

Visual Arts
The Seattle Times

High art meets deep pockets at Seattle Art Fair

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📷 1 of 22 | Elvis is still larger-than-life in Scott Fife's piece keeping watch at the Seattle Art Fair, on Thursday evening, July 30, 2015. The... (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times) **More** ✓

Major art galleries such as Pace, Gagosian and David Zwirner join Northwest art dealers at Seattle Art Fair, hoping to lure buyers from the area's wealthy entrepreneurs and the Pacific Rim.



By **Tricia Romano**

Seattle Times staff reporter

A giant 12-foot-tall beach ball and a food truck the color of the sunset were the first indications that something different was happening at CenturyLink Field Event Center Thursday night.

The ball, an artwork by Negar Farajiani, was presented by the Seattle-based Mariane Ibrahim Gallery. The truck, presented by James Cohan Gallery, was Brooklyn artist Spencer Finch's ode to summer, and served up free ice cream, the hue a synthesis of pinks and oranges. The pieces were on display as part of the [inaugural Seattle Art Fair](#), a first-time venture backed by billionaire Paul Allen's company Vulcan Inc. and staged by [Art Market Productions](#), a company that has put on prestigious art fairs in San Francisco, New York and Miami.



Seattle painter Kelly Lyles makes her own artistic statement with a bold, colorful headpiece worn while visiting various gallery spaces at the Seattle Art Fair. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

Landing like a spaceship next to Seattle Seahawks stadium, the Art Fair, with its collection of 62 far-flung galleries, including three of the world's largest — [Pace](#), [Gagosian](#) and [David Zwirner](#) — seemed to impose itself onto a city that doesn't have a formidable international presence in the art world.

But, said Jeffrey Deitch, the former director of The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and former owner of the cutting-edge New York gallery Deitch Projects, “It’s a natural place for an art fair,” especially with its rich public art, big-name private collectors (such as Allen and Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz) and small but well-curated museums.

The public seemed to agree. According to Art Market Productions, some 4,000 came Thursday night for the opening, and by 8 p.m. a line had snaked around the block. As of midday Friday, 17,000 advance tickets had been sold for the weekend. (Most went for \$20 apiece; VIP packages, benefiting the nonprofit artist-support organization Artist Trust, sold for \$150.)

Inside, local gallerist Greg Kucera is given prominent placement; his booth, featuring work by Seattle artist [Peter Millett](#), is one of two which attendees see first upon entering the building.

The other is the renowned Pace Gallery, displaying a piece of deconstructed Slinkys by New York artist Tara Donovan, and works from teamLab, a group from Japan whose interactive digital installation of a waterfall was projected on the Grand Palais in Paris earlier this year.

Asia, Pacific Rim ties

The Art Market team was free to choose galleries but received one directive from Allen: to highlight the region’s connection to Asia and the Pacific Rim. The fair features a large exhibition of videos and new media curated by Leeza Ahmady, the director of Asian Contemporary Art Week in New York, as well as many Asian galleries, including the South Korean gallery, Gana Art, where a sculpture by Yi Hwan-Kwon, which played with the three dimensions, proved popular with the crowds.

As one of the nearest major art fairs to the Far East, ArtNet called the Seattle event “the gateway fair to collectors in Asia.”



Shen-Shen Wu, left, with 101 / Exhibit gallery of Los Angeles, discusses this oversized oil portrait with Janelle Zaro. Ian Ingram painted the 76-by-47-inch piece, on display at CenturyLink Field Event Center. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

Getting acquainted

For the outside gallerists, the fair offered the opportunity to get to know their collectors better.

“People don’t buy art from places,” said New York-based gallerist [James Cohan](#). “They buy art from people.”

Robert Goff, the director of David Zwirner Gallery, said the goal was “to meet new people and/or to solidify relationships. A lot of what happens in the art world ends up based on personal relationships,” he said. “That’s why we are here.”

On Wednesday night, David Zwirner Gallery hosted a party at Canlis restaurant, with representatives from Chihuly Studio, the Lumiere Group, which handles the [Microsoft Art Collection](#), and Christie’s Auction House, as well as collectors and artists.

Seattle is home to a few of the world's richest people — Microsoft co-founders Allen and Bill Gates; former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, and Amazon's founder and CEO [Jeff Bezos](#). Many of them are formidable collectors, including the family of the late developer and philanthropist Bagley Wright, who built the Space Needle, and Barney Ebsworth, a retired tycoon who relocated here from St. Louis and brought with him [one of the world's most astonishing private collections](#) of American Modernism and American masters.

Lots of money

A lot of money is at stake. At Zwirner, drawings by Marcel Dzama had a tag for \$10,000, said Goff, and a painting by Luc Tuymans had an asking price of \$2 million. On Thursday, the gallery sold an Oscar Murillo painting and a Christopher Williams photograph for an undisclosed price. Over at Gagosian's booth, works by [Richard Serra](#) and Takashi Murakami were for sale — but were so famous they apparently didn't need name cards, let alone prices. (For perspective, a sculpture by [Murakami once sold for about \\$15 million](#).)

The booths themselves cost \$26 a square foot to rent, a veritable bargain compared to other fairs (which can be more than double that) — made possible in part by Allen's connection to CenturyLink (home of the Seattle Seahawks, which he owns). Add in the cost of staff, travel, and shipment of art, and expenses can reach six figures at [bigger events](#).

A major gallery like Zwirner can afford to participate in as many as 17 fairs a year. But for a smaller gallery, a new art fair is a leap of faith.

"I'm not as wealthy as Larry Gagosian or David Zwirner or the people who run Pace," said Kucera. "They can come here as a vanity show if they choose to — I don't think they did, I think they brought their A-game for this. But for the galleries that are here, we don't have that kind of wealth."

An untapped market

In addition to the known collectors, the untapped market intrigued the gallery owners.

"There's a whole other group of people — a lot of new tech money — and maybe some of them are interested," said Goff. "I don't think we see a lot of those people in our gallery ... If they start to ask us about our artists, I think for us that for us would be a good result."

There was plenty of buzz from afar, too. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, director of the Frye Art Museum, said she'd received phone calls from far-flung associates coming to town from Los Angeles, China and New York. National and international publications, including The New York Times, [Artnet](#), [Bloomberg](#) and [Architectural Digest](#) covered the fair, with some sending correspondents. At the Pioneer Square watering hole Damn the Weather on Wednesday night, Oscar winner Ben Affleck hobnobbed.

For Seattle's fair, nabbing the participation of Gagosian, Pace and Zwirner was a particular coup, said Jerry Saltz, senior art critic for New York magazine. "That got everybody's attention," he said. "If the art world is high school with money, you have the football quarterback, the homecoming queen now coming to your art fair. All of a sudden the rest of the high school is hysterical. 'I've gotta go to this!' "

And for local artists ...

Seattle Art Fair

11 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday, noon-6 p.m. Sunday, CenturyLink Field Events Center, 800 Occidental Ave., Seattle; \$20 (seattleartfair.com).

Out of Sight

Noon-8 p.m. Saturday (21+ after 5 p.m.), 10-6 p.m. Sunday, King Street Station, 303 S. Jackson St., 3rd floor, Seattle; \$10 (vital5productions.com).

But one thing lacking amid the buzz: Discussion of Seattle artists themselves.

"I don't know about the artists from Seattle. I don't show any artists from here," Cohan said, adding, "I'll be interested to be able to look at the fair."

Aiming to address that issue, [Greg Lundgren](#), an artist and curator who co-owns the art bar The Hideout, created [Out of Sight](#) with three other curators, an exhibition featuring more than 100 artists from the Pacific Northwest. At the King Street Station a few blocks away from CenturyLink, it is also running through the weekend.

"In the beginning, it was feeling like a lot of New York galleries selling art to people in Seattle and not really giving the spotlight to local artists that I think our city deserves," Lundgren said Thursday night. "There's a lot of attention on our cultural landscape and it seemed like it would have been an opportunity missed if you didn't put forward a lot of the talent we have."



After the preview event Thursday evening, our photographer shot his own still life, with stemware. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

For many, it wasn't an either/or proposition: Many of the artists and gallerists participating in the Seattle Art Fair also had works at Out of Sight.

"The richer and more complex an ecosystem is for a city and for artists, the whole community benefits," said Birnie Danzker, the Frye director.

Amelia Manderscheid, an associate vice president at Christie's, called Out of Sight "a natural response by the artistic community here in Seattle to showcase their own artwork. All boats rise when there is such a strong positive response to the start of the something new."

To wit, Thursday night the restaurateur Linda Derschang purchased two pieces by Seattle artists: one by [Amanda Manitach](#) at the Seattle Art Fair; and, another by [Steven Miller](#) at Out of Sight.

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