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Frieze LA: The Sequel

Did the good vibes outweigh pervasive market anxiety?



Unlike last year—when the Paramount lot suffered through a downpour—the skies were blue at Frieze LA's second edition. Pictured is Robert Longo's *Study of P.S. Palm Tree* (2019), which sold for \$90,000 from Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac's booth © Robert Longo / ARS New York, 2020

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At a moment in which art fairs have come to feel a little predictable, the second edition of [Frieze LA](#) was, well, *fun*. Presented in a unique location at the [Paramount Picture Studios](#), the Californian weather was a relief, the art on show was good, mostly, and celebrities were out in force. Given the space in LA, the tendency might have been to go big—but the fair was pleasingly manageable, with around 70 exhibitors compared with more than 200 at [Art Basel Miami Beach](#). Put simply: it's what you'd want from an LA art fair.

Having said all of that, there is a degree to which art fairs can really only distinguish themselves these days by their location, food or weather, perhaps more so than the art. Due to the conservative nature of the art market, we are tending to see similar work at whichever fair we travel to. This meant there was a lot of figurative painting on show last week in LA (like there was before that in Miami in December, in London in October, in Basel in June etc). Not all of it is in any way good or interesting. The more surprising moments tended to be sculptural, or the instances in which galleries really committed to creating unique displays.



In an age in which art fairs are becoming homogenous, the movie-lot location went down well with visitors. Above, Lorna Simpson (Hauser & Wirth) for Frieze Projects Los Angeles 2020. Photo by Casey Kelbaugh. Courtesy of Casey Kelbaugh / Frieze

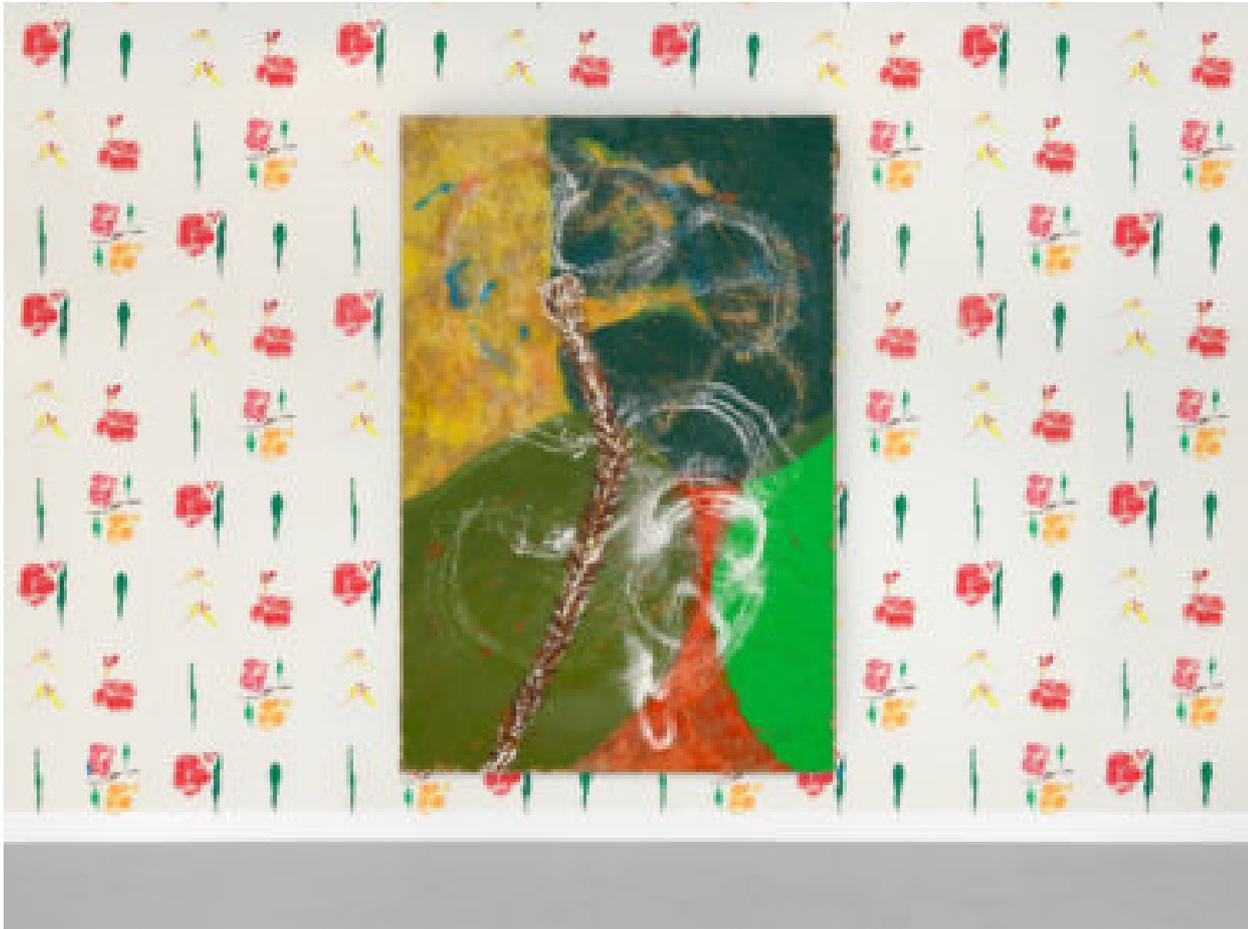
Still, that says more about the art market overall than the specific fair, and what Frieze has pulled off is no small feat, especially considering that people have for years—decades!—dismissed the possibility of a successful art fair in Los Angeles. Indeed, many before have tried and failed. There are lots of reasons why this event is proving successful, from the prosaic (the impact of Uber is not to be underestimated) to the righteous (the idea that LA is a cultural backwater compared to New York is now correctly understood to be a provincial attitude) to the financial (Frieze has the infrastructure to stage this kind of fair—and it helps that Frieze's majority owner, the entertainment group [Endeavor](#), has the heft to attract Hollywood).

So, what looked good and what didn't?

It can be hard to create a compelling cadence at an art fair, given these events comprise a somewhat random string of booths rented by dealers all vying to be distinct rather than cohesive. In the event, the displays that remain in mind a week later were those that took a different path.

At [Felix Art Fair](#)—a happily ramshackle fair with a poolside vibe, staged in hotel rooms and cabanas within the [The Hollywood](#)

Roosevelt hotel—[Thomas Solomon Art Advisory](#) presented a jaw-droppingly good selection of works spanning four decades by the Korean American [Nam June Paik](#) in a display that beautifully made the case for this artist’s singular inventiveness. Paik, also known as “the father of video art”, had worked with the legendary gallerist [Holly Solomon](#) back in the day and now her son, Thomas Solomon, was carrying on that legacy. Solomon says he works to his own rhythm as a gallerist—not taking part in every fair or even staging shows with particular frequency, because he likes to wait and stage really special projects. This was one such.



Sadie Coles HQ went all-in with a solo booth dedicated to work by young artist Alvaro Barrington. Here, *Anansi Rising* (2020) and *Garvey loves flowers too-yah punani heaven sent* (2020)

While the fun of Felix was in the younger artists on show (paintings by British artist [Lewis Hammond](#) on show with [Mexican gallery Lulu](#) were a highlight, mostly priced between \$3,000 and \$10,000), the displays of work by artists with more experience under their belts provided a great foil. Showing for the first time at Felix, [Alison Jacques Gallery](#) had two arresting solo presentations of work by [Sheila Hicks](#) and [Hannah Wilke](#).

Meanwhile, one of the fresher booths at Frieze was a wall-papered installation by hot young artist [Alvaro Barrington](#) at [Sadie Coles HQ](#). The decision to focus on a single artist was a conscious one specific to the fair, Coles said. “I wanted to do a solo project because, although it is necessary to represent your whole program at the bigger fairs, Frieze LA has a fresher profile, and LA is a community of artists: they are your audience.” The in-depth presentation of works by Barrington also marked his LA debut: so “it was exciting for him and for us”, said Coles, adding that works sold quickly at prices ranging from \$10,000 to \$85,000. Meanwhile, Coles also staged a parallel solo project with LA artist [Martine Syms](#) down the street from Frieze in collaboration with the gallery [Bridget Donahue](#), which proved to be “a terrific opportunity to showcase her new work to an invested and very receptive audience.”



Museums and models—including Kardashian sister Kendall Jenner—bought works by James Turrell at Pace. Pictured, *Centaurus, Medium Elliptical Glass* (2019) © James Turrell, courtesy Pace Gallery and Kayne Griffin Corcoran. Frieze

Fairs succeed when they draw from the uniqueness of their locality and it was a pleasure at Frieze to see so many West Coast galleries (there was a small section devoted to younger galleries from the region) and artists on show. [Pace Gallery](#) pulled out the stops with a booth dedicated to work by [James Turrell](#) that succeeded in attracting lots of attention, including from the Hollywood set. Model and Kardashian sibling, [Kendall Jenner](#) acquired an elliptical glass piece by Turrell while actor [Leonardo DiCaprio](#) (who is ever-present at most major art events with his ubiquitous hoodie and an entourage including art dealer [Joseph Nahmad](#)) enquired about an oval piece.

“Frieze Los Angeles is most definitely on the agenda for 2021,” said [Pace](#) President and CEO Marc Glimcher, adding that, in 2020, the gallery has been taking “an even more strategic approach to our art fair planning and have reduced the number of fairs we participate in so that each fair remains a special occasion”. In this competitive environment for fairs, Frieze LA looks strong.

Speaking of LA-specific events, DiCaprio was also present at a party at the hip [San Vicente Bungalows](#), co-hosted by [Pace Gallery](#) and [Kayne Griffin Corcoran](#) to launch a crowdfunding campaign for Turrell’s unfinished magnum opus, *Roden Crater* (1977-present). The monumental work is located within a volcanic cinder cone in the Painted Desert region of Northern Arizona—and the artist has been working on it for the past four decades. At the party—brilliantly DJ’d by the musician [Grimes](#) (who is also the pregnant partner of tech billionaire [Elon Musk](#))—it was announced that another tech entrepreneur, [Mark Pincus](#), had donated \$3m to support the completion of the project.

Multiplier effect

For local gallerists, Frieze certainly brought more business to town. Attendance at [LA Louver](#) for its concurrent exhibitions of work by [Alison Saar](#) and [Ed & Nancy Kienholz](#) had been “superb” said the gallery’s founding director [Peter Goulds](#). At Frieze, the gallery almost sold out its entire display of works by Saar, priced between \$15,000 to \$175,000.

The market in LA has been “continuously growing” throughout the 45 years in which the gallery has been open, said Goulds, who is bullish about the future of the city’s cultural scene: “We are in Los Angeles at the beginning of the 21st century, residing on the focal point of the Pacific Rim—just as New York City was the port of entry from Europe at the turn of the 20th

century,” he said. “And all of our artists stars are rising accordingly.”



Blum & Poe staged one of the best shows in town at its gallery, curated by Alison Gingeras. Courtesy of the artists or Estates and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo. Photo: Makenzie Goodman

The LA and NYC gallery [Blum & Poe](#) sold out its booth at Frieze—and also had one of the best shows in town: “[New Images of Man](#)”, brilliantly curated by [Alison Gingeras](#) (until 14 March). The exhibition revisits a group show of the same name at the [Museum of Modern Art](#) in New York that took place in 1959, focusing on artists grappling with the problems of the human condition (our inevitable demise), as well as the trend towards humanist painting and sculpture that emerged from the trauma of the Second World War.



There was a “dynamic energy on the Paramount lot”, said Alexander Gray, who sold the Ricardo Brey work *Scrub* (2018) in the range of \$50,000. © Ricardo Brey/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Frieze

Meanwhile, Californian artists fared well with LA gallerist [David Kordansky](#), who was busy preparing to unveil a large expansion this spring—including a third gallery—designed by [Kulapat Yantrasast](#) and his firm [wHY](#). Sales made at Frieze included two new \$500,000 paintings by LA artist [Jonas Wood](#) (who was spotted at the fair) as well as a flashe and neon on linen work by [Mary Weatherford](#) for \$310,000.

There was a “dynamic energy, on the Paramount lot and throughout Los Angeles”, said [Alexander Gray](#), founder of the eponymous New York gallery, who praised the “intimate scale” of Frieze LA, where he sold work by featured artist [Ricardo Brey](#) in the range of \$50,000, as well as works by artists including [Frank Bowling](#), [Melvin Edwards](#), [Harmony Hammond](#) and [Joan Semmel](#) with the bulk of sales under the \$200,000 range.

This second iteration of Frieze attracted “a growing number of serious collectors, curators and institutions” said European gallerist [Thaddaeus Ropac](#). The gallery sold well, with works across a range of prices (for example, [Robert Longo’s](#) *Study of P.S. Palm Tree* (2019), sold for \$90,000 to [Robert Rauschenberg’s](#) *Bowery Parade (Borealis)* (1989), sold for \$1.35m) and Ropac is already planning to return in 2021. Frieze Los Angeles, he says, “has a distinctly different attendance to, say, Frieze New York. It won’t be instead of another fair; we feel it’s worth doing an additional one.”

[David Zwirner](#) reported a similar range of sales, in terms of prices, dates and artists: from a \$45,000 painting by [Josh Smith](#) to a \$65,000 photograph by [Diane Arbus](#); a \$150,000 work by [Isa Genzken](#) to a \$1m painting by [Lisa Yuksavage](#).

[Lisson Gallery](#) came with the intention of placing major works “in Los Angeles and California-based collections, which we achieved,” said gallery Executive Director [Alex Logsdail](#), including *Electromagnetic Field* (2019) by [Allora & Calzadilla](#) for \$145,000 and [Stanley Whitney’s](#) *Angels on Sunday, Maids on Monday* (2019), \$350,000



One of the seven-figure sales at Frieze LA: Barkley L. Hendricks, *Father, Son, and...* (1969), \$1.9m at Jack Shainman Gallery © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

"I wasn't expecting the same energy as last year, being the inaugural, but my expectations were exceeded," said [Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels](#), Director at [Jack Shainman Gallery](#), where sales included *Father, Son, and...* (1969) by [Barkley Hendricks](#) for \$1.9m. "We met new people and it feels like the market in LA is growing. I was particularly struck by how many institutional and gallery shows I was desperate to see," she said, adding that the gallery is already "looking forward to next year. I fully believe it will only continue to build."

Both Frieze and Felix did great jobs in establishing themselves as distinct and interesting art market events. But whether the palm trees, sunny climes and optimistic vibes in abundance in Los Angeles last week are enough to shift the deeper residual mood of gloom, doom and anxiety that pervades the art world (and broader society) is not yet clear. No art fair is an island, after all. The world is changing fast and it is unclear what the future holds. Right now, it seems likely we will all be back in LA next spring. But, then again, we said the same thing about Hong Kong last year.