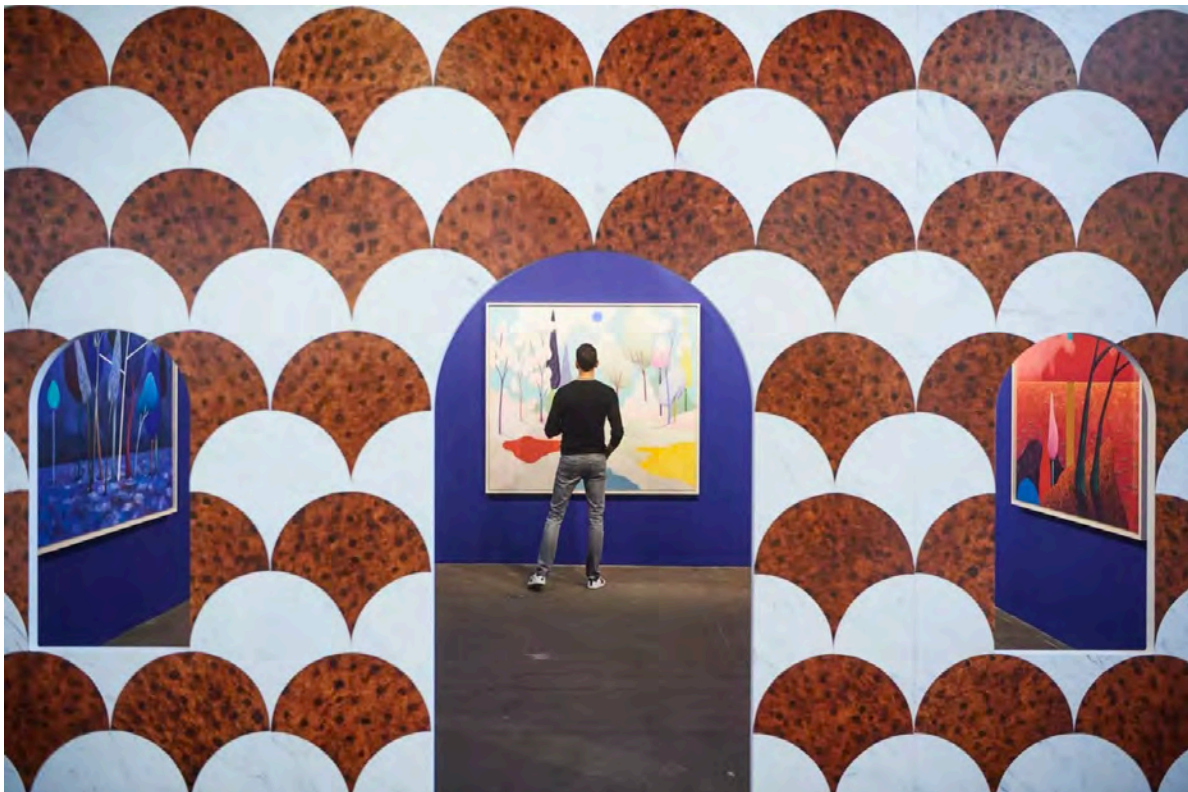


Apr 20, 2018

Art Market

Art Brussels Dares Collectors to Take Risks on Young Artists—and Succeeds



Installation view of Nicolas Party's work in Xavier Hufkin's booth at Art Brussels, 2018. Courtesy of Art Brussels.

It may be the golden jubilee of Art Brussels, the annual art fair in Belgium's capital, but don't make the mistake of pointing out its age.

"50 years *young* is what we say," said the director, Anne Vierstraete, standing beside the red brick facade of the expo's space at Tour & Taxis.

Indeed, the fair, which opened to VIPs Thursday, still holds on to its youthful spirit. Dealers and collectors on the ground all agreed that it's a place where newly ascendant artists can stand out among a more relaxed fair landscape and smaller galleries can connect with the intelligent, curious, mostly Belgian collectors who loyally return each year. Of the 147 galleries from 32 countries, almost 25 percent were showing for the first time at Art Brussels.

It's a fair less reliant on the reliable name-brand artists who have become somewhat predictable fixtures on the walls at booths in Miami Beach and London.

“We have a very loyal base of collectors, because they know what to find in a fair like this,” Vierstraete said. “There is a very thoughtful collector base, they have much knowledge about art history and they really come up for the artwork itself—not because it's trendy to collect this or that. ‘Spec-collectors’ as we call them—we don't have those collectors here.”



Installation view of Georgina Gratrix's work in SMAC's booth at Art Brussels, 2018. Courtesy of Art Brussels.

It's a philosophy that pervades all facets of the Brussels art community—buy on your gut, not based on the name of the artist. That's the mantra of local collectors such as Alain Servais, who was giving tours of his exhibition space, The Loft, all week. His former home, the loft is now full of works by known entities such as Josh Kline and Athena Papadopoulos, but also artists so emerging they've never been represented by a gallery, or so local they live not only in Brussels but a few blocks away from the gallery.

“In New York, art has become a luxury object, almost about fashion, and we try to get away from that,” Servais said, standing beside Papadopoulos's sprawling sculpture installed in the bottom floor of The Loft.

The trust-your-gut philosophy often pays off for collectors in this country. At Wiels, the city's contemporary art center, the newly opened exhibition "Unexchangeable" features work solely from Belgian collectors—including the blockbuster collections of Walter Vanhaerents, Mimi Dusselier, and Bernard Soens—that was made in the late 80s and early 90s. There's stellar work by Franz West, Katharina Fritsch, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Richard Prince, and Cindy Sherman. Vierstraete mentioned that Belgian collectors often bought such works soon after they were made, and well before they achieved their current fame and market status—further highlighting the oracular power of collectors here, and the strategy among Art Brussels dealers who bring work by emerging artists at reasonable prices, hoping to lure in risk-taking collectors.

This tendency to seek out finds at a lower price point is still very alive today, Vierstraete added, and it can confound blue chippers who come with the big names in their stables.

"Sometimes, we have the major galleries, and they came with completely the wrong works—yes, very good works by famous artists, but they were already collected by the Belgians years ago."



Georgina Gratrix
Sophisticated Wrapping Paper, 2018
SMAC



Georgina Gratrix
Fruit Bowl, 2018
SMAC

“Guys like Adrian Ghenie, David Adamo, Elmgreen and Dragset, Cyprien Gaillard—they started here when they were 28, 29, 30,” she said. “Now you see them in all the Art Basel fairs, but they were here when they were young.”

At least one artist from this year’s Discovery sector could be the next on the list. Toward the end of the day Thursday, the fair awarded South African gallery SMAC the €5,000 Discovery Prize Art Brussels for its presentation of work by Georgina Gratrix, who makes playfully girlish still lifes and self-portraits laced with dark self-deprecation.

“She’s quite well-known in South Africa, so it’s really nice to have the work here,” said Shona van der Merwe, associate director at the gallery. “And of

course, the prize is wonderful.”

She added that some of the works had already sold for between €3,500 and €18,000.



Alex Chaves

Guernica, 2018

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The main sector also had plenty of work by artists who may not be considered brand-name, but were still finding buyers in Brussels. Ceysson & Bénétière sold three works by Noël Dolla right as the fair opened for between €35,000 and €45,000, and another hung on the wall, waiting to be scooped up.

“It’s a very easy-going fair, and the fair organizers really listen to what you

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say,” said François Ceysson, a founder of the gallery. “And the collectors are very curious—of course, it’s not Basel, you won’t see someone spending \$2 million in the first morning, but it’s good to see the collectors get excited.”

Martos Gallery had a solo booth of Alex Chaves, a Los Angeles artist who is known stateside for his lush flowers and nude portraits. It’s his first exposure in Belgium. His work often pivots upon a certain Post-Impressionist art-historical reference—a show at Martos last October focused on a reimagining of Édouard Vuillard’s *First Fruits* (1899)—and at Art Brussels, the booth’s centerpiece was a reinterpretation of Picasso’s *Guernica*.

Don and Mera Rubell, the Miami mega-collectors who house their collection in a concrete hanger in Miami’s Design District, are a reliable presence at fairs of all shapes and sizes the world over, but were back in Brussels after an absence of many years. They said it’s a reliable place to spot new talent.

“We just ‘discovered’ an artist we knew 30 years ago,” Mera Rubell said. “We were just walking up to a booth and said, could that be a Joe Andoe? And then it was!”

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Joris Van de Moortel
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8, 2018
Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Contact for price



Josep Grau-Garriga
Cel estripat (Ciel déchiré), 1977
Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Sold

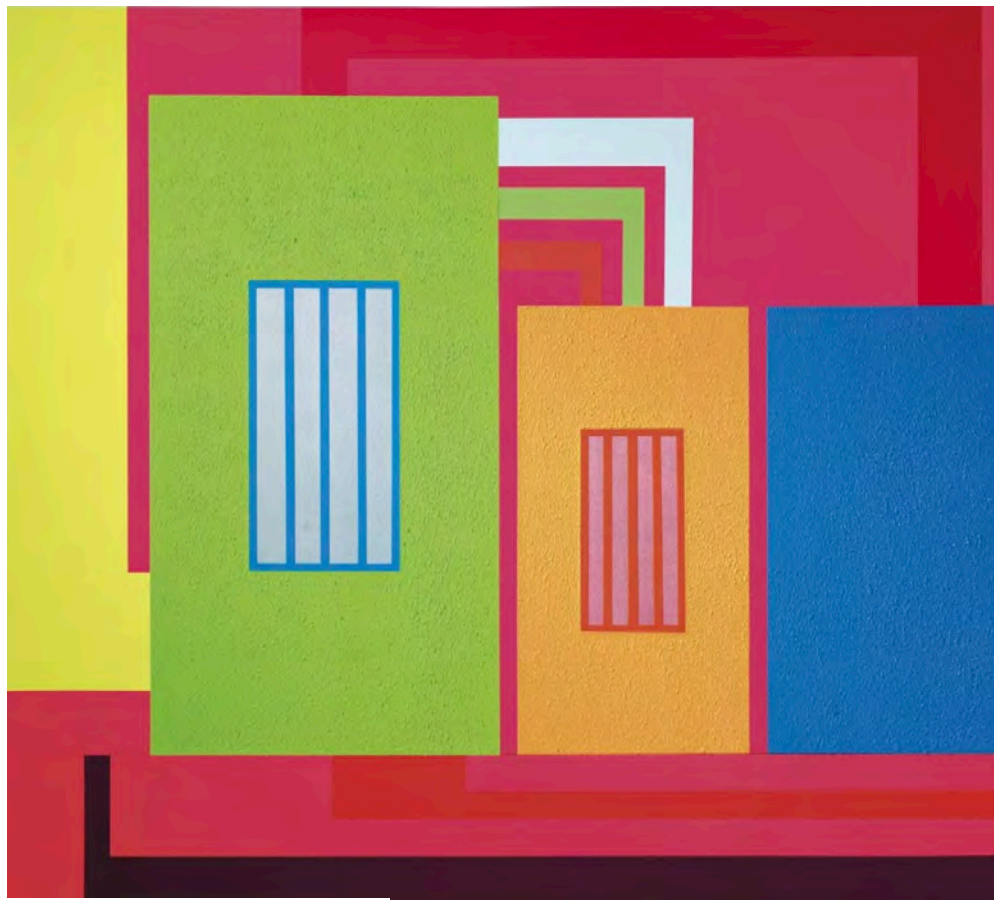
“Yes, it was in the Almine Rech booth,” Don Rubell added.

The hometown galleries take advantage of this intelligent, adventurous collector base as well. The night before the fair, Nathalie Obadia, who has galleries in Paris and Brussels, had strong sales in the first few hours, selling work by Josep Grau-Garriga and Laure Prouvost. On Wednesday night, she had opened in her local space a show by Joris Van de Moortel, and at the booth the next day was a work of his pulled from a performance at the Palais de Tokyo, *1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8* (2015). The title, the artist said while standing in the booth, invokes a punk rock drummer counting off before launching into a tune, and there’s a text aspect of the work that goes into detail about The Velvet Underground song “Sister Ray.”

Almine Rech chose Brussels as the location for its first solo show of work by

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Marcus Jahmal, a Queens, New York-based artist who had created lush, arresting paintings of figures with twisted faces and wild animals and boozy nighttime scenes, because, as one gallery rep explained, they had been working with the artist for a year and he had yet to have a solo show at one of the four Almine Rech outposts. And Brussels seems to be the right choice for the young artist, born in 1990, as some of his other paintings, unrelated to the show at the gallery, appeared at the booth the next day, where in general work was being sold in the fair's first hour, a gallery representative said.



Peter Halley

Theory of Flight, 1998

Super Dakota

And on Thursday night, Clearing opened a show of work by New York-based Korakrit Arunanondchai. Clearing owner Olivier Babin moved into the massive compound in 2017—the gallery operated for five years out of a small townhouse, but the support for his program from local collectors prompted him to bet on more ambitious digs in Brussels, and he purchased a 5,400-square-foot former shutter factory and turned it into a stunning space with high ceilings that run together like the roof of a church, buttressed by separate exhibition spaces, a bar, a café, and office space. Arunanondchai filled it with monstrously big creations, including a winged creature over twenty feet wide that hovered over a plane of vertically installed stone palettes.

Back at the fair, amid the booths selling work by emerging artists at a price point of less than \$50,000, a few galleries opted to bring known entities to Art Brussels in hopes that some collectors still had holes they needed to fill—even if the piece was slightly more expensive than other options. Paris's Galerie Templon, for instance, managed to sell a work by Iván Navarro for \$125,000.

Damién Bertelle-Rogier, the founder of Brussels gallery Super Dakota, said he was transitioning the gallery from an incubator of both new talent and historically overlooked talent from the past into more of a force on the secondary market, with work by established artists consigned to be sold in the art fair arena. Cards on the table, he came to the fair with an electric

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geometric painting by Peter Halley that became one of the first day's biggest buys when it sold for €160,000.



Installation view of Sofie Van de Velde's booth at Art Brussels, 2018. Courtesy of Art Brussels.

“For us, it was about the fact that we’re showing some bigger names,” Bertelle-Rogier said. “We’ve been associated with emerging artists, but we want to shift the dialogue.”

Of the Halley, Bertelle-Rogier said, “Everyone’s asking for it—there are other Halleys, but I hear this one is the best.”

Two neighboring Antwerp operations, Plus-One and Gallery Sofie Van de Velde, came together for a joint booth at the fair that gathered a bunch of

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marvelously charged works united under the title of “Lust Laughter Liquor.” (A little taste of the truly great press release: “And finally there is liquor, related to celebrating good times, new bonds and wild ideas.”) And the stuff is by a slew of all-time greats: a Paul McCarthy porno rag collage, a Marcel Broodthaers manuscript in a liquor bottle, a Bruce Nauman photo of barflies balancing shots of whiskey on their fingers, a marvelous hundred-year-old Francis Picabia drawing of two couples in *flagrante delicto*.



Roni Horn

Untitled ("The disturbed Emperors made a tremendous row,..."), 2014-2016

Xavier Hufkens

At the booth for Brussels art dealing legend Xavier Hufkens, who opened his first gallery in 1987, and gave Antony Gormley, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Rosemarie Trockel their first shows in Belgium, were works by Louise Bourgeois, Sterling Ruby, and Roni Horn. Local collectors don't

seem to be familiar with Horn's cylindrical works topped with glass so clear it could be mistaken for water, or air—and many attendees had to be told to not touch the work.

Xavier Hufkens was also vying for the Solo Prize Art Brussels, a €10,000 award given to one of the many galleries who opt to construct a separate part of their booth and devote it to a single artist. The artist Nicolas Party had built a little chapel within the booth, carving out windows in the walls that let visitors peer into a space housing three of his alien landscapes. He had pulled off a similar tour de force when he carved out a curve-topped entrance in a red wall in front of The Modern Institute's booth at Art Basel Hong Kong in March, and when he built a maze of walls into New York's Karma gallery last October.

On Thursday afternoon, word got out that Party had indeed won the solo prize, prompting Hufkens to get a bottle of Ruinart to pop in the middle of the partitioned-off all-red booth with the curvy windows. At that point, the gallery had already sold all the work by Party, priced between €50,000 and €80,000. There were many things to toast. ●