's Road, London SW3 4RY



Eric Fischl
Victoria Miro



Paddy Whittaker; Michael Davis; Andrew Logan
Royal Academy



James Birch; Eleesa Dadiani
Royal Academy



Mary McCartney; Sandra Beck; Jeff Beck
White Cube, Bermondsey



John Hurt
Eleven. London



Jay Jopling; Ed Saul
Frieze Art Fair



Victoria Siddall
ACE Shoreditch



Peter Simon; Sir Nicholas Serota
Frieze Art Fair



Sir Norman Rosenthal; Allen Jones
Royal Academy



Anthony Howell; Mohamed Ahmou
England and Co. London



Ron Arad
Royal Academy



James Mayor; Alan Hobart
Royal Academy



Tom Phillips
Royal Academy



Nicholas Logsdail; Ryan Gander
Frieze Art Fair



Snowy Ellison
Eleven. London



John Ritblat; Mathew Slottover
Frieze Art Fair

Tracey Emin *The Last Great Adventure is You*. White Cube, Bermondsey. Eric Fischl *Art Fair Paintings*. Victoria Miro. 16 Wharf Road London. John Dunbar England and Co. 90-92 Great Portland Street. London. Mim Scala *In Motion*. Eleven Fine Art. Eccleston Street. London. Frieze Party, ACE Hotel Shoreditch. London. Frieze Art Fair 2014. London. Allen Jones Royal Academy. London



Kate Brindley

ARNOLFINI: NEW DIRECTOR

RECENTLY INTERIM director, **Kate Brindley** is the new director of the **Arnolfini**. Located on Bristol's harbourside, the Arnolfini encompasses the visual arts, performance, film and music with 'learning as the glue that binds the programme'. Brindley's previous role was as director at **Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art** (mima). Formerly at **Bristol Museum and Art Gallery**, she presented the *Banksy vs Bristol Museum* project, which attracted over 300,000 visitors, ranking it in 2009's top ten most visited exhibitions in the world. Current Arnolfini exhibitions: **Josephine Pryde: *These Are Just Things I Say, They Are Not My Opinions*** until 22 February. **Willem de Rooij** until 8 February. www.arnolfini.org.uk

PARASOL UNIT: ANNIVERSARY AUCTION

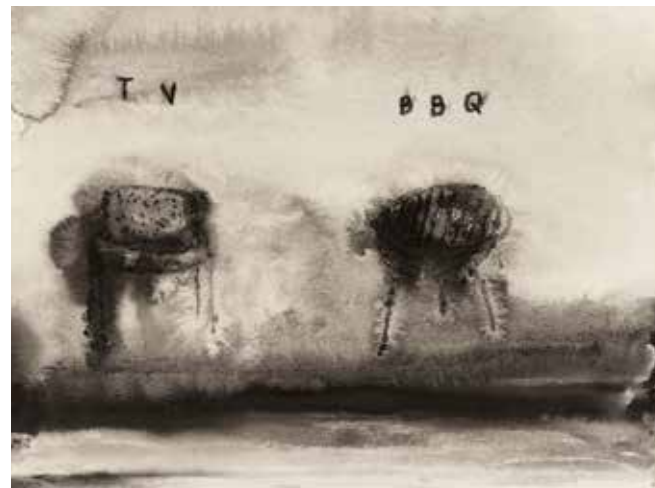
THE **SOtheby's** sale highlight, *The Skirt*, 2005 (est. £150,000-250,000) by Belgian painter and filmmaker **Michaël Borremans**, sold for £926,500 at the fund raising auction celebrating the **Parasol Unit's** 10th Anniversary. Borremans staged his first London exhibition at Parasol Unit in 2005. The 31 works donated also included artists **Chris Ofili**, **Antony Gormley** and **Luc Tuymans**. The auction realised a total of £2,092,250 at Sotheby's with 100% sold. Parasol also collaborated with **Paddle8.com**, who auctioned half of the donated works online, raising an additional £126,700. The proceeds raised from both auctions, as well as a private sale of £160,000, totalled £2.37 million which will go towards the exhibition and education programme devised by Founder/Director, **Ziba Ardanal**. Opened in December 2004, Parasol is a registered educational charity and a not-for-profit institution curating four exhibitions a year encompassing a variety of media. It also stages a number of other artistic projects and gives an annual award. www.parasol-unit.org

BAN THE BLOODY RUCKSACKS FROM ALL GALLERIES



© ALAGRAM

MIDDLESBROUGH INSTITUTE OF MODERN ART



David Lynch *TV BBQ*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran, LA

mima IS the first UK gallery to present *David Lynch Naming*, originally shown in Los Angeles and curated by **Brett Littman**, Executive Director of The Drawing Center, New York. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue trace how multimedia artist **David Lynch** uses 'naming' in film, photography, drawings, watercolours, painting and prints from 1968 to the present. Lynch originally studied painting at the Boston Museum School and Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

David Lynch Naming until 26 March 2015.

mima Centre Square, The Mall Middlesbrough, TS1 2AZ

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

IN PARTNERSHIP with the **Metropolitan Museum**, New York, the exhibition will bring together a collection of the artist's intimate and informal portraits of his impressive circle of friends and follow **John Singer Sargent's** time in Paris, London and Boston, as well as his travels in the Italian and English countryside.

Curated by **Richard Ormond** CBE, key exhibits include the only two surviving portraits Sargent painted of his friend and novelist **Robert Louis Stevenson**, which will be displayed together for the first time since they were painted in the 1880s.



John Singer Sargent
The Fountain, Villa Torlonia, Frascati, Italy, 1907
© Art Institute of Chicago

Sargent: Portraits Of Artists And Friends 12 February - 25 May 2015
NPG St Martin's Place, London WC2H 0HE

THE PACE GALLERY



Robert Fraser

IN COLLABORATION with the artist **Brian Clarke**, this expansive and affectionate tribute to **Robert Fraser** – the seminal London gallerist of the Swinging Sixties – will evoke the dynamic exhibition programme and the cutting edge artists Fraser championed in 1962 at 69 Duke Street. A parallel show of works by Clarke (the subject of Fraser's inaugural show when he reopened at 21 Cork Street in 1982) will be on at Pace's Lexington Street project space. Destined to be a highlight of the spring season.

A Strong Sweet Smell of Incense 6 February – 28 March 2015
Pace 6 Burlington Gardens, London W1S 3ET

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{ *'An artist cannot talk about his art any more than a plant can discuss horticulture.'* }

JEAN COCTEAU

EASTERN PROMISE

THE FIRST Saudi national to be so recognised, **Mohammed Abdul Latif Jameel** has been awarded an Honorary Knighthood for philanthropy and support of the arts. Jameel is chairman of **Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives** (ALJCI) and played a significant part in a project to restore the Islamic Gallery housed in the **Victoria & Albert Museum**. *Art Jameel* – the new name for ALJCI's arts and culture initiative – was created to form partnerships with art organisations worldwide to foster and promote a thriving arts scene inside the MENAT region. *Art Jameel* has a longstanding partnership with the V&A providing the **Jameel Prize** for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition. www.aljci.org



WHITWORTH REOPENS FEBRUARY

THE 125-year-old **Whitworth Gallery**, part of **The University of Manchester**, will reopen its doors on 14 February 2015 following a £15 million redevelopment project by **McInnes Usher McKnight Architects**. Alongside **Cornelia Parker's** major solo exhibition, the opening programme will include: Chinese born artist, **Cai Guo-Qiang**; two exhibitions of works recently donated to the Whitworth from **The Karpidas Foundation**, including pieces by **Laure Prouvost, Dorothy Cross, Nathan Coley, Hayley Tompkins, Gillian Wearing, Keith Coventry, Gary Hume, Richard Patterson, Paul Noble, Michael Craig-Martin, Dexter Dalwood, Matt Connors** and **Richard Aldrich**. Also images by photographer **Johnnie Shand Kydd** of YBAs (Young British Artists) visiting the Greek island of Hydra at the invitation of the art collector, **Pauline Karpidas**.

\$140,000 JACKET



A HIGHLIGHT for comic book nerds is **Todd McFarlane's** original art for **Spider-Man** issue 300 – the only cover appearance of 'the black Venom symbiote suit'. It made a disappointing \$140,000 at **Heritage's Comic & Comic Art** auction (est. \$250,000). The piece features Spider-Man on one of the very last occasions he would ever wear the black costume. Apparently, it is 'burned into the collective imagination of all comic fans from that period and it's one of the most impressive covers to come to market from any period in recent memory'.

TATE REPORTS

THE TATE Modern **Matisse** cut-outs show beat **Damien Hirst's** 2012 record exhibition with 562,000 visitors. The Tate acquired 1,061 works in 2013/14 with a total value of £33.6 million. Of these, 777 were by artists from the UK and 284 from abroad. It also acquired 544 photographic works. In 2013/14, loans numbered some 1,467 works to 282 venues (791 works to 149 venues in the UK and 676 works to 133 venues internationally) made to 23 countries, including Brazil, China, South Korea and Qatar. In the same period, Tate attracted 3.5 million visitors.

FIRST ACTION PAINTING

WALL PAINTING dating back 40,000 years has been found in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Significant because it indicates modern humans and Neanderthals both expressed themselves through cave art. Neanderthals disappeared between 41,030 and 39,260 years ago, while modern humans arrived in Europe 45,000 to 43,000 years ago – several thousand years of overlap. Currently, the world's oldest dated cave art is a red dot found in the **El Castillo** cave in Cantabria, northern Spain, at 40,800-years-old. The Spanish site and the Indonesian caves are around 8,000 miles (13,000km) apart. Other ancient paintings have been found in Gibraltar and most famously at the **Lascaux Cave** in France's Dordogne region, which contains nearly 2,000 figures of animals, humans and abstract signs painted on to the walls with mineral pigments. Archaeologists from Brisbane found that a hand stencil in a cave near Maros on Sulawesi is 39,900 years old, making it the oldest of its type in the world. **Dr Anthony Dosseto**, director of the **Wollongong Isotope Geochronology Laboratory**, added: 'Europeans can't exclusively claim to be the first to develop an abstract mind anymore.' (source: AP)

RUSSIAN FORGERY SCAM

AS REPORTED by *Der Spiegel*, **Isaac Zrog**, a 68-year-old gallerist from Wiesbaden and a 42-year-old business partner were the ringleaders charged with offering and selling 18 fake artworks by Russian *avant-garde* artists in the style of **Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Alexej von Jawlensky** and **Natalia Goncharova**, amongst others. According to prosecutors, the sale of 11 counterfeit paintings resulted in around €3 million (\$4 million) profit. Early reports alleged the ring could have forged and sold up to 400 artworks altogether since 2005. According to **Hessischer Rundfunk**, detectives seized a trove of fake paintings, together with forged provenance documents and receipts, in a coordinated raid across six German states in June 2014. Based on information obtained during two simultaneous raids in Switzerland and Israel, investigators believe that the artworks were painted in Russia and Israel.

(source: Der Spiegel)

KNOEDLER SECRETS REVEALED ONLINE

THE **GETTY Research Institute** offers free online access to almost 24,000 records from the disgraced **Knoedler Gallery** stock books. Books 1 to 6, dating from 1872 to 1920, can now be accessed; stock books 7 to 11 will be added soon. Knoedler's account books were acquired by the Getty in 2012, after the gallery, founded in 1848, closed following a massive art forgery scandal. Now scanned are records detailing Knoedler's clients, the provenance of artworks and an inventory dating from the 1850s to 1971, when the gallery was acquired by **Armand Hammer**. The archive offers a valuable view into collecting tastes, art pricing and opaque gallery practices. www.getty.edu/research/

JUST JOKIN' - AGAIN

AN INTERNET teaser that folk hero **Banksy** had been arrested and thus exposed swept across the media, all of whom rapidly updated their story once it was revealed as an obvious hoax. The false story, published on US website **National Report**, 'revealed' the identity of the British street artist as 'Liverpool-born Paul Homer' and that he had been arrested on charges of vandalism, conspiracy, racketeering and counterfeiting. A basic **Google** search showed that the quotes were originally published in 2013 on hoax website **PRLog**. It was interesting to note the speed and breadth of the i-outrage however.

ALCHEMY & ART

Perhaps the transformative possibilities of Belfast lie not with politicians – but with the young creative talents living in the city.

TEXT ANNA McNAY



Catalyst Arts, exterior, original neon logo by David Shrigley. Photo: Jordan Hutchings

HAVING RECENTLY beaten both London and the EU average with 75% of citizens voting that foreigners are good for their city, Belfast seems to welcome to tourists and foreign inhabitants alike. Since the £18m MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) opened in the Cathedral Quarter in 2012, *artniks* have certainly felt compelled to cross the channel and see what is going on in the Northern Irish capital. But artistic activity stretches much further than this slick multi-arts venue, designed by award-winning **Hackett Hall McKnight**, on Saint Anne's Square. In fact, the established community arts scene in the city sees itself as something separate from this new international interloper, described by many as a 'double-edged sword': bringing in the tourists but failing to promote what else is on offer. And there is indeed a lot more on offer. It seems that most things on the Belfast arts scene begin with **Catalyst**. Now in its 21st year, this artist-run organisation, born homeless and migrating variously over the years, numbers some 150 members, up to 10 of whom sit on the board for two years at a time. In 2003, Catalyst moved to an old Victorian red brick building on College Court, initially up on the second floor, moving down to ground level in 2010. Dating back to 1895, the building had started out life as a printing and publishing house before running as a textile business in later years. Currently it houses a handful of businesses and organisations, including a gym, an events venue, and an architect's and

artists' studios on the top floor.

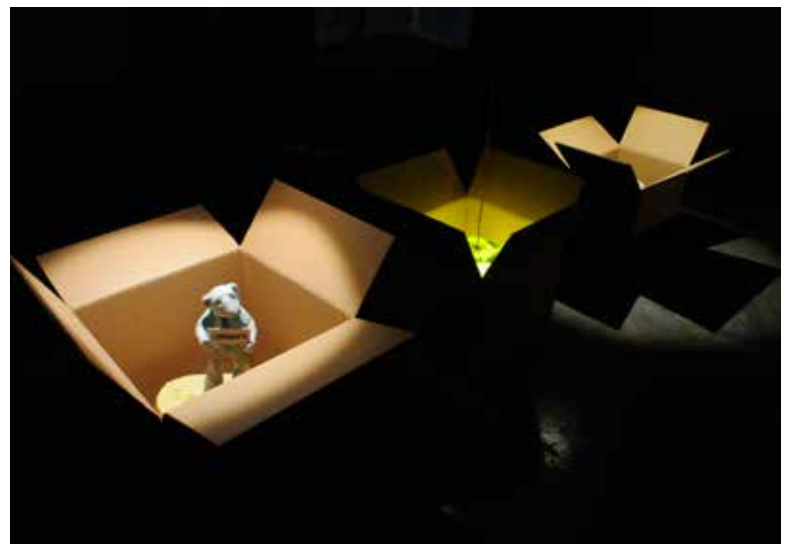
Turner Prize nominee **David Shrigley** held his first ever solo show at **Catalyst Arts** in 1996, for which he made some new sculptures and a book of drawings. He also designed the Catalyst neon logo as part of the show – it went on to become a gift to the gallery, now hanging proudly outside the entrance.

Key to the organisation's concept is the lack of hierarchy, although there is the voluntary role of (co-)director, which takes up to 20 hours per week, lasts for two years, and involves curating, project-managing, securing funding, etc. A huge learning curve, this is an apprenticeship nearly all of the successful artists and gallerists in Belfast and the surrounding area appear to have been through – including **Peter Richards** and **Deirdre McKenna**, who now both work at **Golden Thread Gallery**.

Begun by Richards' now wife, **Gail Prentice**, in a former linen mill on a fairly active interface along **Crumlin Road** – near the old gaol in North Belfast – GTG was conceived as an artists' project in 1998. In 2001, it became a limited company with charitable status. Richards, who is from Newport, Wales, originally came to Belfast to show his work there and ended up staying, marrying and taking over the gallery programming. **Sarah McAvera**, Gallery Manager, joined him in 2003 and McKenna, Engagement Officer, originally from Dublin, in 2007.



Tall Blonde Ladies *Ascendant Landing* 2013 © Hannah Levy/TBL



Alan Phelan *But What End* 2014 courtesy Golden Thread Gallery



Oscar Muñoz *Ambulatorio Belfast* 2012
 Courtesy of the artist, Golden Thread Gallery and Draw Down The Walls

ALSO WORTH A LOOK

householdbelfast.co.uk

A Belfast-based curatorial collective that encourages audiences to re-negotiate how they view and interact with art in urban and domestic spaces.

flaxartstudios.com

A unique resource with studio space for 19 artists. Committed to developing and strengthening the visual arts sector in Belfast for more than 23 years.

crescentarts.org

A diverse community arts centre which has served the population of Belfast, and beyond, with a wide range of arts and cultural activities for over 30 years.

sarc.qub.ac.uk

An established centre of excellence dedicated to the research of music technology and a unique interdisciplinary environment uniting internationally recognised experts in the areas of musical composition, digital signal processing, performance technologies, acoustics and sound art.

forumbelfast.org

A not-for-profit organisation that campaigns for a better and a more equitable built environment in Belfast.

thevacuum.org.uk

A free monthly paper published in Belfast. Each issue is themed and contains critical commentary about the city and broader cultural issues.



Jiann Hughes *Membrane* 2013 © Jason Higgins

'If you take things back to what they're about, it's people and connections. The local is the best way to connect to the international.'

Peter Richards, Golden Thread Gallery



Nicole Weniger *Seasonal Integration* 2012 © Nicole Weniger

Ruth Graham, Development Officer, also joined the team in 2005. They also have various interns, all of whom are paid. Today GTG is the leading contemporary visual arts gallery in Northern Ireland, recognised for its engagement with recent histories and re-imagined futures. It has delivered more than 130 exhibitions locally, nationally and internationally.

GTG moved to its current location on Great Patrick Street (between the Cathedral Quarter and the historic Sailor Town area of the city) in 2007, opening on Friday 13 April, because the linen mill, Flax, was being converted into apartments. Visitor numbers have increased by 800%. As Richards phrases it, the move was from 'the epicentre of civil unrest to the wrong side of the tracks' – an oblique reference to the main road separating them from the MAC as well as to the city's turbulent history.

Located on the tidal River Lagan, with three rivers cemented underground, built over by roads when the cargo ships got too wide, Belfast lies partly in Co. Antrim and partly in Co. Down. The population of the wider metropolitan area is 584,000 and of the city centre itself, 281,000. It takes about an hour to traverse on foot, yet accents are recognisable from different areas. At the height of 'The Troubles', which raged from 1959 until the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998, there would be a car bomb a week outside the Royal Courts of Justice on Oxford Street. And before being overtaken by a hotel in Baghdad, the **Europa Hotel** was the most bombed hotel in the world, with 33 out of 70 bombs planted there actually exploding. Across the city, there are 22 peace walls or lines, with more still being built today. To give some context, the **Berlin Wall** was 12ft high; the Belfast peace walls reach up to 42ft. Although the gates are now often open in the day, they are still closed at night,



Ursula Burke *Papa* 2014 courtesy Golden Thread Gallery

meaning if you live in one area and work in another, your commute, if 'after hours', can involve a lot of circumnavigation. The walls will not come down until the residents agree, but it seems that many who originally opposed them now want them to stay.

The two most famous streets are the loyalist **Shankill Road**, still draped with Union Jacks, and the republican **Falls Road**, home to murals telling the story not only of Northern Ireland, but also of international trouble zones with which its people identify, such as Palestine.

It is not until you experience the living legacy of The Troubles first hand that it becomes clear how much peace in Belfast is still balancing on a knife's edge. Taking a north Belfast taxi with Epsom-born artist **Charlotte Bosanquet**, co-founder of **PRIME Collective**, to visit **Templemore Avenue Public Baths** in Glenmore Street, east Belfast, for example, our driver wanted to stop and cover his company's name, to avoid any repercussions. The baths lie on an interface in a Protestant area but there is the Catholic area, the **Short Strand**, very close by behind a peace wall. To set the scene a little more, Bosanquet related the anecdote that, years ago, before the Good Friday Agreement, when the pool was used by schools in both communities, the children from the Short Strand school used to have to pass by a low wall to get there and were asked to duck and run along its base to get past the flashpoint and into the Protestant area

DRAW DOWN THE WALLS

Perhaps the most successful and moving project that the **Golden Thread Gallery** has commissioned to date was as part of their ongoing collaboration with the **North Belfast Interface Network** and the **Lower Shankill Community Association**, *Draw Down The Walls*, designed to imagine a city without barriers.

As part of the **Cultural Olympiad** in 2012, they commissioned the Colombian artist **Oscar Muñoz** to create a temporary artwork with a real and lasting legacy. After much community consultation, they managed to get gates cut in between two peace walls in a part of the city that had been closed for 20 years – the **Crumlin Road/Flax Street interface**. Entitled *Ambulatorio Belfast*, and adapted from an earlier work in Cali, Colombia, Muñoz sealed aerial maps of North Belfast under a layer of shatterproof glass, which cracked as people walked over it. The work transformed the 'no man's land' between the two peace walls. The installation opened on 9 July 2012 and ran right through July into August – the marching season, when businesses shut up shop and leave town. 'We wanted to shine a positive spotlight on this area that's always shown in the media as being very negative,' says Richards. 'Most of the year round, 360 days a year, there's so much good work taking place there.' The gates were closed again after the project finished but the process of their being opened has continued.

As part of the Cultural Olympiad in 2012 [Golden Thread Gallery] commissioned the Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz to create a temporary artwork with a real and lasting legacy.

whereupon they could continue, two by two, to the pool. Back to the current day, our taxi driver, albeit nervously, continued without stopping, and thankfully nothing happened and the baths were reached. Nevertheless, it was eye-opening to see the levels of fear that still exist.

In the late 1900s, Belfast Corporation built four sets of baths across the city, located on the compass point NSEW, as a civic cleaning up of the population. The eastern complex, Templemore, is the last one still in use. When it was built, there were first and second class baths (in which to wash) and first and second class pools (in which to swim). The first class pool is all that remains in use. The first class baths have long since been turned into a gym and the second class baths remain relatively untouched since being abandoned. The second class swimming pool has fallen into dereliction and was recently used by the BBC as the location for the final showdown between **Sherlock Holmes** and **Moriarty** at the end of season one of *Sherlock*.

PRIME Collective, which Bosanquet has run together with **Alissa Kleist** and **Tonya McMullan** since January 2011, currently uses the bathhouse behind the pools – formerly the caretaker's residence – to host exhibitions, workshops, screenings, talks, meetings and other events, as well as being the base for international artists' residencies – for the peanut rent of £20pw, provided they can light a fire! The collective also recently held a curated swim in the operating first class pool and PRIME helped Bosanquet, as an individual artist, to secure the venue for a performance, *The Meeting*, which she performed with boxers in the empty pool.

Another artist-led studio group and contemporary art gallery in Belfast is **Platform**, which manages 13 studios – and a further two in its communal area – a project space and a gallery upstairs. The organisation puts on a show a month in each space and hosts the first year MFA annual end of year show for the **Belfast School of Art**. Each of the artists has his or her own key and 24 hour access to the building. The nine board members are made up of studio members and other arts professionals – a set up modelled on Catalyst. There is no core funding, but they are lucky enough to get the building for free because it was standing derelict and the landlord would have had to pay rates anyhow. The future, however, is uncertain, and this seems to be the story across the board. 'There's a really strong DIY attitude here in Belfast,' says Platform co-director **Rachael Campbell-Palmer**, who herself creates



Templemore Swimming Pool. Photograph © C Bosanquet, 2014



Platform Arts Board Members 2014

L to R back: Fiona Ni Mhaolair, Barry Mulholland, Liam Crichton, Jason Higgins, Davy Mahon
L to R front: Georgia Yates, Deridre Morrissey, Dorothy Hunter
Missing: Rachael Campbell-Palmer, Faye Hobson, Conor McCaffery, Iolanda Rocha, Roisin Daly

concept-driven sculptures, installations and events. 'Let's just have a go and try. Everyone works together.'

Slightly different from all the rest is **Belfast Exposed**, Northern Ireland's only gallery specialising in contemporary photography. With an aim to support artists and promote the practice, the gallery shows both local and international work from emerging artists as well as some of the major names in photography today. The gallery was founded in 1983 by a group of local photographers who sought to challenge the media representation of the city and the conflict and their work continues, to this day, to reflect a socially-engaged ethos. The exhibition programme is supported by both **Arts Council Northern Ireland** and Belfast City Council and is accompanied by related talks, community events and discussions. Belfast Exposed also offers photography courses for the public and for schools.

Returning to GTG – perhaps the original 'catalyst' behind the thriving Belfast scene – a large part of their success lies in their willingness to provoke. 'I like provocation,' says Richards. 'I think, at this level, that's what we can do – be a provocation.' Like Belfast Exposed, much of their work focuses

on contested space, contested history and the effects of the media spotlight being shone on somewhere and then being shifted. Since young artists are fairly well catered for across town, Richards is keen to ensure that young curators are also given a chance. 'What we're trying to do,' he explains, 'is have a role in this region, as a kind of connector, so that artists and curators don't have to leave. We want to enjoy a vibrant arts community. We want to build connections so that artists see that it's possible to be an artist and stay here.' He's also got a strong interest in building up international connections, however, and in continuing the exchange programmes they have with galleries in the USA and Taiwan. 'We exist in a tiny little bubble on the western edge of Europe. With just that little bit of water between us, it's as easy to get to anywhere else as it is to reach Wales or Scotland.'

A lot of their artists are picked up from artist-led spaces across town, such as the small collective **PS²**, because Richards never feels like the work they show is finished and he wants to give them the time and space to continue their projects and see them through. Last summer, he went on at least 60 studio visits. GTG is principally funded by the Arts Council, core-funded by the City Council,



Tall Blonde Ladies *Dig Dip* 2013 © Hannah Levy/TBL



Midori Miramura *Art & Breakfast* 2014 courtesy Golden Thread Gallery



Tom Bevan *Untitled*

and supplemented with specific project funds, which may or may not be corporate. They do sell artists' works, but not for profit, and any commission earned goes straight back into running the gallery. As such, when they visit art fairs, their aim is 'to lose the artists to commercial galleries, rather than to sell their work.' This might seem the opposite of what a gallery going to an art fair ought to be doing but it gives them a great freedom. 'We are able to present mini exhibitions and not worry too much about sales,' Richards says. Currently, GTG is looking into the possibility of purchasing their own building and acquiring a permanent collection. 'If we could provide that context, we could be even more challenging in the experimental projects that we do.'

GTG organise around six exhibitions a year in their main galleries and open a new show in their project space every first Thursday

of the month at Late Night Art – a scheme much like London's First Thursdays. There used even to be a series of bus tours that took people around eight or so galleries for £5 a ticket with a glass of wine in each. This brought in a lot of new visitors, as people would even do it for their birthday night out. 'I think one of the biggest barriers to art here is the word art,' Richards concludes.

Asked if his being impartially foreign helps when presenting provocative work in a contentious location, Richards admits: 'Do you know, I think it didn't hurt. It's certainly been quite good having a remove, but I've been here so long, I don't know what the remove is any more.' GTG is unique in its mixing of a strong international presence, both in the team working at the gallery and in the locations in which they are co-hosting exhibitions, and its strong Northern Irish focus, with outreach activities rooted very

much in the local. Richards simply says: 'If you take things back to what they're about, it is people and connections. The local is the best way to connect to the international.'

Speaking about the MAC's effect on Arts Council money, McKenna says: 'The butter is certainly spread more thinly now.' But if the new venue continues to bring people in and Belfast is as welcoming as its citizens claim – and as indeed seemed to be borne out upon visiting – then hopefully its existence can only be a good thing for the rest of the artists in the city – as long as Arts Council Northern Ireland continue to remember that they actually exist.

LINKS:
themaclive.com
catalystarts.org.uk
belfastexposed.org
platformartsbelfast.com
primecollective.wordpress.com
pssquared.org

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

THE MAC

MAC International 2014

30 October 2014 – 18 January 2015

A new international art prize with a jury of respected international curators offering professional artists worldwide the opportunity to exhibit at the MAC with a substantial prize of £20,000 awarded to the winner, Mairéad McClean.

10 Exchange Street West, Belfast BT1 2NJ

CATALYST ARTS GALLERY

Noise Fest

4 December 2014 - 12 January 2015

Noise Fest explores the overlapping tensions inherent within music culture and contemporary art practice. Taking its name from the influential festival of no wave music performances at New York art space White Columns in 1981, the works simultaneously consider the direct parallels between music and art, while reflecting on their deliberate counterpoints.

5 College Court, Belfast BT1 6BS

BELFAST EXPOSED

An Ulaid – South Down

Society of Modern Art

A research project by Sabina Mac Mahon
16 January – 28 February 2015

This project – a partnership between Belfast Exposed and Queens Street Studios - is based on research into the lives and work of a group of artists living and working in South County Down in the late 1920s.

The Exchange Place, 23 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2FF

GOLDEN THREAD GALLERY

Repercussion

11 December 2014 - 7 March 2015

An exhibition of contemporary Taiwanese art, curated for the Golden Thread Gallery by Professor Chin-Ming Lee and bringing together individual approaches to the subjects of religion, language, privatisation, the market, and collaboration.

84-94 Grt Patrick Street, Belfast BT1 2LU

PLATFORM ARTS

PXIV: Platform Members Show

5 - 19 December 2014

The Danish artist duo Hesselholdt & Mejlvang suggest a party. Ribbons, flags and decorations fill the room with red, white and black as if it were a special national occasion. A roaring lion stands enthroned in the centre of the room and a stuffed common buzzard holds the majestic posture of a German eagle, its feathers painted for war. Otherwise, however, the stage is empty. What in many contexts would be perceived as pleasant or festive, here takes on a threatening twist that questions the way nationality identity is practised.

1 Queen Street, Belfast BT1 6EA



JONAS BURGERT'S rise to fame was somewhat meteoric. After spending 10 years grafting away in his studio with no one noticing his paintings, **Christoph Heinrich**, Director of Hamburg's Contemporary Art Gallery, finally did. Burgert, who was born in Berlin in 1969, was invited to participate in a group show, *Geschichtenerzähler*, alongside **Neo Rauch**. Even before the opening night, all six of his works had been sold. Suddenly he was Germany's newest shooting star.

Nearly 10 years have now passed since this exhibition and Burgert is still painting as prolifically as ever. His works are as striking and compelling as ever. And as large. In his recent show at Blain|Southern, London, the title work, *stück hirn blind* (2014) measured 350 x 800 cm. But Burgert doesn't work on this large-scale because he thinks bigger is better. On the contrary, he worries that bigger is harder both for the gallery to handle and for him to paint. Rather, it's out of sheer necessity. 'It's a question of proportion. From the beginning on, I made large-scale paintings, because I didn't want to shrink the theme I was interested in,' he explains. 'Even a painting like this is just a detail of the world that I want to paint.'

And what exactly is that world? What is it that is taking place on Burgert's complex, fluorescent, **Bosch**-like canvases? 'In general, I would say that it's just a big scene attempting to show an existential definition of humans.' Burgert is well versed in Existentialism. 'I am interested in why we are not convinced by ourselves and who we are and what we are. We are looking for a sense; we are looking for something that is bigger than what we are; we are looking for spiritual representation.'

As a small boy, Burgert was taken to see the head of **Nefertiti** in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin and he was struck by its timelessness. He realised he had no idea of what the Egyptians believed or what the artist had been thinking as he sculpted the head, but he still found himself transfixed. 'I understood over the years that it's possible to transform content into a form of art and then it remains. There's an opportunity to be timeless.' Even as a child, Burgert was interested in why it is that humans create thousands of gods: 'Why do we need it? Animals are instinctive workers. They are born and they know right away what to do. We have no idea what to do. We are lost, in a way. We need to create gods. We need this illusion. We want to trust in something. We want to trust because maybe this is the solution we are looking for. We are addicted to hope.'

'We all have an illusion about others and about society,' he continues. 'And this illusion isn't just an artificial thing somewhere. It's part of our reality. If you look at a painting and you have it in your mind, then it's part of your reality. But it's just colour on fabric, you know? In a way, it's a weakness to feel so insecure as a human, but I think it's a very intelligent idea of nature to do that. It's evolution. If we were convinced by everything, we'd do nothing anymore. We are lazy. I think we have to love this insecurity we have because it's part of our life.'

And it is precisely this insecurity, these illusions, and this struggle, which Burgert seeks to represent on his canvases: 'I try to paint the situation or the platform – the stage, in

STURM UND DRANG

EPIC TALES IN PAINT

TEXT ANNA McNAY PORTRAIT DAFYDD JONES



“ In the end, I think that to make art is to go through this procedure of being vulnerable and sensitive and strong. ”



a way – on which this struggle happens. This spiritual struggle of looking for a sense.’ His trademark use of fluorescent colours infuses his works with an abstract energy. They also affect an emotional response from viewers. ‘When you look at a painting, you look for the topic to understand the content, but I want to have something that is directed at your feelings. You look at the content and then you feel something in your stomach. Colours can do this. In the end, when you leave the room, you cannot remember all of the content, but if you

still have the feeling of the paintings, then I’m totally ok.’

In his play on illusion and reality, Burgert also often leaves patches of canvas bare – showing through to remind viewers of the artifice. His thick and multifarious layers realise an actual struggle right there on the canvas as he covers, reveals, destroys...

For Burgert, painting has to be both intimate and honest. But, at the same time,

it’s important to ensure that it’s still talking symbolically, with gestures. ‘If it’s too personal, you – the audience – are out of it. It was an important step for me when I started trying to focus on being honest about my feelings. The moment you are honest, you are vulnerable. It’s much easier to be the fool with the cool concept, hiding. But I was bored of this. When you are having a bad time, you are learning. These are rich times. It might sound cynical, but it’s true. The only question is how to be strong enough to stand it. In the end, I think

that to make art is to go through this procedure of being vulnerable and sensitive and strong. Painting is a means of communication and now I’ve been given the chance to communicate with people. This was always my biggest wish.’

LINKS

www.jonasburgert.de
www.blainsouthern.com

WATCH THE STATE.TV INTERVIEW WITH JONAS BURGERT AT HIS BLAIN SOUTHERN PRIVATE VIEW IN LONDON AT:
www.state-media.com/state/ >state.tv > jonas burgert



THE PATH LESS

The former Goldsmith's tutor and prominent Royal Academician, **BASIL BEATTIE**, is one of Britain's foremost abstract artists whose works stridently eschew the fads of fashion and contemporary mores to celebrate the power of paint and gesture...

TRAVELLED

TEXT SUE HUBBARD PORTRAIT DAYDD JONES

BASIL BEATTIE IS OFTEN referred to as 'a painter's painter', which marks the respect he's held in by his peers. He is an artist who has kept to his vision without compromise. A show at **Hales Gallery** – *Above and Below: Step Paintings 1990-2013* – followed hot on the heels of a successful exhibition at the **Jerwood Gallery** in Hastings.

That Beattie became an artist at all is, perhaps, surprising. Born in 1935, he grew up near Hartlepool. His father was a signalman on the railway and there was not much access to art. It was a strongly protestant upbringing. His grandfather was a lay preacher and the young Basil sang in the local church choir. At his secondary modern school, art was taught by the teacher who also oversaw English and gardening, and art books were few and far between. At home Beattie copied images from *Picture Post* and drew what he saw out of the window.

'I remember going shopping with my mother in West Hartlepool and across from the bus terminus was the art school. I decided that's where I wanted to go. There was lots to draw. The shipyards and steel works. There was a steep stairway down to the sea. People used to collect sea coal. I saw a man coming up carrying his bicycle and balancing a sack. I was taken by the struggle and drew him in red and green inks. I used to go to the Odeon on

Saturday morning but then started going to art classes. The art school was an oasis. I began to buy the *Modern Painters* series on **Paul Nash**, **Victor Pasmore** and **Graham Sutherland**. The plan was always to get to London. I wanted to go to the Royal College but wasn't accepted, so I went to the Royal Academy.'

Beyond the obvious physicality of Beattie's paintings, there is the question of the complex metaphors he creates. 'Well, I have been working this way for a long time. In the early 1960s, I saw an article in *Life Magazine* on **Rothko**. I realised he was trying to say the unsayable, to calibrate something inchoate. He wasn't using colour in a decorative way. And I sensed that there was something else going on in these works.'

Beattie's paintings are full of his signature pictograms or hieroglyphs that create their own semantics, though he's at pains to point out that he wouldn't want them to be read as literal symbols or signs. His architectural shapes – towers, doors, steps and ziggurats – his tunnels and passage ways teeter and go nowhere. Everything is precarious, everything tenuous and on the point of collapse. These almost archetypal images seem to come from deep within the unconscious. 'It gets harder with age,' he says, 'wrestling with what you think you have learnt. You still doubt. You have to circumnavigate what you've learnt in order to arrive at things obliquely. I wouldn't want anyone to think I was particularly interested in

architecture *per se*. I'm always trying to subvert the things I know.'

His images are both assertive and evasive. Full of uncertainty, there is a struggle for identity that seems almost anthropomorphic. A ziggurat begun as a grid turned, as he subtracted elements, into a shape with a broad base and something that might be read as a head. It was a coincidence that he was prepared to accept. Doubt and possible failure run like the bass-note through these works. There's something atavistic about them. Whilst he is very well versed in contemporary movements – he taught for many years at **Goldsmiths** – they feel as though they could be understood by 'primitive' peoples who would relate to their darkness and references to death. Even the earth on which his steps are based seems unstable. There's a strong sense of claustrophobia and entrapment; the grids, the shut doors beyond which there seems to be nothing, the tracks that lead into infinite tunnels are nightmarish. It's hard not to be reminded of Auschwitz with its railway lines leading to that infamous watch tower, and Beattie admits that, as young man, while doing national service in Germany, he visited Belsen and it had a profound effect. Mostly he remembers the silence. That no birds sang. Germany was his first trip abroad. It was there, too, that he encountered **Picasso**. Running up the museum steps in Cologne he came face to face with *Guernica*. His work has often been yoked to that of **Philip Guston**, and

the **Abstract Expressionists** are an obvious influence, but there's also an edgy existential quality suggestive of **Giacometti**. It's there in the nervy movement and the sense of doubt. Although he often works from drawings, a painting is largely 'found'.

'You struggle on with it, finding it, losing it. You also have to be prepared to obliterate it. Often you'll say to yourself, why didn't I do that before? But you couldn't. You had to get to that point. Often expunging something is as significant as adding something. But there isn't a formula. The spaces where the cotton is left bare are just as important as those covered with paint. When the paint is thick it fills the weave of the canvas like a skin. The absence of paint allows the painting to breathe.'

Does he paint on the floor? 'I did when I used thinner acrylics. Now I paint on the wall.' What tools does he use? 'Brushes, screwdrivers, squeegees, my hands. But I couldn't ever tell anyone else how to paint my paintings.' That, one might suggest, would be like telling someone how to live his life.

In his *Janus* series, where a shape that resembles a car mirror allows the viewer to look both forward into the future and backwards towards the past, the formal structure is paramount. These works are full of illusionistic space, as if life, itself, was an illusion and the only destination and certainty: death. They are among the most existential of his paintings.



Basil Beattie *Beyond the Rim II* 2013

He is emphatic that a painting only becomes a vivid experience through the process of being made. He is concerned to try and place physical things, such as a door, within a painting, to describe something that has a recognisable quality but that is not actually the thing itself.

‘What I’m trying to do is parallel certain experiences in life but there is no obvious known way of doing it.’

The result is a form of alchemy. An essential relationship between the viewer, the artist and the heart of the work. That place, he says, feels like another zone. ‘It is essential to remain directionless but alert to what is happening in order to discover what I am feeling.’

For a painter who never directly paints the figure, his work is redolent with human emotion. It is the sense of human absence that makes it so keenly and vividly felt. There is a sense that what he depicts are the traces left behind, clues to human activity. **Samuel Beckett’s** lines reverberate: ‘Where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.’

For many years, Beattie had a demanding and complex life as a tutor at Goldsmith’s, a single parent bringing up his young daughters, and as an artist. It was, he says, a struggle to find the time he needed in the studio and for a long time he felt like a Sunday painter. Now he is one of the most recognised painters of his generation. Recently there’s a new vibrancy to his work with the introduction of brighter colour and a move away from exclusively earthy tones. ‘Oh, the colours just happened,’ he says. ‘Lots of people don’t like them. They prefer the muted ones. But the colour is never

used decoratively. There is a symbolic force behind it.’

He is very keen to deny elements of autobiography in his work, yet looking at his paintings is like inhabiting someone’s mind. They seem to be maps of sorts, of how to find one’s way out of the existential crisis of living. Some of them are terribly sad, like the *Steps to Nowhere*. The staircase sags as if utterly defeated. It almost seems to be weeping. After having climbed all that way, the view from the top is, apparently, no clearer than from the bottom. They suggest a Sisyphean struggle to ascend and never an arrival at a destination. His endless corridors that lead nowhere conjure **Robert Frost’s** lines in *The Road Not Taken*: ‘I took the one less travelled and that made all the difference.’ Yet, for all their bleakness, his paintings seem tentatively to adopt the language of shelter, to be a search for some sort of structure, dwelling or resting place, however inadequate.

In an age when painting struggles to hold its own against other media such as installation and video, Basil Beattie continues to revivify the form – both technically and emotionally – with his personal pictorial dramas. The work touches on those most serious of subjects, the meaning of human existence and mortality. As **Jung** wrote: ‘Only paradox comes anywhere near to contemplating the fullness of life.’

Basil Beattie’s paintings are abundant with paradox, ambiguity, doubt and uncertainty and it is this that makes them deeply, movingly, human.

Sue Hubbard is an award-winning poet, novelist and freelance art critic.

LINKS

www.halesgallery.com
www.suehubbard.com
www.jerwoodgallery.org



Basil Beattie *The Difference Between* 2013

‘To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.’

Samuel Beckett



Basil Beattie *Step Up On* 2013



Basil Beattie *Top Up* 2013



Basil Beattie *Step Paintings* 1990-2013 Installation at Hales Gallery, London



Dafydd Jones *Basil Beattie in his studio* London 2014

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PEOPLE

DECEMBER 1998: **MARA-HELEN WOOD** enjoyed her Christmas dinner French style in the almost empty dining room of a Tokyo hotel. Far from missing the conventional pleasures of a western Christmas, she relished the calm and quiet of the occasion as well as the food. Not that she was unfamiliar with Japanese food. Through the hospitality of her hosts, she had grown to love it, an enthusiasm that persists to this day. As Director of the **Northumbria University Gallery**, she was in Tokyo to install an exhibition of Victorian paintings, the second she had mounted there. The only other passenger on the freight-carrying jet during her equally solitary return journey on that occasion had been a racehorse.

The metropolitan art world grandee who welcomed her when she took over London's **Kings Place Gallery** in 2008 was not aware of any of that when he offered her the kindly advice that the capital might prove 'difficult' after Newcastle. However, if he'd been even modestly informed about her achievements he would have known that she had organised exhibitions internationally from Athens to

over the years, and by dint of extraordinary resourcefulness and hard work, the space was splendidly converted.

Today, most visitors would assume that it had been purpose built given that it has an attractive new wing paid for by Wood's prodigious fund-raising efforts and help from the **Baring Foundation** and the **Monument Trust**. This support was offered voluntarily. What is commonly called 'networking' is something that Wood disdains. She does indeed have an extensive and extremely loyal network of colleagues, artists, gallery staff, cultural attachés, collectors and even ambassadors, but as one commentator put it: 'The moment that friendship is exploited for gain is the moment when friendship breaks down'. It is the fact of Wood having no hidden agenda – but instead being spontaneous, enthusiastic and meticulously professional – that so endears her to her many friends. That straightforward honesty characterises all aspects of her role. She sees her task as that of an intermediary ensuring that the artist's work is presented to maximum advantage, both with respect

...artists appreciate her lack of vanity and reticence: they sense immediately that what matters to her is their art and not her own image.

New York, from Dublin to Paris, Reykjavik and beyond, many of them focused upon the work of **Edvard Munch**, such as *Munch and the Workers*, *Munch and Photography*; a series culminating in her curatorship of the great **Frieze of Life** exhibition at the **National Gallery** in 1992. While conducting research on that exhibition Wood had collaborated with notable Munch scholars such as **Arne Eggum**, **Gerd Woll**, **Carla Lathe** and others. She particularly valued the informal information provided by **Jan Thurman-Moe**, chief restorer at the **Munch Museum**. He knew Munch's *children* (the paintings) intimately and his radical methods – the 'horse cure', for instance, wherein canvases would be 'distressed' in the wind and rain – as well as having been acquainted with Munch's surviving friends.

Wood's promotion of Norwegian art also included contemporaries such as **Frans** and **Nico Widerberg** (father and son), **Ørnulf Opdahl** and **Arne Ekeland**, a contribution so highly regarded that she was awarded the *Norwegian Order of Merit* in 1994. Temperamentally she is diffident about formal awards, valuing the respect and affection of the artists perhaps even more. In one sense, however, this international activity has been extra-curricular, the regular programme at the Northumbria University Gallery being demanding in itself. Indeed an important aspect of her background that the presumptuous interviewer hadn't noticed was how experienced she was. Having graduated from **Newcastle University** Fine Art Department, she began running the University Gallery in 1977 as an unpaid volunteer, the job becoming salaried a year later. Originally the gallery itself was an annexe of the library and contained a somewhat lurid orange carpet. Gradually,

to his or her intentions and to the public's engagement with it. The idea of being a 'co-creator' with the artist or the disseminator of post-modern values holds little interest for her. On the contrary, artists appreciate her lack of vanity and reticence: they sense immediately that what matters to her is their art and not her own image.

If one wanted an insight into Wood's aesthetic stance, however, **Matthew Arnold's** definition of culture as 'acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world', to which one might reasonably add 'painted', 'sculpted' or simply 'made', would suffice. An indication of this might be gained from the fact that the exhibition which most interested Wood in the last two years was that of the American **George Bellows** at the **Royal Academy**, a pleasure reinforced by her reading of **Joyce Carol Oates'** incisive commentary on his work. However, as last summer's **William Kentridge** show at the University Gallery demonstrated, she is not nervous about raw content. Slow burning it may have been, but Kentridge's urgent imagery utterly skewered apartheid.

By contrast, Wood revived the career of the pitman painter **Norman Cornish** (he'd spent 30 years working underground while resolutely continuing to paint) after he left Newcastle's **Stone Gallery** in 1980. Over the next 25 years, she rehabilitated his reputation by frequently visiting his studio and discovering work that was fresh, strong and from direct experience, generically different from the stereotype of cloth-capped drinkers by which he was known. An interesting by-product of this was the sense of ownership that people in the region acquired in relation to Cornish's pictorial world. 'He's one of



Above: Frans Widerberg *Mara* c.1985
Left: Jim McAdam *Mara-Helen Wood*

LIGHTS IN THE NORTH

One of the UK's most respected curators is equally celebrated in Norway as an ambassador for Nordic painting.

TEXT CHRISTOPHER COULSON

us', they thought; or 'Spennymoor [his hometown] was just like that...' Responses of that kind may be unsophisticated but they should not be undervalued; they indicate genuine engagement and there is perhaps a lesson here for institutions favouring 'outreach'. Cornish died in August 2014 but, by then, thanks largely to Wood's efforts, his work had arguably become a more authentic

symbol of the north east's resilience than **Antony Gormley's** *Angel of the North*.

Mara-Helen Wood's programme has a democratic strand, but it is dominated by a roster of distinguished, international artists. For example: **Mimmo Paladino, Ian McKeever, Zadok Ben-David, Sjoerd Buisman, Stephen Chambers, Alan Davie,**

Paula Rego. On average, that programme consists of 18 shows a year (12 in Newcastle and six in London) and most are initiated in-house. An average of three shows a year tour nationally. She has a good eye and exhibitions are hung with impeccable balance. The astonishing thing about these bald statistics is that it is all achieved by the director herself and two members of staff.

Clearly multi-tasking is the answer. What would be delegated to a team of specialists in, say, a municipal gallery – educational aspects such as a lecture programme, children's classes, and the practicalities of administration (transport, insurance, press releases, publishing and editing, not to mention organising competitions – the *Borchard Self-Portrait Competition*, for example) – are all handled by Wood and her two colleagues in Newcastle. This punishing self-imposed schedule is at its most exhausting when, having just hung a show at Kings Place, she has to travel back to Newcastle to hang another one there. Equally demanding is the disruption of her Newcastle routine by the necessity of flying to Norway. Wood is sanguine though about cosier, less stressful regimes elsewhere.

As a Scottish Italian (her mother comes from Rome) and another in that long line of exceptional dual-identity arts figures – such as **Richard Demarco** and **Armando Iannucci** – you might expect Wood to be feisty. She is, too, particularly in her unstoppable drive to pursue her goals. The determined way in which she has built a permanent collection at the university, one which ranges from **Walter Sickert** to **Lucian Freud**, from **Craigie Aitchison** to **Stephen**

Chambers and many others, has been little short of amazing. On the other hand, she is surprisingly without rancour about the anomalies of the art world, the seemingly entrenched imbalance in funding and sponsorship that London enjoys – or the way in which mainstream media coverage of the visual arts is dictated by showbiz values. One suspects, though, that Wood's unflappability owes more to a canny political sense of discretion, a reluctance to offer a target to anyone envious enough to threaten her independence. That sense of independence is all-important to her. She sees all the hard work as the price, cherishing the freedom to prosecute no other agenda than her own.

When interviewed for this profile, she commented with a certain irony: 'You're not going to write my obituary, are you?' Well, of course not. She still has so many things to do. The **Frans Widerberg** exhibition, which ends at Kings Place on 19 December and which is accompanied by *The Art of Re-Enchantment*, the book that she edited dealing with his world of virtual reality, transfers to Newcastle in February 2015. Then, next spring, there's going to be a marvellous **Peter Lanyon** exhibition, followed by another (as yet unspecified) grand Norwegian project. For someone of Wood's ferocious commitment the show goes on and on... and on.

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LINKS
www.kingsplace.co.uk
www.northumbria.ac.uk

DARK NIGHTS BRIGHT LIGHTS



New winter annual shines – complete with major sponsor and dynamic arts director

TEXT ANNA MCNAY PORTRAIT ED SYKES

ALTERNATIVE NOVEMBER saw a myriad of activities with **Fringe! Film and Art Festival**, **GFest Gaywise Festival**, the launch of **LGBT History Month 2015** – and the return of the relative newbie on the queer arts scene: **Winter Pride**. With less than a year since the first edition of this one night extravaganza, organisers **Rebecca Paisis** (of **L-Wired**) and **Simon Tarrant** were raring to go, with plans to be bigger, better and altogether more extravagant. The party took place at a huge warehouse out at **Tobacco Dock** in East London and the visual arts exhibition (showcasing the work of the finalists in the **Winter Pride UK Art & Performance Awards** competition) showed at Notting Hill's newest gallery, **Lacey Contemporary**.

L-Wired is the UK's largest lesbian events company and the brand behind numerous renowned club nights. Director and Co-Founder Paisis has been working in the industry for more than 12 years, pulling together large-scale parties and festivals for more than eight years and building relationships with leading spirit brands and production companies, willing to sponsor events. Despite being an old friend of Tarrant's, they had not worked together before. Paisis wanted to give Winter Pride a more cultural feel, making it stand out from all the rest, so that it wasn't just a big party. Tarrant suggested introducing an art competition and **Smirnoff**, already on board to support the event, loved the idea.

'I'm very grateful to Rebecca for having the foresight to create something like this,' Tarrant says. 'When I think about the gay scene in the 1970s and early '80s, it was

pretty different from today. There were very limited events to go to, very limited places to go to, it was very hidden – all quite underground. A hangover from a different era. And then in the '80s it kind of exploded. It exploded in a brilliant way, but it was all about partying – which, of course, we all love – but what I like about what Rebecca is doing with her events is, yes, there's a party, there's always a great party, but there's a bit more to it.'

The team behind Winter Pride is small, but they all bear a share of the organising and logistics. Tarrant's expertise is in marketing and PR, as well as being an artist himself. Although he always loved painting at school, it was never a career option back then. He did it at O-Level but never even thought about continuing to A-Level – it just wasn't the done thing. 'I don't regret it,' Tarrant says, 'but I think that these days children should be encouraged to pursue artistic careers.' Instead he went off to work in the diamond industry – for **De Beers**. With them he travelled all over the globe, working as a diamond valuer in Africa and then in the marketing department. However, he became increasingly frustrated creatively and, around the age of 30, 'the latent artistic beast came out' and he gave up his career – the money, travel and security – to become an artist.

'I must have been confident,' says Tarrant, looking back. 'I travelled for two years all over the world and instead of a camera I took paint brushes and a sketchbook and produced what I thought was a master collection of art. Actually, they were quite naïve daubs.' He taught himself to paint through trial and error, reading and studying. It was important to him to prove to other people that he could do it. And do it he could: he managed to get



XXXora. Portrait by Izaskun Gonzalez. 2014

exhibited twice in the **Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition**. Nevertheless, he didn't feel driven to sell, wanting more just to express himself through his art and he soon realised that he needed to make money. Having worked in marketing, this seemed the logical solution, and so he turned to arts PR, both to promote his own work and other people's: 'It's been a real joy,' he says, 'to promote something I'm passionate about and to give artists a break and chance to show their work.'

For a while, Tarrant ran a pop-up gallery in Chelsea and then one in Cork Street. In Chelsea, he was given an entire six floor building for a year – a pop-up community arts space at the end of **Old Church Street** on **Fulham Road**. His philanthropic nature began to emerge, as he gave the space over to some homeless artists for a show. He then went on to chair the **Save Cork Street**



Jane Moore, 15/04/14: Erika, 2014 © Sketch A Day Project www.sketchadayproject.com



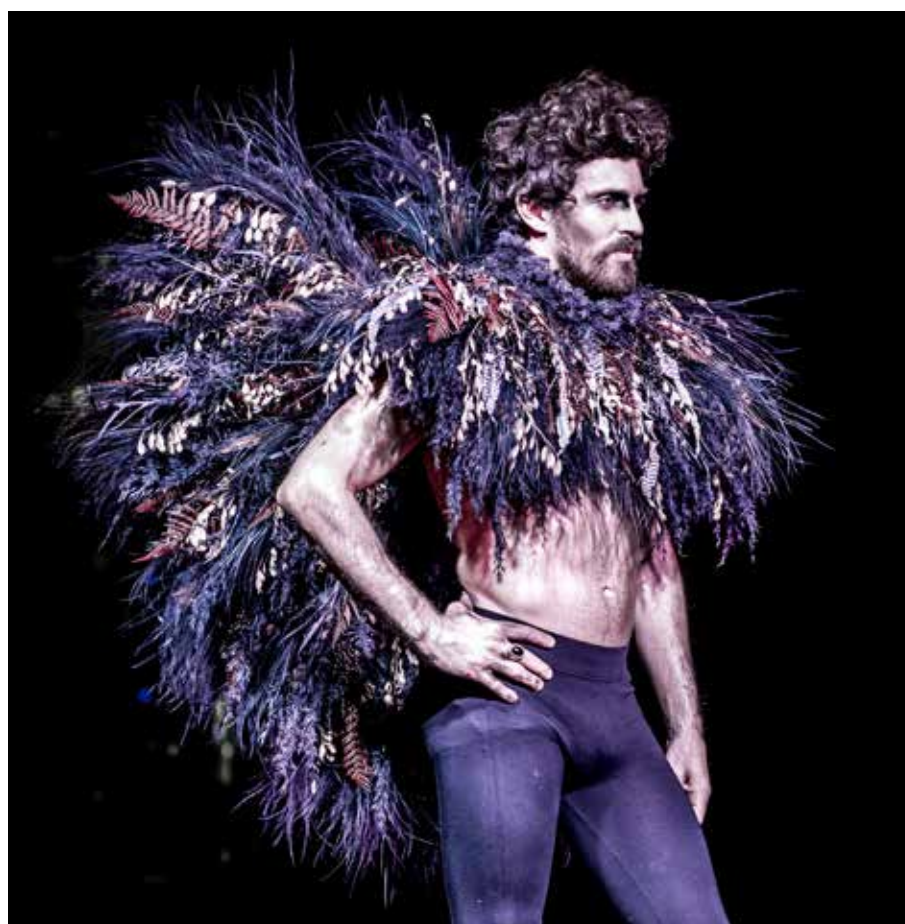
A Man to Pet performing at Winter Pride #2. Photo: Ren Brocklehurst



Winter Pride club dancer at Winter Pride #1 Photo: Tania Olive



Frances Segelman. Portrait by Sam Pelly. 2014



Mikael Bres modelling Cyril Tronchet's floral couture at Winter Pride #2. Photo: Ren Brocklehurst

Campaign, fighting the rising rents in London's Mayfair.

Philanthropy is at the core of Winter Pride as well, since each event is also a charity fundraiser. Winter Pride #1 gave money to **Stonewall** and the **Terence Higgins Trust**, two pillars of the gay community; Winter Pride #2 supported the equally essential **Albert Kennedy Trust**. Tarrant is keen, in the future, to support some smaller charities, less well-known, but who are doing equally great work.

'What we loved about the first event,' Tarrant says, 'was how creative it was. We want to turn the awards ceremony into a real spectacle, so that people come away with a smile on their face.' In addition to a new *Alternative Art Award* – encompassing

everything from graffiti to food art – this event also launched a *Performance Award* and, accordingly, the awards ceremony enjoyed more live performance pieces comprising numerous short *vignettes*. For the theme of #ARTIS..., Tarrant admits he took his inspiration from Smirnoff, looking to be 'playful, provocative, thought-provoking, refreshing and original. They are, after all, masters of advertising!'

'I'd like to think that Winter Pride inspires people to create something new and gives them the opportunity to showcase it,' says Tarrant. Furthermore, you do not have to be gay – LGBTQI or any other letter – to be involved. 'The first year, there was a general misunderstanding that you had to be gay to enter the competition. I want to correct that. Why should it just be gay artists? It's in

the context of a gay event but I don't think art should be limited like that. I don't know if I, as an artist, would want to be defined as just a gay artist. The whole ethos of the gay community is to be open and out there and I think it's important for this to be open to everyone, in a way that society isn't necessarily always open to us.

'I like to think we live in a modern society – and we do – and it is progressive in lots of ways, but I think sometimes sadly there is... not a segregation exactly... but people don't want to be associated with gay events. I'd like to think we might be changing that a little bit and that if you come to an event like this you'll realise that it's all inclusive. Obviously the event itself is aimed at the gay community, but we're delighted to see other people there as well.'

Smirnoff Winter Pride Art Awards 2014

Irish broadcasting personality **Brendan Courtney** hosted the awards ceremony with introductory speeches by Winter Pride founder **Rebecca Pasis** and BBC Art Correspondent **Brenda Emmanus**.

Winner Overall Visual Art Award
Emma Elliott
L'Origine du Monde

Winner Overall Performance Art Award
Kimatica
SIMULACRUM A contemporary Ritual

Performance Art Award Winner
Hattie Lauren Grover and
Danny-Joe Harrison
Where the Heart is

Performance Award Winner
Nevedya

Fashion & Make-up Award Winner
Sevanta Image

Alternative Art Award Winners
Babylon Plants & Floral Circus
'I believe in Angels' wings

Humanitarian Award
Panti

Winter Pride UK. 15 November 2014 at Tobacco Dock.

*The Winter Pride UK Awards were presented by personalities from the arts and music world including: **Frances Segelman** – sculptor; **Catrin Finch** – 'Queen of Harps'; **Sue Tilley** – Lucian Freud muse and model; **XXXora** – hermaphrodite celebrity artist.*

Winter Pride UK Art Prize Finalists Exhibition ran at Lacey Contemporary Gallery, 18-30 November 2014

LINKS:
winterprideuk.com
laceycontemporarygallery.co.uk
fringeifest.com
gaywisefestival.org.uk

Sidsel Christensen
Andrew Leventis
Lisa Slominski
We Never Dream Alone

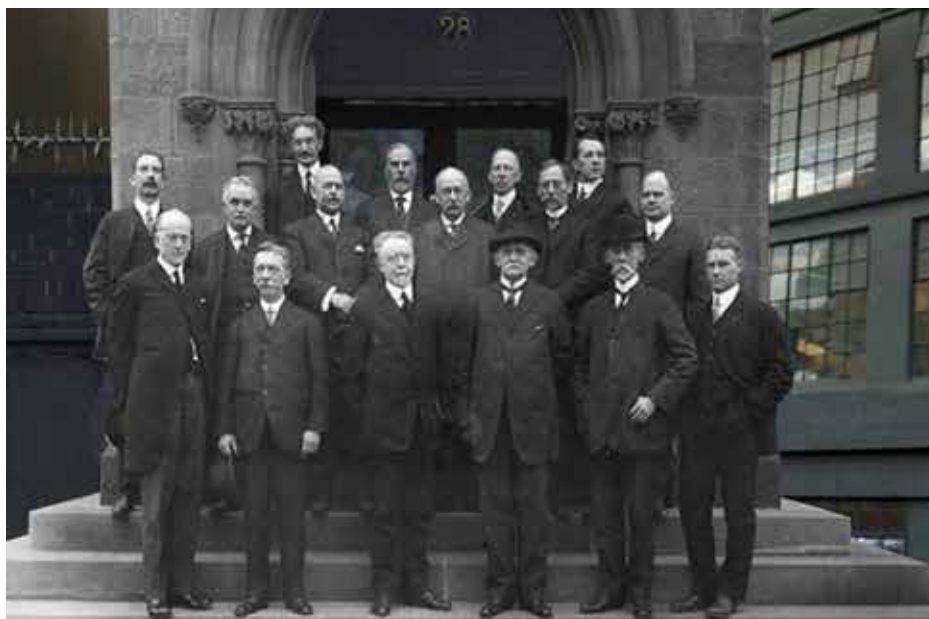
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ART & MONEY



DEALER DISCOUNT



HELLY NAHMAD, 36, has been released from federal prison five months into the 366 day sentence for an illegal gambling business run from his Trump Tower home. Part of the billionaire Nahmad family of Monaco, he transferred to a halfway house in the Bronx from the Federal Correctional Facility in Otisville, NY. At **Art Basel Miami Beach** last December, his father, **David Nahmad**, managed the Helly Nahmad Gallery booth filled with **Picasso**, **Dubuffet** and a huge \$35 million **Alexander Calder** mobile. HN's attorney said he is regularly being allowed to leave the Residential Re-entry Management facility in the Bronx for work. In November 2013, Nahmad pleaded guilty to one count of running an illegal high-stakes poker game. Other charges of racketeering, money laundering and fraud were dropped. He is the cousin of **Helly Nahmad**, a London based dealer with the same name. (source: *New York Observer*)

YIN & YANG

WHEN DID **Christie's** come to dominate the contemporary art sales over rival **Sothebys**? **Karolina Prawdzik** (*Art Market Monitor*) charted New York's evening sales to demonstrate that November 2012 was

the last time the two auction houses were even. The analysis also indicated Sotheby's have maintained their sales totals and kept the average price at around \$6m – thus Sotheby's has not effectively declined contrary to what **Daniel Loeb** (a trustee of MoCA LA) has suggested. Yet the main 2014 evening sale of contemporary art at Christie's brought in \$852.9 million, while the Sotheby's equivalent made less than half of that: \$343.6 million worth of artwork by **Andy Warhol**, **Mark Rothko** and **Jasper Johns**. Subsequently, **Georgia O'Keeffe's Jimson Weed/White Flower No.1** (1932) made \$44.4 million at Sotheby's American Art Sale, the most expensive art work by a woman artist ever sold at auction and seven times O'Keeffe's previous highest price of \$6.2 million. The **Georgia O'Keeffe Museum** in Santa Fe sold the work to boost acquisition funds.



Sotheby's CEO, **William F. Ruprecht**, stepped down a little more than a year after the billionaire hedge fund manager, Loeb, derided the company as 'an old master painting in desperate need of restoration'. Shares in Sotheby's (the oldest listed company on the New York Stock Exchange) jumped more than 7% at the news. When Ruprecht became chief executive in 2000, an antitrust investigation had resulted in jail time for **A. Alfred Taubman**, its largest shareholder, and house arrest for **Diana D. Brooks**.

(source: *New York Times*)

i-SPY i-SALES

LAST JULY **Sotheby's** announced a partnership with **eBay**, giving its 150 million online customers instant access to everything from rare wines to vintage watches and 19th-century watercolours. A previous 2002 collaboration fizzled out after only a year but officials say the market has matured. Sotheby's research shows more than 50% of all lots sold at auction in 2013 were in the \$5,000 to \$100,000 range, the middle market it hopes eBay will open up: 'Even if we only reach 0.1% of eBay users, that's huge for us,' said a source. They spy green shoots. **Christie's** sold a **Richard Serra** drawing in an online-only auction for \$905,000 last May with eight serious bidders competing. In April, Sotheby's sold a **The Birds of America Audubon** folio for \$3.5 million, a record for an online purchase in a live auction. Arrangements between Sotheby's and eBay remain confidential. Sotheby's will pay eBay a commission on each sale. Though eBay also owns **PayPal**, **Bruno Vinciguerra** of Sotheby's



Bruno Vinciguerra of Sotheby's

said buyers 'pay Sotheby's directly for their purchases. For some 25-year-old who is used to shopping online, it's a perfect way to break into the art world.' (source: *New York Times*)

MEANWHILE: 'Digital engagement and new buyers coming to the market have continued to drive growth; new clients represented 24% of all buyers and 15% of the sales total in the first half of 2014,' Christie's announced.

COMMUTER BELTED

ITALIAN COLLECTOR, **Francesco Plateroti**, left a 13th-century rarity by Chinese painter **Wang Zhenpeng** (Yuan dynasty, 1280-1329) on a Paris to Geneva TGV (*Train à Grande Vitesse*). Entitled *The Banquet of Immortals on the Terrace of Jade*, he got off the train at Bellegarde-sur-Valserine, close to the Swiss border, leaving the £800,000 work in the carriage. It was not found at the next stop in Geneva. **Plateroti** claims it is unsaleable without the cultural certificate of authenticity he still holds. (source: *AP*)

CHINESE PUZZLE

THE CREATOR of the forged art that ruined the historic **Knoedler** Galleries, **Pei-Shen Qian**, has been tracked down in Shanghai. Under federal indictment in New York on charges of fraud, Qian disappeared from his workplace in Queens as the scandal broke.



Glafira Rosales (above left) and Ann Freedman

He created some 63 look-alike versions of the abstract work of **Rothko**, **Pollock** and others and allegedly lied to FBI agents about his role in flooding the NY market with over \$80 million in forgeries through a disputed collusion with Knoedler director, **Ann Freedman**.

Glafira Rosales with boyfriend and alleged partner, **José Carlos Bergantiños Diaz**, began the fraud scheme in the early 1990s. US Attorney **Preet Bharara** said they 'tricked victims into paying for worthless paintings, fabricated in the names of world-famous artists.' Rosales pleaded guilty to fraud, tax and money laundering charges in 2013 and is reportedly cooperating with authorities. Diaz was arrested in Spain last year and the US has asked for his extradition. Qian remains beyond the reach of American law because there is no extradition treaty with China. (source: *ABC News*)

HORSES AND WATER

THE DEPARTMENT for **Media, Culture & Sport's** survey, *Taking Part*, began in 2005 under New Labour and has directed more than £15 billion of grant-in-aid and **National Lottery** funds towards the cultural sector. Audience numbers and their social make-up remain scarcely altered. Ten years of 'investment' in the arts and heritage has had *zero effect*. The number of adults who have 'engaged' with the arts *just once a year* has increased by 0.7% between 2005/6 and the first quarter of 2014/15 (to 77%). The number of adults engaging with the arts *three or more times in a year* has fallen by 0.5% (62.5%). Single museum and gallery visits have increased, from 48.2% in 2005/6 to 51.8%, and visits to heritage sites from 69.9% to 72.4%. Public library visits have fallen by 11.8% to 34.9% and visits to archives have halved to 2.9%. (source: *Robert Hewison Cultural Capital*)

COVER Tracey Emin *I've Got It All* 2000

Resplendent in a dress by Vivienne Westwood, Emin's ironic comment on success, art and money, has proven to be highly perceptive. 'Prices can be manipulated. It is commerce, trade, it's not new. Some people trade art, some people believe in art,' she says.



BLONDE AMBITION

THE ONLINE source **ArtNet** analysed data on the past 14 years of **Andy Warhol** auction sales. Despite rumours of overexposure, Warhol continues to remain highly coveted among super-wealthy collectors. Over the past decade, Warhols have generated more than \$3 billion at auction – including \$560 million in 2014, representing almost 5% of the value of the entire global art market. *Triple Elvis*, a 1963 silkscreen, led the **Christie's** record-breaking modern art sale in New York at \$73 million; along with *Four Marlons* (1966) which fetched \$62 million. Warhol's auction turnover and average auction prices have increased by more than 600% since 2004 – result: the cost of insuring the works has skyrocketed.

(source: ArtNet)

MEANWHILE: **Amy Koler** and **Stephen Meyer** moved from Arizona to St. Petersburg, Florida, in 2009, and decided to leave Warhol's *Red Shoes*, purchased from **American Fine Art Editions** in 2005 for \$65,000, at the gallery for storage. The canvas 'from a collection of works featuring women's shoes sprinkled with diamond dust [...] bore Mr. Warhol's signature on the back and a stamp verifying authenticity from the Andy Warhol Foundation.' On a trip back to Scottsdale, Koler and Meyer discovered that the gallery had illicitly sold the work. Manager **Phillip Koss** would not show Koler any documents from the sale and has refused to disclose the price. A law suit now seeks the return of *Red Shoes*, as well as damages for conversion, breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty, negligence, fraud, and unjust enrichment. (source: ArtNet / New York Times)

PRIZE WINNERS of 2014

Rick Lowe
\$625,000 MacArthur Fellowship
Lawrence Weiner
CHF 150,000 Roswitha Haftmann Prize
Paul Chan
\$100,000 Hugo Boss Prize
Duncan Campbell
£25,000 Turner Prize
Yto Barrada
\$100,000 Abraaj Group Art Prize
Carlos Motta (joint) **Nástio Mosquito**
\$100,000 Future Generation Art Prize
Anri Sala
€50,000 Vincent Award
Julien Prévieux
€35,000 Prix Marcel Duchamp
Daniel Gordon
€20,000 Paul Huf Award

(source: ARTSY)



NOTHING FOR NOTHING

FOR NEARLY 30 years, art forger **Mark Landis** duped dozens of museums into accepting fakes into their collections but never asked for money. Now he's the subject of a documentary called *Art & Craft*. Landis is thin, pale and bald and looks a little like **Truman Capote**. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was 17. When contacting museums, he would often use aliases and dress like a Jesuit priest and with his odd demeanour and near encyclopaedic knowledge of art history, Landis could easily pass as an eccentric art collector. He studies a print of an original work and, with meticulous attention to detail, copies exactly what he sees: religious icons, impressionist or modern works. More than 45 museums could not tell the difference between Landis' copies and original works. As one museum director explains, Landis would imply he had more paintings he might donate 'and possible endowments from the family's estate'. The museum director admits: 'He knew right where to hit us. Our soft spot: art and money.' Since Landis was donating his copies to museums, he wasn't doing anything illegal. But, after nearly 30 years, he finally got caught. **Matt Leininger** was the registrar at the **Oklahoma City Museum** in 2007 when Landis offered to donate works of art there. Leininger found out that other museums had some of the same works. One Landis version of an **Alfred Jacob Miller** painting made it into 'six or seven museums'. Leininger admits that he became obsessed with stopping the faker. In the documentary, when the two finally meet, Landis asks Leininger: 'Did I get the colours right?' The real Landis is living on disability. Among famous art forgers, he's in a class by himself, says **Colette Loll**, a leading art fraud investigator.

STEVE BOUNCES BACK



TOP PRIME broker **Goldman Sachs** is making a personal loan to **Stephen Cohen** backed by his \$1 billion art collection. Cohen had been seeking an art loan having paid off and terminated his personal credit line from **Deutsche Bank AG**. Private-banking clients prize art loans because they can keep the paintings in their homes while borrowing at rates as low as 2.5%. Cohen, who has a fortune of about \$11 billion (cf *Bloomberg Billionaires Index*), is known as a major collector

with art by **Van Gogh** and **Picasso** to **Warhol**, **Pollock** and **Jasper Johns**. At the height of his recent trading troubles, Cohen sold artwork totalling at least \$77 million through **Sotheby's** – including **Gerhard Richter's** *A.B. Courbet* (1986) at \$26.5 million; followed by **Warhol's** *Liz #1: Early Colored Liz* (1963) for \$20.3 million. His collection includes art valued at about \$1 billion. Famous for paying \$8 million for **Hirst's** shark preserved in formaldehyde, in 2012 he spent some \$120 million on four bronzes by **Matisse** (cf *New York Times*). Cohen's **SAC Capital Advisors** managed as much as \$16.5 billion, thanks in part to average annual returns of 30% that the firm produced since he founded it in 1992. Goldman Sachs was a prime broker to roughly 25 SAC funds and affiliates. SAC paid banks \$1 billion in annual commissions and other fees in recent years (cf *Wall Street Journal*). In 2007, Goldman Sachs bought a majority stake in a \$24 million loan that **Art Capital** made to celebrity photographer **Annie Leibovitz**, backed by her entire photo archive, as well as other artwork and real estate.

(source: Bloomberg)



TULIP MANIA AGAIN?

THE GLOBAL art auction market rose in value by 17% to a record \$7 billion in the first half of 2014, according to **ArtPrice**, a French company which tracks auction results worldwide. During the first six months of 2014, art works sold at public auction brought a total \$7.15 billion, above the \$6.11 billion spent in 2013. **Thierry Ehrmann**, ArtPrice president and founder, declared: 'We have gone from 500,000 collectors in the post-war period to nearly 70 million *art consumers* worldwide.'

(source: ArtPrice)

MONEY NO OBJECT

MASTERS OF The Universe (boss hedge-fund managers) continue to destabilise the art market with their mine-is-bigger-than-yours antics. Those bottomless pockets have skewed the whole value structure of art, to the detriment of galleries, museums and other serious collectors. The art business is no match for Wall Street style aggression and market manipulation. The average holding period for contemporary art is now down to two years, and, taken as a group, hedge-fund collectors certainly influence the prices and popularity of the world's top artists. Price spikes can often be stoked by a handful of big bidders competing for an artist's early examples at auction. Blue-chip dealer **Jose Mugarabi**, known for buying **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, said a hedge-fund manager recently asked him to track down a mural that Basquiat painted inside a New York nightclub called the Palladium. 'The guy said, "I'm willing to pay \$100 million, \$200 million for it" – he wants the art he loved and remembered seeing when he was young, and he can afford to pay anything to get it.' (source: Wall Street Journal)

TOP TEN EARNERS 2014

Picasso	\$345.8 million
Andy Warhol	\$299.2 million
Francis Bacon	\$236.5 million
Monet	\$177.6 million
Qi Baishi	\$168.9 million
Gerhard Richter	\$159.2 million
Mark Rothko	\$146.4 million
J-Michel Basquiat	\$131.9 million
Alberto Giacometti	\$115.7 million
Zhang Daqian	\$115.5 million

(source: ArtNet)

FEW, IF ANY, investors in art have bettered *The Skin of the Bear*. More properly termed *La Peau de l'Ours*, this early investment fund was the brainchild of Parisian financier **André Level**. He set up his investment vehicle under that odd title, persuading a dozen other art lovers to contribute 250 francs each year to buy contemporary paintings. The investors would hang the works in their homes during the 10 years before the fund cashed in by selling off the collection at auction.

Level kicked off *The Bear* in 1904. By the time the ten years were up, the prices of work by **Picasso** and the other selected artists had soared nearly out of Level's reach. The sale catalogues produced in 1914 are now themselves worth more than *The Bear's* original investment in works by **Picasso** or **Braque**. The great sale narrowly went ahead before the First World War broke out, and huge profits were pocketed – so large that the investors were more than happy to donate a fifth of their loot to be shared between the artists.

In fact, *The Bear* backers had quadrupled their money over the decade. The stars of the show were **Picasso** and **Matisse**, with the former breaking all records for the moderns by selling his great *Saltimbanques* for 12,650 francs: it had cost Level a mere thousand in 1908. Could a latter-day Level achieve the same results today? The answer is certainly yes, but there are critical differences between *The Bear* and the approach of today's would-be large-scale imitators.

First, the bullish Bears were all art-lovers, happy to enjoy the works on their walls until the sell-off. Second, the investment was small by their standards, and they were happy to entrust their money to a friend who had demonstrated that he had both an artistic eye and a financial brain. Third, Level's chosen sector of the contemporary market was focused and carefully selected – like all great collectors (a rule that still applies today) he concentrated his efforts.

Most important, however, is the final factor. Level sought 'value'. This is the key concept for some of the world's greatest financial investors, led by the immortal **Warren Buffett**. He looks for a small number of large investments which he believes have good management, a good profit record and a great customer franchise, and which are priced attractively on the market. He aims never to sell these beauties, what's more, thus avoiding the erosion of profits by taxes and commissions.

'Value' in stocks and shares seems more objective than in art, though subjectivity does affect both. In hindsight, buying Picasso and Matisse, as Level did, seems a cast-iron deal – and their stature was plain to see for many others at the time. Whether many (or any)



Warren Buffett visionary investor

THE BEAR NECESSITIES

Art investments are nothing new.

When **Robert Heller*** first wrote about the most famous art fund of the 20th century, created in 1904, it surprised even those with an expert knowledge of modern art



Artists and cafe society: at *The Dome* c.1910

André Level's friend and associate, Wilhelm Uhde, is seated first left, Jules Pascin is seen drawing on the extreme right.

Courtesy Harry N. Abrams Inc. NY

of today's contemporary heroes will match these peaks is an interesting question: but in any event, the technique, the art equivalent of Buffett's mastery, is to buy great works at little prices. It wasn't that Picasso's *Saltimbanques* fetched a high selling price that was decisive, but the low buying price – the young Spaniard was a new kid on the block. But here's a difficulty for the would-be art investor of today. The new art funds have been talking big money. Unless they pay big prices, they will have great difficulty in fully investing their funds. Instead of discovering new, important talent, the investors will have to seek established names who are already highly valued (or over-valued).

Where contemporary prices have already soared high, the risk is probably at its greatest. You may even now be purchasing the next Picasso, an innovative master who will change the direction of art forever: but, speaking with the greatest respect, I find this proposition unlikely. Talk of \$32,000,000 for an important early **Rauschenberg**, or the achievement of

\$40,000,000 for artwork by his sidekick, **Jasper Johns**, does not to my mind represent a sure thing.

Such risks are intensified if the auction market is involved. You are always gambling on the right buyers competing at the right level on the right day. The odds will move against sellers the more that art funds participate, since supply will obviously increase, and demand may well not match the selling wave. That's where the final factor in *The Bear's* success comes in – the predetermined exit.

Level's investors knew that after 10 years, the entire collection would be marketed at a special auction. The prestige of the vendors plus the excellence of the increasingly fashionable artists would attract the cream of contemporary collectors, and the excitement of the event would do the rest. It may be that 'private' auctions by today's new art funds will also work – but *The Bear's* sale method was a once-in-a-lifetime event, which was never put to a further test.

The principle was similar in some respects to a highly contemporary financial investment – private equity. Here money is raised, primarily from institutions which, like *The Bear* boys, are prepared to wait 10 years for the pay-off. The investor trusts the fund manager to find suitable investments (often by taking public firms private) and ultimately a suitable exit (often by taking the private investment public again).

The art market has long known skilled investors of much the same variety – experts whose judgment of value is enhanced by long experience, who have access to large lenders, and who are also adept at making profitable exits. For some reason, these highly successful practitioners are ignored by those discussing art investment, even though the latter is plainly their game.

They are the dealers, some of whom have made fortunes which even financiers must envy. The profits of the late **Ernst Beyeler**, for example, are legendary. He once remarked that he made his living from the work he



Pablo Picasso with his wife Olga in 1919.

Right
Andre Level *Memories of a Collector*. 1959
 Showing frontispiece with an original lithograph by Picasso (also containing reproduction of an autograph page by Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob)
 Limited edition of 2200 copies.



Pablo Picasso
Family of Saltimbanques, 1905
 oil on canvas, 212.8 x 229.6 cm (83 3/4 x 90 1/2 ins)

Purchased 1909 from the artist by André Level, Paris, for the collection of *La Peau de l'Ours*. Sold in the Bear sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 1914, no.63 (as *Les Bateleurs*) purchased by Modernen Galerie Heinrich Thannhauser, Munich. Sold by June 1915 to Hertha Koenig [1884-1976], Munich. Valentine Gallery, New York. Sold 10 February 1931 to Chester Dale [1883-1962]. Bequest 1963 to NGA Washington
 Courtesy National Gallery, Washington

sold and his fortune from what he retained. The core of the sales and collection alike was and is the same as Level's – the great modern masters.

To my knowledge, no art gallery has established an investment fund around its activities. Indeed, very few of these businesses have ever sold any shares to the public. No doubt many dealers find the profits too high and the intimate private contacts too secret to encourage going public. It is a world where stocks of good, even great art are very high, and where the interests of dealer, collector (and artists) are very closely intertwined.

An interesting example of fusion, if not confusion, arises from the historic operations

of **Charles Saatchi**. In some aspects, he has behaved like an investment fund, locking up millions in widely spread holdings. The activity of the collector greatly reinforces the profits of the investor. For instance, Saatchi was for some years virtually the sole buyer of what became known as **Young British Artists**. The more he bought, and the greater the publicity attached to his purchases, the larger the value created for his holdings. Throw in close relationships with gallerists like **Larry Gagosian** and you have profitable exit routes lined up.

But the operations of a notorious recluse like Saatchi, who doesn't even attend his own openings, are hardly a model for wider public participation in contemporary art. Dealers



Scholars argue about **Rainer Maria Rilke's** relationship to Picasso's painting *The Family of Saltimbanques*, but the yoking of the *Fifth Elegy* and Picasso's 1905 masterpiece is less important than seeing in Rilke's poem a confirmation of the latitude available to a great artist.

Is it important to know whether it was Rilke's own experience with Père Rollin's troupe, recorded in 1907, that was the first inspiration rather than Picasso's painting? Most likely both experiences mingled. It is quite possible that Rilke had known the

Picasso painting for a long time. He was acquainted with **Wilhelm Uhde** whom he saw in Paris fairly often. Uhde knew Picasso's work well and was a friend of **André Level**, whose organisation, *La Peau de l'Ours*, had acquired the painting and was eventually to sell it in March 1914 in an important auction. According to **von Salis**, Rilke had once prevailed upon Frau **Herta Koenig** to purchase the painting and may have been responsible for her decision, later, to acquire it. If Rilke's *Fifth Elegy* was not inspired by the Picasso painting, why did Rilke dedicate the poem to Frau Koenig? In 1915, when Rilke requested the use of her apartment while he sought the right house in the country, he wrote:

'I would beg for a bed in the guestroom for myself, a bed for my housekeeper, the kitchen, and permission to work at your magnificent desk – everything else would remain locked up; at most I would on some afternoon sit for a long time before the Picasso, which gives me courage for this beginning...'

On 28 June 1915, he writes to a friend: *'...meanwhile I am sitting here in the apartment of friends... with the finest Picasso [the Saltimbanques] in which there is so much Paris that, for moments, I forget.'* Finally, on 10 October, he writes: *'I must leave these rooms tomorrow, as the owner is returning from the country, and with them the glorious big Picasso beside which I have been living for almost four months now.'*

Source: Rainer Maria Rilke: *Duino Elegies*. Leishman & Spender NY 1939



Herbert Vogel (16 August, 1922 – 22 July, 2012) and **Dorothy Vogel** (born 1935) famous 'amateur' American buyers who built a multi-million dollar collection.

with their clients' best interests at heart have always advised against regarding art as an investment. Just as the wise men say, art is too illiquid and its values too problematical to make that a sensible pursuit.

The best advice has always been to buy what you love, concentrate your buying on a limited area of art and artists, and buy the best you can afford within that territory. With any moderate luck, the monetary results will be as satisfying as the art. After all, that's what the now world famous collectors **Herbert** and **Dorothy Vogel** did by spending one of their two modest salaries on work, notably

the newcomer American minimalists.

Much of their collection is displayed at the National Gallery in Washington, while they enjoyed a (one hopes) rich annuity in their old age. If such results can be achieved on relatively small means (and they can) who needs an investment fund?

*The late Robert Heller (1932-2012) was both a respected management guru and lifelong patron of the arts. He was closely involved for many years with the Flowers Gallery (London & New York) and wrote numerous scholarly essays on British art. A version of this article was first commissioned for STATE newspaper.



Dafydd Jones
Jonas Almgren, London

CLICK

WHAT A PICTURE

The Matchmaker: will Jonas Almgren succeed in his mission to make buying art online as familiar as buying it off a gallery wall?

TEXT HOLLY HOWE PORTRAIT DAFYDD JONES

THERE ARE NOT MANY people who can make the leap from a tech background to running a major art platform, but **Jonas Almgren** has made it. The 51-year-old Swede took the journey from Stockholm to London, via Silicon Valley and New York. Having graduated in Stockholm with a master's degree in computer science in the '80s, Almgren headed to Palo Alto, California to find his fortune as a programmer. Working his way up the Silicon Valley ladder, he

finally ended up at **Epiphany** – a B2B software company, which had around 12 people when he joined, and over 1,000 staff when the start-up went public during the dotcom boom.

After collecting his cheque – ‘the Epiphany success freed me from depending on a monthly pay cheque’ is as far as he’ll elaborate on the profit he made – and having witnessed first hand the growth opportunity of the tech start-up, he and a former colleague decided to launch their own business doing location-

based search: a concept that didn’t exist at the time. Unfortunately, **Google** had the same idea, so rather than try and go head to head with the big guns, they decided to sell their company to **Local.com** – a similar online yellow pages in LA. He then gathered up his wife **Alessandra** and their two children **Emil** and **Emma** and moved to New York: ‘because I felt that I had done Silicon Valley – I wanted to do something that also involved other aspects, such as art, and New York seemed to be a good place...’

Shoreditch House London. August 2014

A quiet corner in the private club, whose members comprise mainly people in the art, fashion and start-up world. A gin and tonic, a salad. And a fitting place to meet to discuss a career that has straddled two industries and melded them together. Back in 2007, Almgren was happily without a job, taking time to get to know New York and all it had to offer.

‘We collected a little bit of art, but mostly we were just fascinated by seeing how it worked and how traditionally everything was run. It was like the internet didn’t really exist in Chelsea [New York] or in the art world and no one really believed that you could bring art online. It didn’t really have any benefit, except as sort of like a magazine. You could show what you had, that seemed to be all. The **Chelsea Art Galleries** website really

started as a small excel spreadsheet of all the shows, just so that my wife and I could have an overview of everything going on. Because when you have 300 galleries having exhibitions, it’s hard to keep track. And then we realised the spreadsheet could just as easily be put online and that turned into **Chelsea Art Galleries**, which a few years later morphed into **OneArtWorld** – listing exhibitions from all galleries everywhere.’

Almgren developed a friendship with gallery owner **James Cohan** and the two pondered how they could use their individual skill sets to create something new and exciting. Cohan had the idea of running an online art fair...

‘...but we couldn’t quite decide if this was an idea that could be made profitable or not. Then in 2008 the whole art market crashed

and doing things cheaply became more interesting for a lot of galleries. They were more interested in trying out new, untried market channels. It *was* online and all of them despised the online world, but they were hurting from not selling – so that’s when we decided to launch the **VIP Art Fair**.’

In 2010, Almgren, his wife Alessandra, Cohan and his wife Jane, set about creating a fair which used the same model as **Frieze** or **Basel** or any other physical art fair. Galleries pay for space, not sales commissions, and the responsibility of the fair was to provide the marketing and, as a result, the visitors.

‘As James pointed out – “you really only need 100, or even less, of the big time collectors to show up and it can be a success”. There aren’t actually that many big buyers in the

high-end art world. Lots of people saying “yeah, sounds interesting, let me think about it” and then we went to **David Zwirner** and he said “Yes, this sounds really interesting”. He stood up, just extended his hand and said “Ok, I’ll do it”. Once we had Zwirner it was very easy to get all the other galleries to join because they knew the big guy was on board.’

The inaugural date was set for 22 January 2011 and the fair was to run for a week. Everyone was interested to see how it would work – even the **Wall Street Journal** gave front page coverage in the run up to the event. The galleries were there, the visitors were there, but in the initial days of the fair *the site crashed* – it was just too popular.

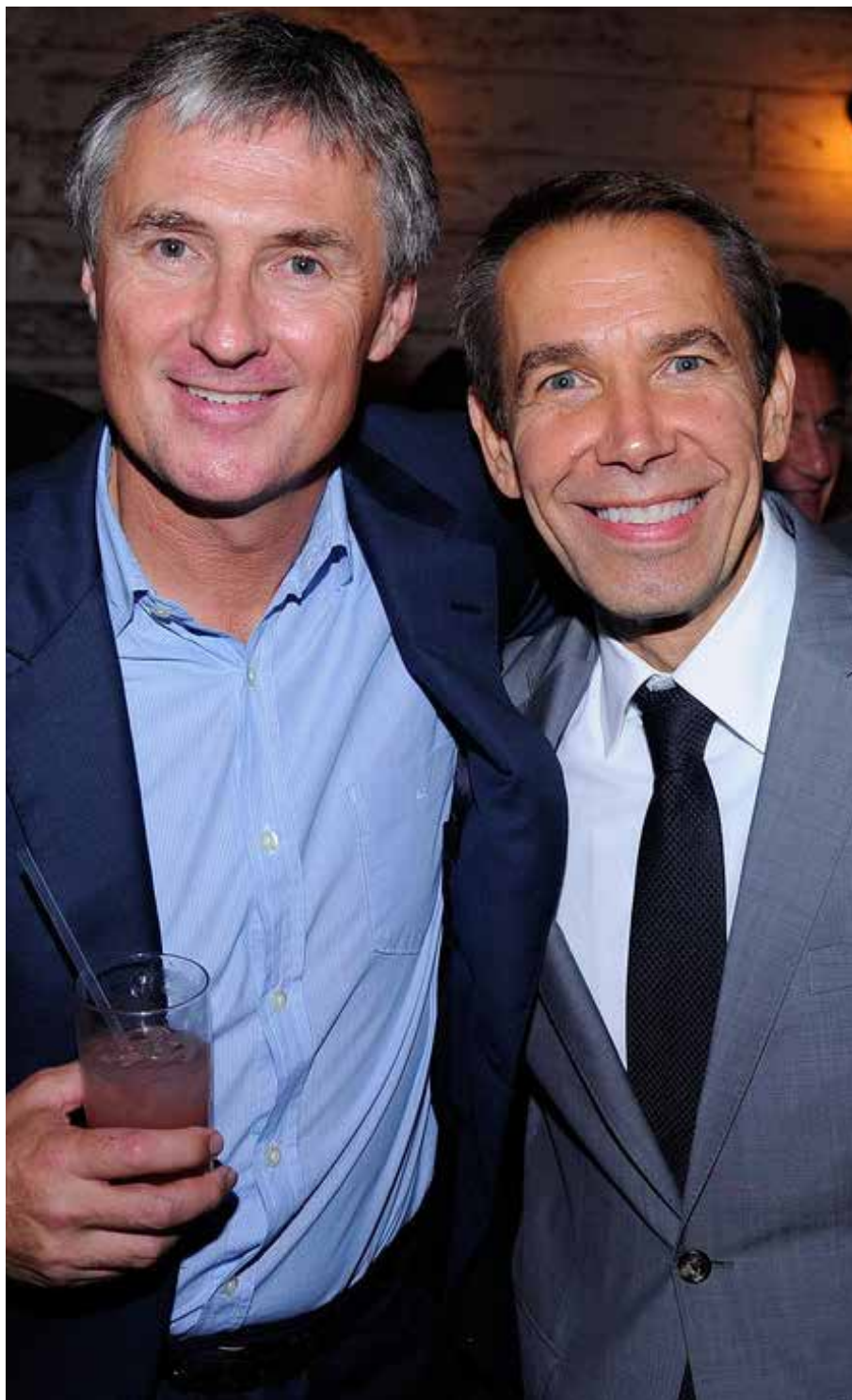
‘Obviously a lot of opportunity was lost because people got tired of trying the first

few days when it was very very slow – and they might never come back after that point. [A year later, having issued partial refunds to the galleries and improved the technological architecture of the site, the fair returned but the buzz didn't return with it]. I still think the important lesson we learned, or I learned personally, was that, one, you *can* attract people to an online event; and two, there was never a conviction from the galleries that this would really work. They were not willing to create the kind of transparency that was really needed for an online venue to sell. The galleries were refusing to [publish] prices so you then have a button that says: contact the gallery. None of the efficiency of the web – where it's so easy to buy because you just click.'

In 2012, Almgren and his family packed their bags once more and moved to England where he took on a new role at **ArtFinder** – an online platform for selling art. The company, established in early 2011, hadn't quite found its niche. It sold a mixture of art works, posters, apps, e-books and other bits and pieces.

'When I joined, they were really looking to drive the technology forward. In December 2012, I was made CEO. I firmly believe that any start-up out there has to be the best at whatever it is doing. We said that we were going to create the best marketplace for art, with a particular focus on becoming a *mass market* for art. This requires two things. One, you have to have affordable art available; and two, you have to make the whole purchase very simple. The very high end art market is very small, there are about 2,000 artists that are extremely successful, everyone else is struggling and, in fact, the majority of artists make less than one third of their living from making art. With ArtFinder, we evolved into being a marketplace connecting potential art buyers or art lovers with artists. It's really a matchmaking process, very much like a dating site – in fact, the algorithms could be quite similar. And because it's online, it doesn't matter if the artist is in the Czech Republic and the buyer is in Hong Kong. We can still hook them up and, as it happens, we have made exactly that sale. We are the biggest advertiser for art on Google in every English language country in the world. We are about twice as big as anyone in the US, the UK, Singapore or Hong Kong, Australia, Canada and so forth. That means that anyone looking for art to buy on Google will see our ad if they are in English language countries. The artist suddenly reaches hundreds and millions of potential art buyers whenever they use Google to try and find art.'

ArtFinder's customers pay an average of £300-£500 per art work, though the highest price paid for one piece is around £15,000. ArtFinder takes a 30% cut of the sale (compared with a gallery which generally takes around 50%). With a pool of artists based in 72 countries, around 60% of the company's revenue comes from the sales of paintings, 10% is photography and the rest is mainly editioned prints. Though ArtFinder won't disclose its clients' names, the pool includes 'some celebrity footballers and some celebrity musicians [...] Our biggest collector has probably spent £150,000 with us now, but buying a lot of art works rather than one for £150,000.' Almgren is clearly on a mission to create a more egalitarian art world and his passion is apparent when he talks about the challenges artists face.



David Zwirner and Jeff Koons Artists for Haiti dinner to benefit the Stiller Foundation. Zwirner was a primary supporter of the inaugural VIP Art Fair

'I think the one thing you start realising when you look at all of this is how much luck plays a big role in the art world. It's not so much about quality as it is being in the right place at the right time and having the right connections. There are so many artists that are fantastically good and so few artists that actually end up with a gallery – or selling enough that they can actually live from making art. I think that is about to change in dramatic ways. Two things I had completely wrong were that I didn't think people would buy art very often, because it's a considered

and special purchase, and I didn't think people would buy more than one art work at a time. It turns out that 30% of our buyers have bought at least twice, so they've come back. I would say the majority of orders are multi-item. When [the art is] quite affordable, if people actually want to fill up a room or a larger area, they buy a series of pieces that work well together and do it all in one go. You will see the big galleries actually looking for talent online. Some very successful artists have made their own success online through **Instagram** and other media. Most small galleries are still behind the curve in terms

'So if I'm a new up and coming collector and I want to prove myself, maybe I want to buy a Jeff Koons. But, of course, I want a Jeff Koons that looks just like a Jeff Koons, so my friends will recognise it.'

of understanding how they should leverage online and what they should do.

'It's like all collectibles. If you have a few buyers with very deep pockets, you can get whatever they are willing to pay to prove that they can afford it. It has nothing to do with the quality of the artwork, it's all about what enough people would like to own and you have artists that are well-known brands. The high-end art market is pretty much stalling in terms of developing actual new and interesting concepts. So if I'm a new up and coming collector and I want to prove myself, maybe I want to buy a **Jeff Koons**. But, of course, I want a Jeff Koons that looks just like a Jeff Koons, so my friends will recognise it. What's the point of buying a Jeff Koons that looks like something else? Just like **Coca-Cola** doesn't change its logo very often because that's what people recognise.'

Having started a small collection while he was still in California, primarily of emerging artists, Almgren and his wife 'got hooked on seeing all the fantastic art' that New York had to offer. They purchased works by **Fred Tomaselli** and **Ghada Amer**. But their collection didn't go down the traditional route.

'We assumed that we would buy paintings because that's what most people think when they start buying art, but in the end we have actually only bought one painting [the Ghada Amer work] and not even that is an oil painting! We bought a few electronic works that are quite interesting and maybe it was because of the Silicon Valley background we felt compelled to do that. I love **Jim Campbell** – a California-based artist. He's using very low resolution of moving images and when you first see it, it's just like dots, flickering on and off. But actually when you look at it squeezing your eyes, suddenly your brain makes it all out. I really love him, he's great. He's actually quite commonly collected, in New York at least. Because it's flat artwork, you can hang it on the wall, but you do have to plug it in. We also bought an artwork by **Bill Viola**, a diptych of two large plasma screens. It's very painterly, very beautiful and you could almost look at it as an evolving painting, the way he works, especially with water and colour. I think it's as with all art-based technology, you always have an anxiety about how it will last.

'We were looking at some photography actually, but in the [**Sean Kelly Gallery**] back office area they also had an **Antony Gormley** sculpture and we ended up saying "Great photography, but what we really would like is the sculpture" and spending hugely more money than we would have spent on the photography. It is one of the artworks we will probably never sell.'

As Almgren prepared to travel back to his home in Cambridge, *State* asked him which artist's work he would most like to own, excluding those in his current collection. He paused for a long time, turning the question over in his head.

'I don't know. There are many. Does it have to be a living artist? It's interesting because we've just bought a house, built in the '30s – a modernist house – and we went to Tate to see the **Matisse** exhibition. Someone said "Matisse would be perfect in your new house" – and I said: "Yes, but we would have to sell the house to buy the Matisse!"'

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Does the inexorable annexation of the art world by the Babel&Bling class really matter?

TEXT SUSIE HOGARTH

AT FIRST GLANCE, IT'S easy to dismiss criticism of the art world's astronomical prices as puritanical. To question the sale of **Jeff Koons'** *Balloon Dog (Orange)* for \$58.4 million – or a single **Christie's** auction of contemporary and post-war art raking in \$495 million – is to be po-faced about something so much bigger, so much more interesting, than mere tedious notions of value-for-money. **Pablo Picasso's** *La Rêve* may have sold for \$155 million, but **Steven Spielberg's** yacht, *Seven Seas*, cost \$50 million more. Isn't the former – in fact – more valuable, or more valued?

'It's a romantic notion that artists should be struggling away in their garret, never sully their hands with mammon,' says **Lisson Gallery's** Sales Director, **Sam Chatterton Dickson**. 'I think people get het up by the top end of the art market. Art is very broad, it's not just the **Francis Bacons** that keep the art world going.'

And he's right. But even if we do look critically at that top end, to compare Picassos with yachts is meaningless. Art enjoys a kind of cultural *exceptionalism* – a position apart from the rest of vulgar commerce. But is it an *exceptionalism* at risk of becoming grotesque?

The art market's ascent over the past decade is coolly, freakishly, impervious to events that could – and have – toppled other industries. On 16 September 2008, the day that **Lehman Brothers** collapsed, **Damien Hirst** sold a record-breaking amount of work at auction. His sales in London that day totalled \$70.5 million. Yet in the weeks following, the Bank of England addressed the real possibility that ATM machines would stop dispensing cash altogether. Six years later, Hirst's ironic *coup* looks more like foreshadowing than fluke. According to the *New York Times*, 11 of the 20 highest prices ever paid at auction



Ben Lewis contemporary critic

have occurred since 2008, as 'alternative' investments – of which fine art is the finest – emerged as a sure bet when compared to the turbulence of stock and bond markets.

'After 2008, the art market dipped for a year and a half but then it started zooming up again,' notes critic **Ben Lewis**. 'Now it sort of defies gravity. The worse the world economy is, the more expensive art becomes. Why is that?' But it's not just art, the prices of all kinds of luxury goods are rising, as we enter what economists are referring to as a second 'gilded age' of the super rich. According to the annual *World Wealth Report*, the number of High Net Worth Individuals globally rose by almost 10% in 2013. Some might be up in arms, maybe rightly so, about inequality, although no one is likely to lose much sleep over the fact that a **Hermès Birkin** handbag is even more crazily out of reach than it was 10 years ago. But art is different.

'You do not have to be an art lover to be an art investor. People who invest in pork belly futures do not need to enjoy eating pork.'

Bruce Helander

Art's *exceptionalism* works both ways; it might get a special dispensation for ludicrous prices, but it is also something we feel like we all *own* on some level. And it's currently in the hands of caretakers, some of whom are passing it around for a quick buck.

'Regrettably, there is an entirely new wave of investors who couldn't care less about contemporary art and don't have a clue about warming up to a great painting or sculpture,' says **Bruce Helander**, artist, critic and Editor-in-Chief of the *Art Economist*. 'You do not have to be an art lover to be an art investor. People who invest in pork belly futures do not need to enjoy eating pork.' Elsewhere, writer **Dave Hickey** resigned from the art world in disgust at what he saw as the demotion of critics and curators to a 'courtier class' – a servile board of experts asked to keep their true opinions in their back pocket, in favour of oiling the wheels of a critical consensus for the *right* artists, to keep the *right* prices high. But the art business insists that *love*, not money, is the compass of the 'true' investor. 'The first rule of thumb is to buy what you love,' says Helander. Over



Seven Seas Yacht as owned by director **Stephen Spielberg**

at Lisson, Chatterton Dickson offers similar advice: 'I do have people coming to me to say "I want to invest in art, what should I buy?" and I say: "I don't think you should buy anything unless you love it".'

Love plays a curious role in this most emotive of trades. It acts as both a tacit legitimisation of high prices (you can't put a price on *love*) and as a braking mechanism for a market that otherwise exists in constant danger of swelling, overheating and bursting spectacularly. Like the aristocrat who insists the family silver has no real value because it could never be sold, and so maintains it as economic security for future generations, the art lover who sits in front of his/her **Oscar Murillo** or **Lucien Smith** (both of whose prices have surged by 3,000% in the past two years) and really, *truly* appreciates it – rather than flipping it to the next highest bidder – helps to stabilise, reinforce and lend credibility to the entire system.

But what of the work? Love, art and money exist in a delicate balance. The risk of money becoming too powerful, too seductive, is that the love is lost and the art that rises to the top is reduced to a commodity. Or the pursuit of money, untempered by love, swells the bubble with rapid sales and ever escalating prices until it bursts.

It is irony that allows art to wear its

social commentary lightly. It can at once critique the excesses of the super rich and profit from it. Buyers can continue to consume goods that feel both socially and intellectually imperative *and* luxurious. Then they can watch the prices, and their own cultural capital, rise. It allows Hirst to call his diamond skull *For the Love of God* while selling it for £50 million – and **Takashi Murakami** to be simultaneously artist and corporation without losing any of his credibility. It vividly colours Koons' triumphant anti-intellectualism and market dominance. And it helps shift the glossy, design-led work of emerging young sculptors, which affects a pose of being critical of high-spec aestheticism while coincidentally looking really great in the airy atriums of corporate skyscrapers. 'Expensive art that makes fun of people buying expensive art,' says Lewis, 'that's the art world's ontological feedback loop.'

While the rate at which millionaires are being minted in the developing world promises to keep at least the *source* of demand healthy for many years, the question of whether the demand itself is future-proof is a cultural one. Not all art selling in blue chip galleries is ironic or meaningless. But the art market is dragged onwards and upwards by the belief that you can have many things which are at once incredibly meaningful and incredibly, stupendously, expensive. It intellectualises *excess*, and by doing so opts out of asking truly difficult questions of the world that sustains it. Only if this stance were to become unpalatable would the art market truly shift. But to take issue with it would be tedious, says the artist [or gallerist] who sees its flaws and turns them into something interesting. Perhaps it would. But maybe there's a rogue collector out there who would pay good money to watch someone try.

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