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United Kingdom

A breath of fresh air for the fair-weary

The second edition of London’s latest fair had plenty of variety and showed promise for the future

CONTEMPORARY ART

London. The appeal of Art14 London, which closed its second edition last month (28 February-2 March), has become that it is “just Frieze”. This is not so much because the city’s more famous art fair has lost its status, more that many in the art world have become tired of the increasingly homogeneous taste of the wealthy, international buyers that the high-end fairs, such as Frieze and Art Basel, serve. “The by-product of globalisation is manufacturing; choosing art should not be the same as choosing a fashion label,” said the dealer Pearl Lam, who exhibited again this year. She added: “What makes the world interesting is its differences.”

“It feels very fresh to me, both the artists and the galleries. I’m learning a lot”

Such differences were abundant at Art14, sponsored by Citi Private Bank, which was again a sight for fair-weary eyes. The showing of emerging art from around the world has filled the Western art’s commercial scene. The gap is not only visual: lesser-known artists and those from countries outside the Western art’s axis tend to have lower price points. As such, the bulk of the reported sales came from further afield and under $50,000 (these included works by the Tibetan artist Tenzing Rigid for around $20,000 from Rossi & Rossii; the Taiwanese artist Liu Shih-Tung from Lin & Lin for around £13,000; and the Palestinian artist Humen Harb from Ath Gallery for $8,000).

One exception to the rule was Donn Schell’s Family Collection in Miami, which sold for $500,000 at Sun-daram Tagore gallery. Tagore said he was not surprised given London’s growing status as an international trading hub. “Buyers come here from every corner of the world,” he said. The work was bought by a private individual from Spain, who was new to the gallery.

That this work was even at the fair underscores the wide variety on offer: “emerging” incorporates a huge range, being essentially anything yet to enter the mainstream, whether by young or very adventurous artists, or those from a less familiar country. But this very broad concept is precisely what is liked, and less-like, about the fair.

In the absence of any hard-hitting rules on what can be brought, dealers responded with varied, accessible, unfamiliar – and therefore attention-grabbing – works. Scientific formulae on blackboards (Alejandro Gijarro, Tristan Hoare, London), interpretations of African hairstyles (Okhai Ojfolere and Gary Stephens at Omenka Gallery, Lagos) and even mock stained-glass windows made with cocktail sticks and showing scenes from the popular cartoon “South Park” (Reecie, Triumph, Moscow) were all available at Art14. Striking sculptures (La Huy’s Piece of Perception and Transformation, 2013, at Primo Marella, Milan; Sokari Douglas Camp’s All That Glitters, 2013, at ArtHouse, Lagos) and artist projects added to a generally lively atmosphere.

Regulars on the fair’s scene, noted least the experts that the fair brought in via its associated Global Private Museums Summit, greatly appreciated the chance to see something new, for once.

One to watch

An older star rises in the East

While much of the art at Art14 was youthful and experimental, the fair also included works by older artists, particularly those from Asia, who are lesser known on the auction circuit. Pearl Lam brought five works by the Chinese abstract artist Zhu Jinhui (Beers 1954), who was a member of the “Stars” (Xingjing) avant-garde group, alongside his better-known contemporary Ai Weiwei. But Zhu, whose sculptural paintings bridge the gap between traditional Chinese philosophy and Modern American expression, is certainly becoming a star in his own right.

Not only is Lam an important supporter (she hosted his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong during the Art Basel fair there last May), but the New York and London gallery Luxembourg & Dayan has also selected the artist as one of three in its “Thick Paint” show in New York (alongside Jean Fautrier and Franz West, to 19 April). An older star has risen in the East.