

BAERT GALLERY 2441 HUNTER STREET LOS ANGELES CA 90021
+1 213 537 0737 INFO@BAERTGALLERY.COM

ARTnews

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'We Want to Invest in the Region': FOG and Untitled Fairs Bring Out Dealers, Collectors in San Francisco



Luhring Augustine's booth, with work by Oscar Tuazon and Lygia Clark, at FOG Art+Design. COURTESY LUHRING AUGUSTINE

As San Francisco weathered two very minor earthquakes and braced against voracious rain that forecasters had classified as an "atmospheric river," two art fairs in the city—FOG Design+Art and Untitled—went about their business of opening with nothing but signs of positivity in sight. The older, more established FOG and the newer upstart Untitled (a West Coast satellite of a fair initiated in Miami) offered different vibes but together courted collectors and curiosity-seekers to a Bay Area art scene that rose to the occasion for both.

FOG kicked off Wednesday with a preview gala that doubled as a benefit for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, with proceeds from ticket sales for the evening going to an institution that serves as a locus of sorts. Wild fashions abounded (no small amount of them evocative of straightjackets and bondage gear—dark energy right for the times), and cascades of food and drink (vegetable sushi, a glorious cocktail infused with activated charcoal) flowed in the midst of booths showing art from near and far.

“We’ve been doing the fair since the beginning, when it was much smaller and scrappier, and it’s been interesting to be part of its evolution,” said Chris Perez, director of Ratio 3, a San Francisco gallery set up by the entrance. “It’s attracted galleries from outside the city, and what is really great about it is that it is an art fair, but it has design too. The design element gives it personality. Eventually all these things end up together in the same room.”

Among Ratio 3’s offerings were minimalist geometrical weavings by local artist Ruth Laskey, each for \$20,000, and a suite of 21 photographs by Amie Siegel available all together for \$45,000 (or \$2,500 each). Of FOG’s opening party, Perez said, “Tonight is primarily social because it’s benefiting the museum, but it’s great because you get so many patrons of SFMOMA coming through.”

In a nearby booth for the long-running local institution Crown Point Press, director Valerie Wade handed out white gloves to visitors looking to flip through a bounty of handmade books by Los Angeles artist Laura Owens, some of them with pop-up pages and all priced between \$5,000 and \$10,000. “People here are very serious collectors, so they come back,” Wade said of early expectations for the five-day fair, which runs through Sunday.

Edward Cella Art & Architecture, from Los Angeles, featured wondrous drawings from the 1970s and ’80s by Lebbeus Woods, a theoretical architect (he never actually built anything) who found himself on the receiving end of an improbable windfall. As described by gallery director David de Boer, Woods’s 1987 drawing *Centricity Series, Upper Chamber, Neomechanical Tower* was “stolen by the director of 12 Monkeys for a torture chamber in the film. He sued and won a huge settlement that afforded him a lifestyle where he could make whatever he wanted for the last 20 years of his life.” That fateful drawing was for sale for \$50,000, with a pair of earlier works from the ’70s on offer for \$13,000.

In the same booth was a store of drawings and photographs related to the Sea Ranch, a modernist ’60s-era utopian encampment on the coast of North California that is the subject of an eye-catching new exhibition at SFMOMA. Along with those were works by R. Buckminster Fuller, including a Three Part Triad sculpture set for \$300,000.



Lebbeus Woods's *Centricity Series, Upper Chamber, Neomechanical Tower*, 1987.

EDWARD CELLA ART & ARCHITECTURE

Lévy Gorvy gallery, in town from New York, mixed things up with a few paintings by Richard Diebenkorn and, most prominently, a two-artist display of work by Gego and Carol Rama. “It’s a very sophisticated group of collectors,” Dominique Lévy, the gallery’s cofounder, said of the San Francisco set. “These two are eccentric

and extraordinary women with very individualistic art. SFMOMA has understood both of them, and I like doing a booth where there's a dialogue that will be a discovery for some and a reinforcement for others." Of the fair, whose opening night had seen the sale of some of the gallery's pieces, priced between \$150,00 and \$500,000, Lévy said, "It's smaller, which is nice. It has variety between art and design. It keeps an intimacy that makes it really joyful."

Jason Jacques Inc., also from New York, offered a bewitching sculpture in the form of Moss Girl Shaman with Birdhouse (2018) by Finnish artist Kim Simonsson. On sale for \$30,000, the work is "part of a dystopian, post-apocalyptic story that he's created," Jason Jacques said. "It's an incredible tale. This one is a shaman who covered herself in feathers and picked up a sacred relic, which happens to be part of a boombox." Work from the same series by Simonsson has been on display across town at the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, which is soon closing a captivating group exhibition titled "No Time" that engages what a show description identifies as "perceptions of what we call 'nature' and our role in its transformation."

About FOG, Jacques said, "I've been looking for a reason to come out here for a long time. There's no opening at any art fair anywhere in the world with this much caring and people getting dressed up. It's really refreshingly classic."



The booth for Luhring Augustine was devoted to a playful pairing of the late Brazilian artist Lygia Clark and Oscar Tuazon, who remade a wall into a sort of portal for White Walls (San Francisco), a site-specific intervention comprising a hole cut and framed at an angle that fairgoers could walk through. "It would be reinstalled, as a commission, in someone's home or in an institution," gallery director Geneva Viralam said of the work, which was on sale for \$100,000. About Clark and Tuazon together, she said, "We've had this pairing in mind not only for their aesthetic overlaps but similar interest in activism and ways the public can respond to their work. San Francisco is a community of incredible collectors and wonderful institutions. We knew this level of conceptualism might be well-received by this audience."

The New York gallery Andrew Kreps chose to participate in FOG as well as Untitled this year, after having exhibited in just the latter in the past. "We've always had a very good experience with Untitled, but FOG is a very specific fair," said director and partner Liz Mulholland. "They have different audiences, and we were interested in becoming part of the FOG family but also working with people at Untitled we love as well." Early on Wednesday, the gallery had sold a pair of photographs by Roe Ethridge, Hibiscus Diptych (2018), for \$45,000 and a drawing by Alex Katz for a price not disclosed.



Andrea Bowers, *It's OK to Be Angry; Feminist Slogan*. (Posada Broadside Series. COURTESY JESSICA SILVERMAN GALLERY

Jessica Silverman, whose namesake gallery is a pillar of the San Francisco scene, said, "I started at SF20, which is what this used to be called in 2009, so I've been doing an incarnation of this for 10 years. The quality keeps getting better and better. Art dealers are doing art, and design dealers and are doing design—so you get this really pleasant visual incongruity that is the most differentiating factor of what FOG does to any other art fair in the world. It's a beautiful mix, and then everything around the fair—the shows, the camaraderie—is really extraordinary."

"San Francisco is pretty small so the top galleries here are few and far between," Silverman went on. "We're all friends. There's support within the Bay Area scene that we try to extend to our colleagues. There are a lot of great collectors here, and enough to go around." On Wednesday, Silverman had sold three arresting works by Detroit-based artist Matthew Angelo Harrison, with materials like West African statues and animal skulls encased in resin (for prices between \$18,000 and \$20,000). Also sold for a price in the "high five figures" was *It's OK to Be Angry; Feminist Slogan*. (Posada Broadside Series), a large cardboard work by Andrea Bowers.

Pamela J. Joyner, the collector of African-American art and a longtime Bay Area figure who was the honoree at an Innovators Luncheon at FOG, told ARTnews, "It's important to have a platform to showcase art and artists that is commercial in addition to public. We have great museums here, and we certainly have great collectors, so now to add these platforms that focus more on the distribution channel fills out the ecosystem, highlighting San Francisco in a way that's consistent with the city's real place in the art world."

Thursday marked the opening of *Untitled*, with 55 galleries (to FOG's 53) from 10 countries assembled for the fair's third San Francisco edition, this year in a new setting: an enormous warehouse on Pier 35. The environs were much rawer but filled with energy, especially when it came to a show-stopping work by the entrance: a

spinning sculpture by Mat Collishaw at the booth of the London/Berlin gallery Blain I Southern. "This is based on a Victorian zoetrope," director Sarah Bourghardt said of *All Things Fall* (2014), which starts at a standstill and then, by way of a motor, spins at a delirious speed that makes the characters within it seem to move. Those characters are up to no good—whipping each other, throwing babies over a wall—as depicted in Nicolas Poussin's 17th-century painting *The Massacre of the Innocents*.



Mat Collishaw's *All Things Fall*, 2019, at Blain I Southern at Untitled. COURTESY UNTITLED

Blain I Southern is one of three galleries exhibiting at both Untitled and FOG this year, along with Andrew Kreps and David Zwirner. "The directors felt it was worth coming over to promote our artists and also to continue conversations with existing collectors and relationships that we have in the area," Bourghardt said. "We want to invest in the region."

Jeffrey Walkowiak, Untitled's director of communications, said, "Our goal has always been to compliment FOG. Because we are a curated fair, we go through a process where we work with a guest curator"—this year's was Juana Berrío—"to vet applications and special projects." Of a number of booths populated by local organizations and artist-run institutions, he said, "A goal for us specifically in San Francisco is to work with the community. We don't want to be a fair that is going to come in and plop down for a week and then pick up and leave."

The booth for Denny Dimin Gallery, in town from New York, featured pastel paintings of figures swimming and lounging poolside by Jessie Edelman, priced between \$4,000 and \$14,000. "We're really interested in San Francisco collectors because they are very smart but seem to not have as large a world of art at their fingertips," said gallery partner Elizabeth Denny. "We want to try get to know them."

Baert Gallery from Los Angeles showed wall works by Jebila Okongwu, a Nigerian-British artist currently based in Rome who cuts up banana boxes and assembles their shapes into geometric abstractions. Of their artist-appointed status as "Divination Paintings," gallery founder Christian Baert said, "The way he makes them is he cuts triangles and then applies them randomly to the canvas, which is linked to the process an African shaman would use to read the future." One such work had sold on Thursday, for \$12,000.

As Untitled's opening moved into the evening, in attendance left for a performance near conjunction with a show presented by the M City/New York gallery Kurimanzutto and the Francisco Art Institute, Patti Smith played two concerts for a crowd that numbered around 10 each. The show surrounding her featured her photographs, many of them taken at the home of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and rising up to the vaulted ceiling behind her was a grand mural by Rivera that pays tribute to industrial workers as muralists—including Rivera himself.

Painted in 1931, the work is a prized possession of the Francisco Art Institute, which was set up in 1871 with a purpose to, as president Gordon Knox told the audience, "radiate out of here incredible flows of meaning in art, of music, of culture." Smith did all of that and more in a fitful, funny, and moving performance accompanied by the guitarist Lenny Kaye. She drew from her memoir *Just Kids* and talked lots about having visited Casa Azul—the Mexico City abode where the artist couple lived—and even having slept in Rivera's bed.



She called a book about Rivera's life that she received as a gift from her mother when she turned 16 "the most wonderful and poisonous gift I ever had," and sang a song about butterflies in tribute to artwork that Isamu Noguchi installed over Kahlo's bed when she was laid up for a long time. Expressing amazement over having her own photos hanging in such a sanctified space, Smith said, with a mix of weariness and wonder, "If you live long enough, all kinds of shit happens."