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MARKET — SEATTLE ART FAIR 2015



THE SEATTLE ART FAIR ARRIVES, WITH DEALERS ON THE HUNT FOR TECH MONEY

BY *Erin Langner* POSTED 08/01/15 11:20 AM



The exterior of the 2015 Seattle Art Fair on opening day.
TORI DICKSON/COURTESY SEATTLE ART FAIR

A giant beach ball, a pink ice cream truck, and a winding line of people waiting to see art are not sights that people usually associate with perennially gray Seattle. But on Thursday night, most of the 4,000 people who visited the opening night of the inaugural Seattle Art Fair got to experience all three.

Iranian artist Negar Farajiani's *Made-in-China*, a beach ball about 12 feet in diameter, distracted many visitors from the wait outside of the CenturyLink Field Event Center and helped set the tone for much of the pleasant, fun art inside. Spencer Finch's sherbet-hued ice cream truck, seen earlier this summer in an exhibition organized by Creative Time in New York's Central Park, added to the breezy mood.

Greeting visitors with some cheerfulness was perhaps a wise move by the fair's organizers, Art Market Productions. Seattle's history with fairs has been fraught at best, with longstanding members of the art community having to think back to a fair that ran from 1992 through 1997 when asked recall an event with a similar stature. (The more modestly scaled Affordable Art Fair also made appearances in 2012 and 2013, but has not been back since.)

Anticipation has been running high for the fair here, especially given that Paul Allen, the billionaire Microsoft cofounder, has been its driving force and the fact that international heavyweights like David Zwirner, Gagosian, and Pace are among its 60 galleries.



Work by Dustin Yellin at Winston Wachter Fine Art, Seattle.

TORI DICKSON/COURTESY SEATTLE ART FAIR

Art fair openings in places like Miami Beach and Basel, Switzerland, have become popular meeting locations for celebrities. Would they turn up in Seattle? I asked a local dealer about sightings. "Does the mayor count?" he grimaced. While many others gave the same answer, almost all of Seattle's major collectors were present, many with champagne glasses in hand—Jon Shirley, Kim Richter, Barney Ebsworth, Betty Hedreen, Jeffrey and Susan Brotman, and their daughter Amanda. Some were spotted again on Friday.

Local museum directors were also on the scene, including Sylvia Wolf of the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery and Stephanie Stebich of the Tacoma Art Museum. Finding the Seattle Art Museum's director, Kimerly Rorschach, at a busy cross-section between Pace Gallery and Seattle's own Greg Kucera Gallery, I asked her early reaction on the fair. "I'm impressed," she said, glancing around at the spacious booths.

Many gallerists from outside the Pacific Northwest echoes her assessment. Robert Goff, the former Haunch of Venison director who now works for David Zwirner, cited Seattle's cultural institutions as a reason for the gallery's decision to participate. "There are a lot of collectors out here who we don't see as often, so we took the selection process super seriously," Goff said, when asked about how the gallery picked work to bring. "The artists we brought are really top notch, while offering a range of price points, from \$8,000 to \$2

million.” One of the Zwirner pieces that attracted the most attention (and the most selfies) was Yayoi Kusama’s sterling silver and blue polka-dot *PUMPKIN* sculpture, which was unsold as of Friday afternoon.



Work by Yayoi Kusama at David Zwirner.
TORI DICKSON/COURTESY SEATTLE ART FAIR

Pace Director Elizabeth Sullivan pointed to the success the gallery had over the past year operating a location in Menlo Park, California—home to a campus of more than 7,000 Facebook employees—as one reason behind their decision to participate. Given Paul Allen’s technology connection and the local offices of not only Microsoft but also Amazon, Google, Facebook, and Adobe, it was perhaps not surprising that the fair set a theme of art and technology, though few galleries adhered to it.

But there were exceptions. Pace showed saturated digital renderings of waterfalls and flowers by the teamLab collective. Los Angeles’s 101/Exhibit offered free pencil holders designed by artist Micah Ganske and created using 3D printers. And, of course, there were drones. New York’s Bitforms Gallery showed flashy abstract paintings that Addie Wagenknecht made onsite at the fair using the miniature remote-controlled aircraft and UV-sensitive pigments. Harmless as they were, all three of these projects read more as gimmicks disconnected from the world around them than relevant technological advances that inspire awe (much less incisive approaches to tech culture).

Seattle’s history as a port and a gateway to elsewhere—to Alaska, to Canada, and to the Pacific—bores deeply into its identity, and artists and galleries whose work looked to that history resonated strongly at this fair.

Seattle ceramics artist Jeffry Mitchell has been a hometown classic for years, but if there were ever any doubt about how his work would hold up in a wider context, its prominence amid the art fair frenzy, at Portland’s PDX Contemporary and San Francisco’s Rana Bransten, brushed that concern aside. His lovingly-shaped platters invite with the delicacy of a doily while pushing back with the emotional weight of their bruised, black-and-blue palette.

San Francisco dealer Catharine Clark deliberately picked works for her gallery’s booth with a connection to either the West Coast or to the fair experience. Among the most compelling was Nina Katchadourian’s *Under Pressure*, a video the artist created of herself lip syncing to the Queen song of the same name inside an airplane bathroom. “It points to the anxiety of travel,” Clark said. While fairgoer travel doesn’t bring much pressure in most cases, all of the tensions flying now evokes—threats of attack, racial profiling,

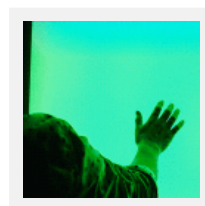
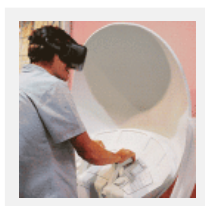
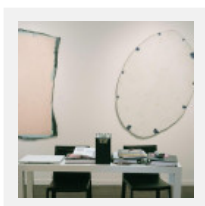
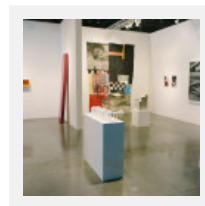
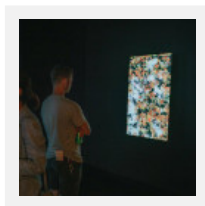
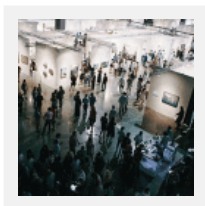
immigration restrictions—still permeate any trip, making Katchadourian’s piece move quickly from the lighthearted to the deeply serious.

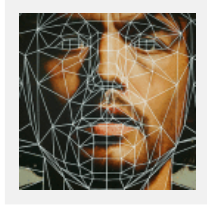
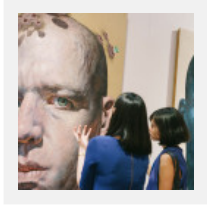
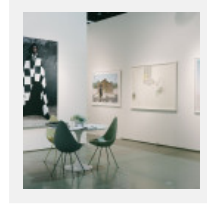
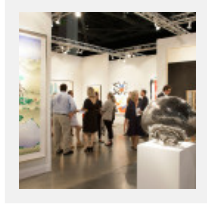
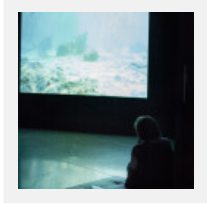
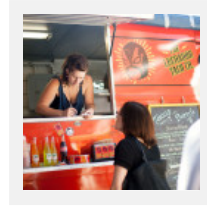
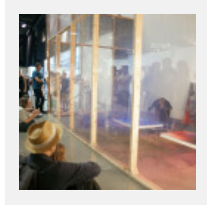
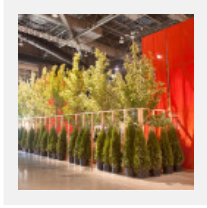


Paul Kasmin's booth at the Seattle Art Fair.
TORI DICKSON/COURTESY SEATTLE ART FAIR

Among a handful of non-commercial pieces commissioned by the Seattle Art Fair was an exhibition of videos organized in response to Seattle’s location on the Pacific Rim, titled “Thinking Currents.” The works touch on issues such as the environment, immigration, and migration, and include *SEA STATE 6*, Singaporean artist Charles Lim’s work for his nation’s pavilion at this year’s Venice Biennale. The video’s scenes of a container ship at sea became especially poignant as I exited the fair and found myself back at the *Made-in-China* beach ball. Behind it, through a sliver between buildings, I could see Seattle’s sea, the Puget Sound, and a container ship heading toward the Pacific, perhaps to be loaded up with the cheap plastic toys that work sends up.

I expect that I am not alone in hoping that the Seattle Art Fair returns for a second edition. As it is, it runs through Sunday, and then summer, finally, arrives in the art world, with no major fairs until September.





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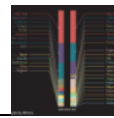
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