

THE IRISH TIMES

The big Frieze

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Kevin Cosgrove's *Workshop with Overalls*, oil on linen, 2 @ 120 x 140 cm, 2012

IT CAN BE hard to spot a trend when you're in one, particularly at the beginning. At the Frieze Art Fair, everybody is looking for the next big thing, and with 264 gallerists from 35 countries showing the work of more than 2,400 artists, the next big thing, whatever it is, could easily be lurking in there somewhere.

The first surprise is that the art market is alive and well. There isn't the feeding frenzy that used to characterise the world's major fairs (Basel, Armory, Frieze), but museums, institutions and collectors are still getting their wallets out, and the malaise that seems to hang over buyers in Ireland is absent. The Irish presence at the fair consists of the Kerlin and Mother's Tankstation galleries, with Kevin Kavanagh showing Amanda Coogan's work at Moving Image, a satellite event for contemporary video art.

Daragh Hogan of Kerlin says galleries need to show at events like Frieze to reach a global audience. Museum directors are at the fair, and the influence of the interest created is far reaching. The Art Newspaper, which publishes a daily addition for Frieze, suggests the trend we're all searching for is a recession-reflecting combination of DIY and domestic objects, but that's nothing new.

The paper describes a shelving unit by Dirk Bell, from Berlin's BQ gallery, bought by a private collector for €16,000, and quotes gallery director Jorn Botnagel, saying, "The artist likes people to live with his work instead of putting it into storage. Collectors find it easier to fit these works into their lives." Which lets you know that at this level art is as much a commodity as it is something to raise the human spirit to a higher emotional and philosophical plane.

What's more obvious at the fair is what is missing: gone are the volumes of vacuous, shiny and high-priced trinkets turned out by artists such as Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons, although there is still plenty to tempt the vulgar tastes of a certain kind of "rich".

Irish artist Joy Gerrard, who has lived in London since 1999, recently completed large projects for the London School of Economics and for the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. She says, "This year the trend was figuration and works on paper, with less overt and bombastic display."

Alice Maher, whose stunning show is currently at Imma, once said art fairs weren't healthy places for artists, and, writing in the Evening Standard in 2009, Charles Saatchi agreed: "I've always believed that it is important for artists never to be allowed near art fairs, for fear that the disillusionment with being part of a meat market would traumatise them into abandoning their brushes." But Gerrard says even though the fair's raison d'être is selling art, it's also "essential for any artist, or serious student to visit. For a practitioner it acts as a huge dictionary of contemporary materials and ways of display."

Indeed, the fair is not all about selling. Leaving the marquee, Joanna Rajkowska's Forcing a Miracle was a triangle of grass into which lights and incense sticks have been embedded. The illuminated smoky fragrance was heady and almost otherworldly. The Frieze Talks, which included New York-based Irish artist Brian O'Doherty, were free events and were packed to capacity.

Maybe it's just window dressing on capitalism's attempts to draw art into its own politics of price and market manipulation, but it's also where you can see what's happening, right now, across the international art world. And Frieze shows both the best and the worst of that world.

Tate director Nick Serota is making slow progress, being frequently accosted. In the VIP area, Keira Knightly is having lunch with a man with a broken leg. You could spend all day watching the comings and goings. Few stands have prices on the labels. Some stands have no labels at all. At the De Carlo gallery, there isn't even a list. In the booth next door, at the gallery of the mighty Larry Gagosian (it has just surpassed the Louvre in square footage, spread around the world) they have gone one better and dispensed with a desk. No one seemed to work there, although I can imagine if a major collector or perhaps Keira Knightly materialised, so too would some of the incredibly beautiful and incredibly thin gallery assistants who populate the higher-end booths.

I start to wonder if somewhere there might even be a gallery showing no art at all. Of course there is: London gallery Cabinet has a large crate on the floor, and a text on the wall announcing a John Knight show, Quiet Quality, taking place at its East London premises. Its director, Andrew Wheatley, says it's all about subverting the premise of the art fair, but with booths costing from about £10,000 (€12,400) for the smallest, it's an expensive gesture.

A problem with galleries trying to be subversive is that, these days, there isn't much artists haven't already tried. Yves Klein's exhibition *Le Vide* (The Void) was nothing but an empty gallery, and that was back in 1958. Paul McCarthy's Hot Dog photo series from 1974, hanging on an external wall of Hauser Wirth's booth at this year's fair, is all genitalia and mustard. And Jeremy Deller (winner of the 2004 Turner Prize) at the Modern Institute's stand is doing his own bit of subversion with a free art work in the form of a poster (see panel), although most people seem too intimidated to pick up a copy.

Klein's own work is on show at the accompanying Frieze Masters, in another huge tent across Regent's Park. Dedicated to work made before 2000, Frieze Masters is fascinating. There are ancient sculptures, Renaissance angels, works by Giacometti, Degas, Picasso, and our own Francis Bacon and Sean Scully.

One of the thrills of Masters is the chance to see less iconic works by artists usually only seen in museums. There was a Gericault 1812 painting *Torse d'homme, le bras gauche levé* (Man's chest with raised left arm) at the Guy Stair Sainy booth, which, on restoration, proved to have a lot less drapery than previously thought. It was both sexy and stunning. There were also some gorgeous Eva Hesse drawings and a 1460 Spanish work by an unknown artist: *Saints Cosmas and Damian Healing a Christian with the Leg of a Dead Ethiopian*. Now there's a subject.

The gallerists at Masters are far friendlier. They smile back, and even offer to chat about works with million-dollar price tags, such as the \$20m (€15.37m) Alexander Calder mobile at the Helly Nahmad gallery. The reputations of the artists they are showing are already secure: they're not waiting for any trends to materialise, so there's no need to add mystique through the misplaced tactic of rudeness. Or perhaps they're basking in the rumour that one of the galleries had just taken £22m in one day.

Now in its 10th year, Frieze has the pulling power to attract major collectors, movers and shakers from around the world, so comparisons with the flat Irish art market are unfair. Nevertheless, art fairs are the best way for Irish artists to get off the island and tap into the international energy that's still powering things elsewhere. With booths costing from £352 per square metre, it's a considerable investment, but at least 60,000 people came through Frieze, paying at least £20 a ticket.

Mother's Tankstation sold out its exhibition of the work of painter Kevin Cosgrove, while Kerlin had already sold a large Callum Innes painting on the first day of the fair (shown alongside the work of Stephen McKenna and Siobhan Hapaska).

As the recession continues to bite, it may seem difficult to make arguments for supporting private galleries, but until things pick up in Ireland, perhaps this is the way things will have to be done, for the time being at least.

Five Frieze highlights

Jeremy Deller , *A Photograph: of David Cameron on a holiday in South Africa paid for by the Apartheid Government* (1989), free posters to collect at the Modern Institute

Julia Mehretu, Wall drawings, White Cube gallery

Nevin Aladag , Contemporary carpet collages, Rampa Istanbul

Yarisa & Kublitz , Playful sculptures, Gerhardsen Gerner (right)

Anri Sala, *Clocked Perspective*. An engaging clock (far right), Regent's Park