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ARTS / GALLERIES

## Looking Back at the Dallas Art Fair — the First-Timers Tell All

Record Number of Visitors in Year 10 and More to Come

BY CATHERINE D. ANSPON // 05.07.18

As Dallas Arts Month recedes in the rear view window, we reflect upon Year X of the event at its epicenter — **Dallas Art Fair**, which reached a crescendo this spring, drawing a record 17,500 visitors.

*Artsy* to *Artnet* and *Artnews* all reported upon the 2018 Fair, replete with buzzed about sales, top artworks, the players. New York's prime gallerists from **Paul Kasmin** to **Galerie Lelong** reported intense interest and acquisitions made. At Kasmin, for example, a \$225K **Lee Krasner**, and a \$95K **Ian Davenport** canvas, sold in advance of the Dallas Museum of Art's solo for the artist next September, were typical of this collector-driven fair where buyers were savvy and aware.

For our Fair recap, we went with the human-side, and chose Texas-centric, surveying three first-time exhibitors — two Dallas gallerists and one New York City dealer with hometown roots — about the experience of being among the 90-some vetted dealers making it into the 10th edition.

And we caught up with a first-time Fair visitor, armed with a PhD in art history who heads a university department, to discern her impressions of the Dallas Art Fair brand.

## The Big Risk

For Dallas gallerist **Liliana Bloch**, the Fair loomed as an opportunity — and a financial risk at \$10K — for an emerging dealer hitting the five-year mark, finally attracting serious collector interest from Dallas regulars on the *Artnews* Top 200 Collector list.

Bloch took a leap of faith, which she felt was necessary to attract exposure to her artists. Her gamble, and gut, paid off.

In an email to *PaperCity*, the dealer revealed how the Fair had seriously elevated her game.



BLOCH SAYS, “OUR FIRST YEAR PARTICIPATING AND WE REACHED A MILESTONE: THE FIRST DALLAS GALLERY TO SELL WORK TO THE DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART THROUGH THE DALLAS ART FAIR FOUNDATION ACQUISITION PROGRAM. AND THAT WORK WAS BY A WOMAN! **ALICIA HENRY** STUNNED THE AUDIENCES WITH HER UNFORGETTABLE PORTRAITS.”

“I was told that the decision on Henry’s piece was unanimous. This made the acquisition extra special.”

Bloch’s booth was designed to dialogue with a gamut of offerings from her stable, including the disparate aesthetics of artists **Leigh Merrill**, **Ryan Goolsby**, and **Bret Slater**. A video was also part of the experience, described by the gallerist: “**Bogdan P. K. Perzyński**’s 34 minutes of gorgeous, and melodic sounds of the last uncut European forest located in the border of Poland and Belorussia (Belarus)”

Bloch singled out a neighbor, putting to rest the notion that the high stakes world of art fairs is without civility.

“It was a pleasure to share our outside wall with the awesome team at **McClain Gallery** [in from Houston]. **Leigh Merrill**’s “Flower Variation” series looked fantastic next to their **CoopDPS Milano** wallpaper. It proved that great pieces don’t compete but activate any space. [McClain director] **Erin Dorn** was the best neighbor we could have.”

The dealer also heaped praise on the homegrown Fair — co-founded by independent curator **Chris Byrne** and Dallas real estate developer and downtown advocate **John Sughrue** in 2009 — which has operated for a decade at a decidedly non-convention center space:



Fashion Industry Gallery, in the heart of downtown's Dallas Arts District. (Byrne stepped away after year nine, to concentrate on curatorial projects, especially championing the work of visionary artist **Susan Te Kahurangi King**.) The Fair director, **Kelly Cornell**, rose through the ranks, from her start as intern in 2011 to taking over officially as Fair director in 2017. Artist-curator **Brandon Kennedy** heads exhibitor relations.

Bloch says, "Kudos to all and each one of the staff members at the DAF. They were helpful, efficient, and dedicated to connect us with art networks from all over!"

Finally, the Dallas gallerist revealed the secret behind the avant-garde look of her booth: "Our multicolored walls were a happy accident. We ran out of white paint right before the fair, and our trip to Home Depot took us to the paint section, where the colored gradations, and transitions inspired us to honor each piece with their own hue.

"So we had a booth with vertical stripes of black, bubble-gum pink, off white, sanguine red, light blue, and mint green."

## A Feminist and an Iconoclast

Another Dallas dealer, and first-time exhibitor to DAF, found success. The gallerist did so with a challenging program that devoted an entire booth to a decade of work by an under-known California talent.

The artist in question was unique in having sound-based work at the Fair.

**Bivins Gallery** unveiled a solo exhibition, "Illuminations," by **Mary Hull Webster**, who came in from Northern California to meet collectors at the booth of **Karen** and **Michael Bivins**.

Karen Bivins, reached via email, told *PaperCity* about the Dallas debut for Webster's electronica, which also marked the artist's first major show in Texas.



"MARY [HULL WEBSTER] CREATES ALL OF HER OWN SOUNDS, AND EACH LIGHT STACK HAD ITS OWN TRACK, WHICH GENERATED A HUM — YOU FELT LIKE YOU WERE ENTERING A SANCTUARY WHEN YOU WALKED INTO OUR [BOOTH] SPACE."

Bivins says, "The light stacks, light boxes, and aluminum panels featured in the show ranged in date from 2008-2018, and averaged in price from \$20,000-25,000. We had many curators, art consultants, and museum directors come by. We sold a variety of works that went to both Dallas collectors, two of which were prominent, and one out of state collector."

Bivins is optimistic about the future potential sparked by the Fair: “We did not have any museum purchases, however multiple museums expressed interest in Mary’s work. Several international galleries also expressed an interest in representing her.”

## A Homecoming

Meanwhile, another narrative signaled a homecoming. SMU grad **Olivia Smith** — director of NYC-based, first-time exhibitor **Magenta Plains** — paired inter-generational talents **Zach Bruder** and **Bill Saylor**, both of whom found favor with collectors.

A good dilemma to have, as reported by *Artnews*, was running out of paintings by Bruder. Smith, nimble on her feet, enlisted FedEx. Read the anecdote, and what the authoritative mag thought of Year Ten, [here](#).

*PaperCity* caught up with Smith back in Manhattan, amidst the fever of Frieze week, where Magenta is also exhibiting. The 30-something dealer shared impressions of her first year as DAF exhibitor: “Being a native Dallasite, it only made sense to bring Magenta Plains to the fair in my hometown. Reconnecting with the Dallas art scene, its institutions, and its supporters was particularly special for me, as I am a product of growing up within the city’s schools and museums.”



“IT’S AMAZING TO SEE HOW THE DALLAS ART SCENE HAS EXPLODED IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS— THERE ARE MANY FACETS TO EXPLORE, FROM DIY ART SPACES TO PRIVATE COLLECTIONS.”

Smith says, “The paintings in our booth by **Bill Saylor** and **Zach Bruder** were incredibly well received and we were very happy to forge new relationships which we feel are lasting. My peers and colleagues visiting from New York felt welcomed by the hospitality Dallas showed and in general sales were strong throughout. Many fellow exhibitors mentioned returning to the fair next year.”

And there was an after-hours happening involved too, which added a touch of community to the exhibitor experience for Magenta Plains and friends. The Dallas native curated a chic cocktail affair at her family’s Highland Park casa, with a little help from fellow art dealers. Smith says, “The highlight of my week was hosting a collector soiree at my childhood home on Saturday night to celebrate the fair with friends **Half Gallery**, **Lyles & King**, **Night Gallery**, and **Canada**.

“We staged some artwork alongside my family’s personal collection as an extension of the Dallas Art Fair like a one night pop-up. It was fantastic seeing the paintings installed in a



very livable, domestic setting. The night ended in impromptu piano performances by hosts and guests alike — truly a night to remember!”

## An Art Historian Weighs in

**Dr. Cindy Lisica**, a Texas transplant, wields an art history PhD from University of the Arts London, and has worked at museums from the Warhol in Pittsburgh, to L.A.’s MOCA, the Tate Britain and Tate Modern in London, and The Menil in Houston. She also directs her own gallery in Houston, where she is based, and heads up the art history department at Houston Baptist University. Lisica told *PaperCity* via phone that she traveled to Dallas (her first visit to the city) specifically for the Fair, and labeled the entire experience as “impressive.”

In a follow-up email, the art historian-gallerist-curator singled out some of her favorite moments from Fair week.

At DAF, Lisica made a point of visiting the booth of **Miles McEnery Gallery**. She says, “Miles was present at the booth and is very personable. His gallery in Chelsea has been open since 1999, and he exhibits a range of thoughtful paintings that pop and other mixed media works. Multi-layered, complex artwork by **Tom LaDuke** is both curious and pleasing. We will see Miles McEnery at the Seattle Art Fair (August) next [where Lisica and he will both exhibit]. *Check out all of Lisica’s top Fair picks in the slideshow.*

The **Dallas Contemporary** and the **Dallas Museum of Art** were both on Lisica’s circuit. Each museums resonated, with programming connected to the high tide of the Fair and accompanying Dallas Arts Month.

Lisica says of her DMA visit: “I have been a fan of **Laura Owens** since I was a grad student working at MOCA Los Angeles during her very first museum solo there in 2003. Some of those works were on view at the DMA in this very comprehensive exhibition.”



“THE NEW OWNS WORKS WERE BIGGER, BRIGHTER, AND EVEN MORE RICH THAN THE QUIETER, SOFTER PIECES OF THE PAST.”

The recent works relate to today’s digital world of logos and signs, as well as printed media ads and newspapers, whereas previously her artwork had a more organic touch featuring small animals and insects in trees. Owens continues to give us the thickness and dimension in her layered paintings by squeezing out paint from the tubes and spreading it like icing.”

“The exhibition also includes a collaboration room with furniture fabricated by her ex-boyfriend, artist/designer **Jorge Pardo**. Another gallery in the museum features smaller paintings hung along the top of the ceiling around the space, presenting abstracted clock faces, some with moving hands, perhaps representing time zones of places unknown.”

Lisica then honed in on the trifecta of exhibition at the Dallas Contemporary:

“A large embroidered American flag with words, ‘You are safe here with me’ repeated across the stripes holds its place on the back wall of the “Carry Me Home” solo exhibition of Tehran-born, New York-based artist **Sara Rahbar**. Her work is presented in sculptures and installations across three gallery spaces. Each space features different tonalities, mediums, and other material iterations on the theme of war and violence on the body, reminding the viewer that ‘home’ carries different meanings over time and place. The darkly lit spaces with single warm spotlights on each piece increases the drama, or trauma, felt by the viewer.”

“A second exhibition at the Dallas Contemporary, **Eric Fischl**’s “If Art Could Talk” presented a retrospective of paintings from the 1990s to today. The thematic thread is that each scene contains artwork being depicted within the scene — as if the art is looking at itself, voyeuristically and sometimes comedically. Many of the pieces bore curious, provocative, sometimes disturbing subject matter — also one large work that pokes fun at art fairs — perfect opportunity to display it in Dallas.”



“THIS IS A MUST-SEE EXHIBITION FOR FISCHL FANS AND OFFERS A GREAT DEAL OF PIECES IN ONE PLACE. THE DALLAS CONTEMPORARY IS A FANTASTIC SPACE. IT WAS ALSO REWARDING TO SEE YOUNG ARTISTS ALONGSIDE THE LIKES OF FISCHL AND HOLDING THEIR OWN.”

“Witness **Harry Nuriev** (born 1984, Moscow) whose “6 Fears” installation looms in a large single space — swans made of cut up tires and electrical tape, copper wire holding their necks in place, and purple paint (kitschy lawn swans, you could call them). The merry-go-round / carousel in among them was meant to be used by children visiting the gallery. Electric cars (very basic robots) are on a vertical platform (pane of glass) moving and making noise, but not the noise that you would expect in a park or playground. Very robotic, repetitive, and strange.”

## A Consultant Names Names

Finally, **Jana Cothren**, founder and director of San Antonio-based **3C Art Advisory** — a regular attendee at the Dallas Art Fair — shared her picks for Best Booths in the slideshow — including the breakout Texas painter, brought by a London dealer, who should be on your



collector list.

Scroll through to see takes from the trio of first-time exhibitors — Bloch, Bivins, and Magenta Plains' Smith — impressions of art historian Dr. Lisica, and then highlights from this out-of-town advisor.

