

Tech Art Down, Tech Money Up at Seattle Art Fair Debut

BY MOSTAFA HEDDAYA | JULY 31, 2015



The Seattle Art Fair.
(Sofia Lee)

SEATTLE — The photographer from the New York Times, zooming in on the Plexiglas enclosure housing Addie Wagenknecht’s drone-painting studio by the entrance to the Seattle Art Fair, had a problem: Wagenknecht was temporarily absent. One name-drop of his employer, however, and the zoolike enclosure was buzzing with live-action quadrocopter formalism. The lensman from the paper of record, boat-shod and critter-belted, had his shot. Fortunately, the rest of the scene at last night’s thronged opening was less incongruous, and the Pacific Northwest’s first major art fair made a promising debut.

Situated in the cavernous convention center appended to the Seahawks’s downtown CenturyLink Field, the fair is a collaboration between Brooklyn-based Art Market Productions, which puts on Texas Contemporary and five other fairs nationally, and Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen’s Vulcan real estate concern. Seattle’s most eligible 62-year-old bachelor — and a prolific art collector — Allen exchanged pleasantries with well-wishers (“I am exhausted”) as he padded around the VIP opening, his comically long slacks kissing the floor, a picture of tech-mogul chic.

As art fairs have metastasized worldwide, the savvier ones have sought to distinguish themselves in two ways: by ensuring local flavor in the gallery mix and by including putatively noncommercial curated elements. Both methods have been employed here, with varying degrees of success.



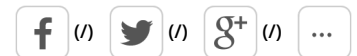
First, in terms of boosting the home team, 13 of the 62 booths are from Seattle. This is markedly below the 25 to 30 percent participation that Art Market Productions chief Max Fishko told me the event was shooting for, but Seattle's gallery scene is thin, and all the key names, like Mariane Ibrahim and James Harris galleries, were there. Crucially, tech pandering was kept to a minimum: Only one booth featured anything related to 3D printing. Asked about Silicon Valley Contemporary's programmer-friendly San Jose outing last year, Fishko laughed. "Those guys are idiots," he said. "The reality is, you can't put yourself in a situation where you're taking some of the most intelligent, creative people in the world and try to foist less than stellar ideas on them. They're not gonna buy it."

Fishko's approach convinced at least one authority on the subject. Steven Sacks, of Manhattan's Bitforms gallery, had turned down overtures from the Silicon Valley fair. But the Seattle fair, said Sacks, whose gallery was responsible for the Wagenknecht drone enclosure, "felt more authentic in terms of reaching an audience that is more tech savvy." Dominated by vanilla postwar and contemporary art — Allan Stone Projects' stellar Wayne Thiebaud presentation puts to rest the idea that "vanilla" is a slur here — the Seattle Art Fair seems to have anchored in the safe monocultural harbors of the global collecting class.

Second, with regard to curatorial elements, the fair included some off-site efforts organized by local figures and an impressively expansive on-site project curated by Leeza Ahmady, who directs New York's Asian Contemporary Art Week. Titled "Thinking Currents," this occupied a substantial corner section of the exhibition hall and comprised mostly video works, by artists from the Pacific Rim "and beyond!" (exclamation point theirs). Although the curatorial brief, printed as a wall text by the entrance, was inscrutably vague ("The exhibition refrains from engaging in overarching statements in an effort to yield fresh and nuanced contextual stratum [sic]"), many of the 25 works on view were excellent, with standouts including Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook's "Death Seminar B," 2015, Wael Shawky's "Dictums Manquia I," 2014, and Monira Al Qadiri's "Soap," 2014. The last, in which maids are inserted into scenes from Gulf television soap operas, echoed the strategies of the artist Ramiro Gomez, whose service worker luxury-advertising interventions occupied much of the Los Angeles gallery Charlie James's booth nearby.

The question is: Can the regional collector base support an annual fair of this caliber? The presence of blue-chip names like Pace, Gagosian, and David Zwirner is a vote of confidence. Representatives of all three, however, were mum about sales at the end of last night's opening. A director at Pace spoke of the gallery's West Coast ambitions (it did a Menlo Park pop-up last year), while a counterpart at Zwirner expressed pleasure with the reception of his "very Zwirner" (featuring Carol Bove, Dan Flavin, Wolfgang Tillmans, Yayoi Kusama, and Richard Pettibon, among others) booth. Local press coverage of the fair is sure to stress the crowds attending — close to five thousand came yesterday, with lines out the door, and 16,000 are expected through the weekend — yet the tangled matter of economics remains.

[View Slideshow \(/photo-galleries/highlights-from-the-seattle-art-fair\)](#)



[Contemporary Arts \(/visual-arts/contemporary-arts\)](#)

[News \(/visual-arts/news-0\)](#)

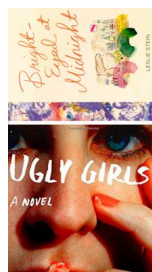
[Fairs \(/visual-arts/fairs\)](#)

[Visual Arts \(/visual-arts\)](#)

[Seattle Art Fair \(/tags/seattle-art-fair\)](#)

[Mostafa Heddaya \(/tags/mostafa-heddaya\)](#)

RECOMMENDED



(/news/story/1212486/bonhams-la-auction-of-california-and-western-paintings-and)

AUCTIONS

California and Western Paintings and Sculpture at Bonhams



(/news/story/1207788/summer-books-from-huma-bhaba-to-anicka-yi-what-are-artists)

FEATURES

What Are Artists Reading This Summer?

(/news/story/1207788/summer-books-from-huma-bhaba-to-anicka-yi-what-are-artists)

(/news/story/1212316/british-museum-uses-virtual-reality-china-falls-behind-us-in)

FEATURES

Checklist: British Museum Uses Virtual Reality, and More

(/news/story/1212316/british-museum-uses-virtual-reality-china-falls-behind-us-in)

MOST POPULAR

- MOST READ (/NEWS/STORY/1209834/TECH-ART-DOWN-TECH-MONEY-UP-AT-SEATTLE-ART-FAIR-DEBUT | NEWS/STORY/1208993/5-MUST-SEE-GALLERY-SHOWS-RYAN-STEADMAN-E1027-AND-MORE | NEWS/STORY/1207414/A-REVEALING-MEMOIR-FROM-BEYOND-LISTEN-TO-ME-MARLON | NEWS/STORY/1209598/CARIBBEAN-DESIGN-ACCORDING-TO-MEILING | NEWS/STORY/1208244/KAWAII-MONSTER-CAFE-OPENS-IN-HARAJUKU | NEWS/STORY/1207397/VIDEO-DOUGLAS-KIRKLAND-A-LIFE-IN-PICTURES | NEWS/STORY/1209074/CONTEMPORARY-ARTISTS-REDEFINE-THE-PORTRAIT-AT-LONDONS-VA) #QT-ARTICLE_DETAIL_POPULAR=2#QT-ARTICLE_DETAIL_POPULAR
- 1 Tech Art Down, Tech Money Up at Seattle Art Fair Debut (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1209834/tech-art-down-tech-money-up-at-seattle-art-fair-debut>)
 - 2 5 Must-See Gallery Shows in New York (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1208993/5-must-see-gallery-shows-ryan-steadman-e1027-and-more>)
 - 3 A Revealing Memoir From Beyond: "Listen to Me Marlon" (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1207414/a-revealing-memoir-from-beyond-listen-to-me-marlon>)
 - 4 Caribbean Design, According to Meiling (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1209598/caribbean-design-according-to-meiling>)
 - 5 Kawaii Monster Café Opens in Harajuku (<http://enjp.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1208244/kawaii-monster-cafe-opens-in-harajuku>)
 - 6 VIDEO: Douglas Kirkland — A Life in Pictures (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1207397/video-douglas-kirkland-a-life-in-pictures>)
 - 7 Contemporary Artists Redefine the Portrait at London's V&A (<http://uk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1209074/contemporary-artists-redefine-the-portrait-at-londons-va>)

FOLLOW US



(<https://www.facebook.com/ARTINFO?ref=hl>)



(<https://twitter.com/artinfodotcom>)



(<https://plus.google.com/106519335585920525288/posts>)



(https://instagram.com/blouin_artinfo)

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTERS

[About Us \(/about-us\)](#) [Contact Us \(/contact-us\)](#) [Subscriptions \(/subscriptions\)](#) [Advertise \(/advertising\)](#) [Jobs \(http://jobs.artinfo.com\)](http://jobs.artinfo.com)

[Artists \(http://www.blouinartinfo.com/galleryguide-artists\)](http://www.blouinartinfo.com/galleryguide-artists) [Site Map \(/htmlsitemap\)](/htmlsitemap) [RSS \(/artinfo-rss-feeds\)](/artinfo-rss-feeds)

[Google+ \(https://plus.google.com/106519335585920525288\)](https://plus.google.com/106519335585920525288) [BlouinArtinfo.com \(http://www.blouinartinfo.com\)](http://www.blouinartinfo.com)

© 2015, Louise Blouin Media. All rights reserved. [Terms \(/user-agreement\)](#) | [Privacy \(/privacy-policy\)](#)