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In a Busy Month for Art Fairs, FIAC Counts Collectors Among Its Treasures

By **Ted Loos**

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Galerie Lelong's booth includes Joan Miró's "Oiseau Solaire," a sculpture in bronze that the gallery's owner, Jean Frémon, called "important and rare."

Successio Miro/ADAGP, via Galerie Lelong & Co.

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The world's art collectors, busily acquiring treasures, may not always realize that they are hot commodities themselves.

Collectors are greatly sought after by art fairs, because without them, there is no one to buy all those paintings, sculptures and room-size installations. And that means no event.

As fairs have proliferated beyond anyone's wildest dreams, patrons have ever more choices. A partial list for October — one of the busiest fair months of the year — includes not only Frieze London and Frieze Masters, but also Art Toronto, Tefaf New York Fall and the Korean International Art Fair.

So how do collectors decide which ones to attend and which ones to skip?

The International Contemporary Art Fair, or FIAC, has the attention and patronage of the New York collector Carole Server because it is a “feel-good fair,” she said. The Parisian event will stage its 45th edition at the Grand Palais from Thursday to Sunday.

“What’s not to like?” asked Ms. Server, who is a trustee of the Bronx Museum of the Arts. “It’s Paris in October, with great museums, food and shopping. And the Grand Palais is one of the most beautiful venues for looking at art.”



The Bonny Poon gallery is showing a disemboweled 2003 Volkswagen Jetta, covered in text, with other works hung inside and around it.

FPBJPC and Bonny Poon, Paris

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Ms. Server, who last year purchased works by Eddie Martinez and Pieter Schoolwerth at FIAC, added that she prefers it to the Frieze fairs: Because they are two weeks apart, some non-European collectors who have to travel to the Continent find themselves choosing between Paris and London.

FIAC has been thriving of late. This year it is attracting about 195 galleries from 27 countries, and about one-third of the participants are French.

The fair has maxed out its envelope and will not be increasing its dealer list anytime soon.

“We don’t have any more capacity in the Grand Palais,” said Jennifer Flay, FIAC’s director. “Our galleries would all like more space.” She added that the issue might be alleviated after the building undergoes a renovation that is expected to be finished in 2023.



Jennifer Flay, FIAC’s general director, has had a major role in determining the shape of the event since 2004. MaximeTétard/Les Graphiquants

Ms. Flay has had a major role in determining FIAC’s shape since 2004, first as artistic director and now as general director, and she said that striking a balance between veteran dealers and newcomers was a core part of her mission.

In the veteran category are the Paula Cooper Gallery, Gladstone Gallery and Hauser & Wirth. But Ms. Flay emphasized “the extraordinary selection of young galleries” this time around, some of which are in the Lafayette sector, for emerging dealers.

One of those galleries, Bonny Poon of Paris, is only one year old, and FIAC will be its first major fair.

Ms. Poon, an artist who runs the gallery with Nathaniel Monjaret, said her booth was a collaboration of the “secret society” known as FPBJPC (which stands for Franco Polish Black Jeans Porn Club, among other things) and the artist Jim Joe.

Like so many contemporary artworks, it is complicated: The center of the booth is a disemboweled 2003 Volkswagen Jetta, missing its engine and other crucial parts, shipped from New York.

The car will be covered in text, and other works will be hung inside and around it. The vehicle’s journey to Paris

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and presence in the Grand Palais can be seen as a parable of “contemporary art’s unrelenting drive,” Ms. Poon said, as well as showing how art fairs are just “a conglomerate of pop-ups.”

FIAC also serves up more traditional art. Paris’s Galerie Lelong, which also has a branch in New York, will be showing works by the modern masters Pierre Alechinsky, Jean Dubuffet and Joan Miró.

“The challenge for a gallery is to be immediately recognizable, and yet not the same every year,” said Lelong’s owner, Jean Frémon. “We wanted the presentation to be strong and simple, and things we’re known for.”

The booth includes Miró’s “Oiseau Solaire,” (1966-97), an “important and rare” sculpture in bronze, Mr. Frémon said, chosen in part because there is a retrospective of the artist’s work in another part of the Grand



Robert Colescott’s “Diana’s Secret (The Orchid Corsage),” 1976. Blum & Poe is offering works by Mr. Colescott (1925-2009). 2018 Estate of Robert Colescott/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Palais.

Lelong has been participating FIAC for years. “Like other fairs, with the exception of Art Basel, it has had ups and downs,” Mr. Frémon said. “At one point we were considering stopping being in it, but it improved again.”

As at many fairs, some dealers choose to focus on just one artist. New York’s Anton Kern, for instance, will show the work of Nicole Eisenman. Her four bronzes on view include “Maquette: Standing Man” (2018), and they will be displayed with two sculptures in aluminum.

Blum & Poe, which has branches in Los Angeles, New York and Tokyo, offers works on paper and paintings by Robert Colescott (1925-2009).

The painter is perhaps best known for “George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page From an American History Textbook” (1975), depicting the pioneering black scientist and inventor in the famous boat-astride pose ascribed to the first American president.

The gallery represents the Colescott estate and presents him with an eye to a retrospective scheduled for fall 2019 at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati.

“A show like that can move the needle a bit,” Matt Bangser, a partner in Blum & Poe, said of interest in Colescott.

“His work resonates,” Mr. Bangser added. “Through his life he was intent at looking at the American experience, not just the African-American experience. It’s a cross-section of stories.”

Blum & Poe has attended FIAC for the past four years and has usually done solo shows.

“We don’t have a gallery in Europe and we find that a fair is a nice opportunity to highlight an artist that people may not see otherwise,” Mr. Bangser said. “And at a moment of art fair fatigue, it can be good to focus on one artist.”

That fatigue is one big reason that Ms. Flay has trained much of her energy on Hors les Murs, or Outside the Walls, a series of programs that take place all over the city.

“Paris has these beautiful patrimonial sites; it’s very unusual for a fair,” she said. “We’ve got these incredible features in a country that is steeped in culture.”

Hors les Murs tries to build on that foundation without gilding the lily. In collaboration with the Louvre, 30 works will be placed outside in the Tuileries Gardens, by artists scheduled to include Robert Indiana, Alicja Kwade, Per Kirkeby, Alexander Calder and Richard Long.

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As part of Hors les Murs, or Outside the Walls, 30 works will be placed in the Tuileries Gardens, including Franz West's "Dorit." Marc Domage

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Over at the Musée National Eugène Delacroix, the British artist Rebecca Warren will show two sculptures. (Delacroix, a 19th-century painter, is currently the subject of a large retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is co-organized with the Louvre.)

On the Place Vendôme, the provocative duo known as Elmgreen & Dragset will address climate change with an installation called “To Whom It May Concern.”

Those locales have all been activated by FIAC projects in the past. This year, the Place de la Concorde joins the party for the first time as host to five installations, which Ms. Flay called a “village of nomadic architecture.” Two of the structures are by Jean Prouvé and one each are by Kengo Kuma, Claude Parent and Jean Maneval.

Ms. Flay said she wanted to connect one of them in particular, Prouvé’s “École Provisoire de Villejuif” (1957), to current events well beyond the typical concerns of an upscale art fair. The temporary school, made of glass, steel and wood, was meant to be easily built, dismantled and moved.

“Some of Prouvé’s work was done for displaced people after World War II,” Ms. Flay said. “There’s something so current and vital in the concept,” regarding issues of migration and sustainable development. “We should be keeping these ideas in mind in today’s world.”