

the great and the small

Launched as younger, cutting-edge alternatives to major contemporary art shows, a growing number of satellite fairs have become must-see events themselves
By Marc Spiegler

THE ORGANIZERS OF THE ZOO ART FAIR in London never expected their opening to become the madhouse by the monkey house. At the show's first run this past October, all 26 participating galleries were London locals less than three years old. Few of the artists on offer in the tight booths were well-known beyond the U.K. art scene. And while the venue, two buildings on the grounds of the London Zoo—and, on opening night, the reptile house—had its idiosyncratic appeal, one would hardly expect the art crowd to show up en masse for the novelty of a few lizards and lemurs. Nonetheless, an hour into the fair's private preview, Prince Albert Road along the northern edge of Regents Park was thronged with frustrated people waving useless invitations. Too many had been invited, and the too-narrow gates made entry to the event exasperatingly slow.

"We had 200 people RSVP on the day of the opening," recalls Soraya Rodriguez, who founded the Zoo Art Fair with London dealer David Risley. "And it turned out to be quite a specialized group, with few of the celebrities and general public you might see at the Frieze Fair VIP opening." Indeed, to the great chagrin of Zoo fair organizers, those stranded outside included Kunsthalle Zurich director Beatrix Ruf, the Tate's Nicholas Serota, Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art director Robert Fitzpatrick and even Frieze Art Fair co-founders Amanda Sharp and Matthew Slotover, whose event at the other end of Regent's Park had brought the art world's traveling circus to London that week.

Granted, the opening-night frenzy may have been fed by logistical failures but it also reflects a broader art market phenomenon: the increasing importance of satellite fairs piggybacking off larger, established shows like Frieze, Art Basel and the Armory Show in New York. The five or so in 2003 will climb to over a dozen in 2005, and some are now de rigueur among insiders. Big-name dealers such as Andrea Rosen and Jay Jopling, for example, arrived early for the opening of the New Art Dealers Alliance (NADA) fair in Miami in December. And though there's less buzz surrounding the Scope hotel fairs than their newer competitors, you can still sometimes spot market-makers like Don and Mera Rubell or Marty Margulies moving through the halls.

For collectors, curators and critics, this surge in side events offers even more art to see, discuss and buy. On the downside, it further complicates the schedules of this already harried lot, and requires constant monitoring to separate the must-sees from the missables. The situation is only going to get more complicated. In the past, major fairs might have given rise to one concurrent event, the classic example being Liste: The Young Art Fair in Basel. But Art Basel had been around for 25 years before Liste emerged. By contrast, Art Basel Miami Beach attracted a coinciding Scope fair when it debuted in 2002, and NADA joined the mix a year later. The second edition of Frieze in October attracted both Scope and the Zoo fair.

These days the presence of two or even three satellite fairs is becoming the norm. Liste, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary, will be joined in Basel this summer by a new fair, the Volta Show. Launched by Friedrich Loock of Galerie Wohnmaschine in Berlin, it will feature contemporary galleries and artists falling into the midmarket, midsize gap between Liste's newcomers and Art Basel's heavy-hitters. "All of us would like to go to Art Basel in the future," Loock says. "But that might take 10 years, so why not do something in Basel right now?" And as if there were not enough to see, *Flash Art* (continued on page 90)



Scene and herd: A full house at the Zoo Art Fair in London this past October, top; and the art-packed hotel room "booths" of the Daniel Reich Gallery, below, and Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, bottom, at Scope New York in 2003





(continued from page 88) impresario Giancarlo Politi has been making noises about staging a hotel fair at the same time.

Even struggling shows attract satellite fairs. Last year Art Forum Berlin had two such events, Kunstsalon and the Berliner Liste. This September, rumor has it, a group of galleries plans to break away from the Berliner Liste to form a fourth fair.

This boom underscores the fact that an ever-increasing percentage of sales take place in fair booths rather than gallery spaces. As so many new collectors—who often



have far more money than free time—focus their attention and collecting budgets on fairs, these events present incomparable opportunities, especially for galleries based outside art market centers. “Liste has the benefit of being in Basel with the big fair, which means it attracts the very best people—be they collectors, curators or writers,” observes Javier Peres of Peres Projects in Los Angeles. “That setting is important for exposing artists to the best possible audience.”

Like many young galleries, Peres Projects has followed a classic progression through the fair circuit. Shortly after opening, the gallery attended Scope Miami in 2002, moved to NADA in 2003, and then did Liste, Frieze and Statements at Art Basel

Miami Beach in 2004. With their far cheaper booth rates—often just a few thousand dollars—satellite fairs offer younger dealers an affordable entree into the international market. Granted, the inexpensive facilities have their downside: At Scope sites, art is presented on hotel beds in often cramped rooms; Liste’s labyrinthine Warteck building, a former factory, requires careful map-reading skills to avoid missing a battalion of booths; and the 2004 NADA fair was held in a Miami neighborhood that taxi drivers warned passengers against touring on foot.

Then again, grunginess can have an upside, too, in a market where major international collectors now commonly compete to be first to buy the the next Wilhelm Sasnal, Michaël Borremans or Wangechi Mutu, scoring bragging rights (and, sometimes, speculative profits). But as one line of reasoning goes, by the time

“emerging” artists make it into a major fair like Frieze or Art Basel, they’ve already emerged. This is an arguable assumption, but the alternative-indie vibe of these fairs certainly can make them seem ideal terrain for making exciting discoveries. “We’re not trying to look like Art Basel,” says NADA director Heather Hubbs. “We want the fair to look professional—good light, good spaces, clean bathrooms—but not linen on the tables and a VIP room. NADA needs to stay more grassroots.”

Another factor is the rapid surge in prices and the selective placement strategies dealers unleash to push young artists once they achieve even a minimum market momentum. Collectors with shallower pockets and shorter track records can feel pushed aside, but at satellite fairs, they still have a chance to play high roller. “The total number of pieces under \$5,000 in a major fair is actually much higher than in the ‘off’ fairs, but to many collectors, buying them there feels like going to Prada and buying a keychain,” observes Art Basel director Samuel Keller. “For the same amount of money at fairs like Liste or NADA, a minor collector can get the biggest work in the booth and make the dealer ecstatic.”

Like Keller, other fair directors have been surprisingly welcoming to the side events. “I don’t see them as direct competition,” explains Art Forum Berlin director Sabrina van der Ley. “As long as they do something interesting, it just attracts more people to Berlin during our fair.” And Rodriguez says Frieze’s Sharp and Slotover were happy to collaborate with the Zoo fair once the project was established and had a coherent concept.

Still, even in a booming market, there’s not enough room for everyone. More regional fairs, which draw the international part of their rosters from the ranks of galleries unable to get booths at bigger events, are the likely losers in the new satellite fair phenomenon. “For me, doing a fair like Artissima in Turin is a big risk, because it’s so expensive that you need to sell out your booth twice over to show profits, which means you have no inventory afterwards, and international collectors rarely attend,” Looock points out. “At the Volta show, if I sell one painting, I will break even. If I sell two, I will be very happy. And there are so many big collectors present in Basel—if we get just 20 good ones to visit Volta, it will be worth it.”



Clockwise from top: A poster for Liste; Tim Lee’s *Upside Down Water Torture Chamber*, Harry Houdini, 1917, from the Tracey Lawrence Gallery, Vancouver, at Liste 2004; New York dealers Zack Feuer of LFL Gallery and Becky Smith of Bellwether in Smith’s booth at NADA in Miami this past December