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THE ART OF COLLECTING

In the context of a dense European fair calendar, FIAC takes on a more international character



MARC DOMAGE

Pushing boundaries, and gaining more steam

At FIAC, galleries respond to a mandate to 'broaden the audience for art'

BY TED LOOS

Just because an art event has been around for a long time doesn't mean its success was foreordained.

The Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain, or FIAC, the art fair holding its 44th edition from Oct. 19 to 22 at the Grand Palais in Paris, is resurgent of late, but it wasn't always.

Jennifer Flay, the New Zealand-born director of FIAC who began her job in 2003, recalled a headline in a French magazine at the time that summed up the fair's ups and downs: "FIAC at 30: Birthday or Burial?"

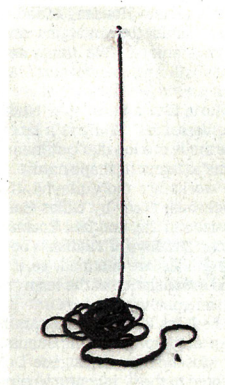
She chuckled, adding that her position was "not the job everybody wanted."

This edition of FIAC, which gathers 193 dealers, evinces the broad-based support from the art world and collectors that the fair has been gathering for a few years.

So far it's not without controversy, either: An installation that was to go in the Louvre's Tuileries Gardens — "Domestikator," by the Dutch art and design collective Atelier Van Lieshout — was withdrawn by the Louvre for being sexually explicit (its outline depicted copulation). The piece was to be part of Hors les Murs, or Outside the Walls, a public art program organized by FIAC, but was instead placed in front of the Centre Pompidou.



BASIM MAGDY/GYPSUM GALLERY



DIAMOND STINGILY/QUEER THOUGHTS, NEW YORK



THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, INC./ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK



JEPPE HEIN/303 GALLERY, NEW YORK, PHOTO BY MORTEN KJAER

Such hiccups are to be expected when pushing boundaries is part of the mandate. "We want to broaden the audience for art," Ms. Flay said. "If you were to describe FIAC, it would be via these forthright, audacious programs."

Galleries have responded. New entries this year include dealers as far-flung as Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art of New York and Gypsum of Cairo.

"The complexion of FIAC has changed dramatically over the past 10 years," Ms. Flay said. "Of our total now, only 30 or 40 galleries were present in 2003. It's a total makeover."

The overall dealer makeup is approximately a quarter French and two-thirds European. "But it's getting more American every year," Ms. Flay noted.

Among the American dealers, Mr. Na-

hem is bringing a selection of Pop Art works by the likes of Tom Wesselmann, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, including Lichtenstein's bronze sculpture "Metallic Brushstroke Head" (1994), as well as more contemporary works.

"We're primarily specializing in the secondary market," Mr. Nahem said, referring to works that have been bought and sold before. "So we try to keep it fresh and not bring tired works that have made the rounds a lot."

Paintings in the Nahem booth will include Joan Mitchell's "When They Were Gone" (1977) and Ed Ruscha's "The Uncertain Trail" (1986).

Another first-time FIAC dealer, Sam Lipp, a director of New York's Queer Thoughts gallery, said the setting was slightly intimidating, but exciting.

"Just the venue of the Grand Palais is so impressive, we feel honored to be included," he said. Queer Thoughts will present work by Diamond Stingily in the Lafayette sector, for newer galleries.

Mr. Lipp noted the international character of Lafayette, with entries from all over the world and not just the traditional art hubs: "We're the only gallery representing New York," he said.

FIAC is also appealing to dealers as "a fair with an intimate, international feel, and an important history," said Lisa Spellman, the founder of 303 Gallery in New York. She is exhibiting in the main sector, making it the seventh year in a row she has participated in the fair.

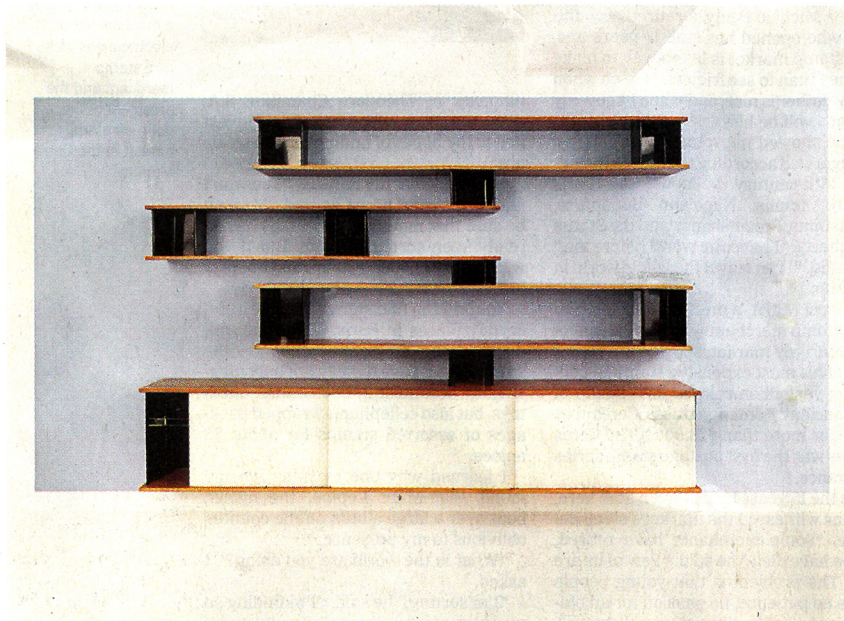
FIAC's Paris location — in the context of a dense European fair calendar in the

Offerings

Above, the Grand Palais. Artists and galleries represented include, from far left, Basim Magdy, "We're All Victims of Our Own Adopted Fantasies Here" (Gypsum); Diamond Stingily, "Kaa 1963" (Queer Thoughts); Andy Warhol, "Jackie" (Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art); Jeppe Hein, "Yellow, Orange, Green and Red Mirror Balloon," (303 Gallery). Below, Jennifer Flay, FIAC director.



JAE-AN LEE



MARIE CLÉRIN / LAFFANOUR GALERIE DOWNTOWN, PARIS

Additional lines
The reintroduced Design section will include French midcentury modern furniture, designed by the likes of Charlotte Perriand (here, her "Unique Bookcase").

Pushing boundaries

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fall, with Frieze London among others — is convenient for dealers from abroad, given the force-multiplying effect.

"Strategically it makes a lot of sense," Ms. Spellman said. "It's almost in tandem with Frieze. That works well for us."

And Paris's serious museum landscape is another appealing factor. "We love the institutions there, like the Jeu de Paume, the Pompidou and the Palais de Tokyo," Ms. Spellman said. "Our artists have shows there. We have a lot of connections to Paris."

For this year's booth, 303 Gallery is presenting a solo show of the Danish artist Jeppe Hein, who is based in Berlin. "The scale and intimacy of the Grand Palais is really inspiring to artists," Ms. Spellman said. "It's the perfect fair to do a one-artist booth."

The relatively spare installation is made up of 21 shiny balloon-like sculptures that appear to be hanging from the ceiling. Ms. Spellman's goal is to sell them all together. "It's one body of work," she said.

One of the most French areas — five out of five booths — is the newly reintroduced Design section. The dealers will all show 20th- and 21st-century objects.

One of them, Laffanour — Galerie Downtown, of Paris, first showed at FIAC in 2004, and specializes in part in the popular category of French midcentury modern furniture, designed by the likes of Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand.

"Perriand is one of my favorite de-

signers," said François Laffanour, the gallery's founder. "She was creative. Not only modern but also practical and with simple materials."

Among the 10 items on view will be a 1957 Perriand creation in mahogany, "Table de Forme-Libre." But more contemporary pieces will be in the mix, too, including Ron Arad's 1993 "This Mortal Coil," a free-standing spiral-shaped bookshelf.

The overall fair context is a plus for the Design galleries, Mr. Laffanour said. "It's a nice idea to have this link between fine art and design," he said. "Most of our clients are also art collectors."

Ms. Flay said that part of her satisfaction after 14 years on the job was the way the city had embraced the fair and even molded itself to fit.

'We try to keep it fresh and not bring tired works that have made the rounds a lot,' said Edward Tyler Nahem of New York.

"All of Paris is on board with us," she said. "The museums have synced with our dates." For instance, the Centre Pompidou's "Cosmopolis #1" exhibition begins the day before the fair opens.

"The whole city seems to exist as a backdrop for FIAC," Ms. Flay said. "I thought we'd never get there. But in some ways we have."

Some have coined the term Paris Art Week for the time of the fair, and Ms. Flay said she liked the phrase except for one thing: "The word FIAC isn't in it."