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Art Basel fairs go online and Marron collection is split up

Plus, string of sales at Frieze LA; Brexit fears boost art exports to £9bn; three superstar Victorians hit the market

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Derrick Adams' display at Frieze LA

Melanie Gerlis FEBRUARY 20 2020 0

Art Basel is to offer online viewing rooms that coincide with its fairs in Basel, Miami and Hong Kong. The initiative was fast-tracked to March, as an alternative to its Hong Kong fair, which was cancelled earlier this month because of the coronavirus outbreak.

All galleries that had been accepted to the Hong Kong fair can show in the virtual viewing rooms (March 20-25, with two preview days). This edition comes at no cost to participants in view of the fact that it is a first run — which also seems right, given that only 75 per cent of their fair fees were refunded.

Despite the forced schedule, it's the right time for such a platform — though not a risk-free decision. Many in the art market will recall the online-only VIP Art Fair that was launched in 2011 (it was run by Noah Horowitz, now director of Art Basel in the Americas): it failed spectacularly on the back of technical glitches. Such problems should not arise now that buying art online is more familiar, but the logical conclusion is that two of the expanding, traditional, physical art fair are numbered.

It's a tricky balance to strike, not least because the Hong Kong fair was cancelled precisely because of its physical location. Marc Spiegler, global director of Art Basel, stresses that the online platform is complementary to the real-life events, rather than a replacement. "In every aspect of our lives, everything that is not a pure commodity purchase is reinforced by personal interaction. That's especially true when it comes to unique artworks in a market still heavily based on trust," he says.

James Turrell's 'Glass' series at Frieze LA © Pace Gallery and Kayne Griffin Corcoran

"Frieze Los Angeles really brandished its West Coast swagger, with a rich diversity of work and visitors," says Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, founder of New York's Salon 94 gallery. Entertainment royalty at the fair's second edition (February 13-16) included Charlize Theron, Jennifer Lopez, Natalie Portman and Kendall Jenner — the *Kardashians* TV star bought a work in the American light and space artist James Turrell (through Pace Gallery and Kayne Griffin Corcoran). Multiple sales were reported by Blum & Poe, including a painting by Mark Grotjahn ($600,000) and, closer to Frieze LA's sweet-spot price range, works by Henry Taylor ($100,000-$120,000) and by Los Angeles artist Aaron Garber-Maikovska ($75,000).

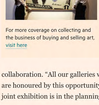
Hauser & Wirth sold all five of its new paintings by Avery Singer ($85,000 to $495,000) and, at Salon 94, all 14 geometric portraits by the Baltimore-born Derrick Adams ($35,000-$100,000) sold from a colourful booth designed by the artist. Adams' recently opened exhibition at Luxembourg & Dayan in London has also already sold out (seven works priced at $120,000 each, until April 4).

Picasso's 'Femme au beret et la collerette' (1937) © Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Courtesy the Donald B. Marron Family Collection, Acquavella Galleries, Gagosian, and Pace Gallery

In a surprise move, the widow and family of the late Wall Street banker Donald Marron have consigned his collection of Modern and contemporary art, reportedly worth $400m, to three galleries — Pace Gallery, Gagosian and Acquavella — rather than take the usual, and expected, auction house route.

Marron, whose roles included chief executive of PaineWebber Inc, founded the bank's corporate art collection (which became the UBS Art Collection). He was also a longtime trustee and former president of the board of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Art Market



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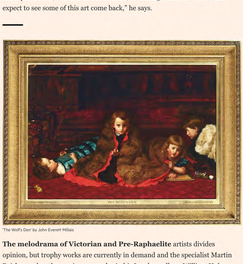
His collection consists of more than 300 pieces of 20th-century art, including Pablo Picasso's "Femme au beret et la collerette" (1937) and "Femme assise (Jacqueline)" (1962), along with Mark Rothko's "Number 22 (Reds)" (1957). Important contemporary artists are also in the mix. The galleries aren't confirming how the works will be divided up or exactly what is being sold, but the Marron family's decision has brought out a rare spirit of collaboration. "All our galleries were involved in building the collection and we are honoured by this opportunity," says Marc Glimcher, president of Pace. A joint exhibition is in the planning for May.

Fears over the implications of Brexit are likely to be behind the dramatic spike in art exports from the UK in 2019, finds the art market analyst and commentator Ivan Macquisten. The value of fine art and antiques leaving the country, as recorded by the customs authorities, rose by 80 per cent to £9bn, its largest increase since 2010, when exports rose 58.1 per cent. "The numbers aren't everything, but this is raw data that for 20 years has always proved illustrative of general trends," Macquisten says. Anecdotal evidence from dealers and auction house specialists also suggests collectors have been moving art out of the country, to avoid any possible additional tariffs.

Leaving Britain: striking surge in art exports from the UK



Source: HMRC
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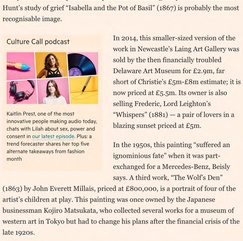
Macquisten doesn't see this as the death knell for the UK market and notes that the value of imports into the UK has remained stable (up 1 per cent to £2.1bn). "If there was a market crash, these would have fallen. Money tends to go where the expertise lies, which is still in London, so if things settle down I would expect to see some of this art come back," he says.



'The Wolf's Den' by John Everett Millais

The melodrama of Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite artists divides opinion, but trophy works are currently in demand and the specialist Martin Beisly now has three prime examples in his London gallery. William Holman Hunt's study of grief "Isabella and the Pot of Basil" (1867) is probably the most recognisable image.

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In 2014, this smaller-sized version of the work in Newcastle's Laing Art Gallery was sold by the then financially troubled Delaware Art Museum for £2.9m, far short of Christie's £3m-£8m estimate; it is now priced at £5.5m. Its owner is also selling Frederic, Lord Leighton's "Whispers" (1881) — a pair of lovers in a blazing sunset priced at £5m.

In the 1950s, this painting "suffered an ignominious fate" when it was part-exchanged for a Mercedes-Benz, Beisly says. A third work, "The Wolf's Den" (1863) by John Everett Millais, priced at £800,000, is a portrait of four of the artist's children at play. This painting was once owned by the Japanese businessman Kojiro Matsukata, who collected several works for a museum of western art in Tokyo but had to change his plans after the financial crisis of the late 1920s.

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