



Critic's View: Frieze, Unfrozen

May 15, 2015

by James Croak

Frieze. What a curious title for an art fair in a red hot art market.

Of course the title literally refers to a feature of classical architecture wherein carved figures hover above entryways; still, one cannot but be amused at the shared homophony with its mirror opposite of the supernova market currently underway. But the show's producer is London based *frieze* magazine, and so, wordplay notwithstanding, Frieze New York is the proud title of the art fair that opened on Randall's Island on Thursday, May 14, 2015 for the fourth year.

The fair is an ever burgeoning four-day event now including more than 190 galleries exhibiting thousands of art works. The center ring is a large tent that has become a competitive architectural commission in itself. Added to this visual overload are half a dozen other programs including: Frieze Projects in site-specific art installations; Frieze Talks in onsite panel discussions by all the usual suspects; Frieze Sounds in commissioned audio works; and Frieze Education, which is basically high school tours.

One can go there overland by car on bridges or by buses from the Guggenheim Museum, but the best way to get to the conjoined islands of Randall's and Wards is by ferry from the 35th Street Ferry Dock. I recommend this mode of transportation, as a boat ride in brisk spring air to an island always prepares one for a special experience, and Frieze New York 2015 does not disappoint.

This extravaganza is sponsored by Deutsche Bank, and your bank ought to be a stop prior to heading to this fair: a \$19 ferry ticket or \$25 parking fee, \$44 single day entrance fee, \$75.50 for a single day plus catalog, or \$92 for single day and subscription to *frieze* magazine. These fees cover access to a mercantile tent where other people who have paid much larger fees to be there hope to sell you things they believe are salable, not necessarily things that are worth buying. For a family of four taking the ferry from 35th St. plus one sales catalog, the visit pencils out at \$283.50.

I expect resistance to the cost of a visit to be dissolved by curiosity after last week's stunning auction results in New York City.

"Christie's Has Art World's First \$1 Billion Week" screams the headline on the cover of New York Times. Indeed their three evening auctions this week set a new milestone in the avalanche of money pouring into the art market, eclipsing the previous record by a wide margin. The week began with a mediocre [Picasso painting selling for \\$179.4M](#) on Monday night, stunning onlookers as the highest price ever bid at auction for anything. The previous record was \$142.4M for Francis Bacon's *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* in 2013. The next two dramatic evenings put Christie's over the billion mark and created high expectations on the part of galleries for sales at Frieze.

The unstated theme of this year's Frieze New York is handmade objects. This a predictable backlash

to nearly 20 years of shiny, chromium steel pop art castings and the like—I once joked that the primary art material for the past two decades was Windex.

Certainly there is a tipping point when artists need to feel directly involved in the production of their work, and we reached that point. That said, it is as if almost no one knows how to create handmade objects anymore: the tradition of craft has been lost. Instead we are seeing *all* objects, completely unedited; it has the feel of the guts of an art school spilled into a large tent. Acres of student-quality art, their sources easy to spot, and the production methods essentially entry level.

On a happier note, Marian Goodman Gallery, which specializes in art from Europe, has an exhibit of Giuseppe Penone's miracles of wood carving. He takes trees and large wood beams and strips their growth rings to find the sapling underneath, a psychoanalysis of the forest.

Sometime he uses heavy girders from a demolished building and reveals the young tree inside the strapping structure that held up a building for a century. And yet here it is, still there, a long twig with its branches jutting out, reaching for the sun a century earlier, then enclosed in its mass and the paint and masonry detritus of the old buildings. Hooks and nails and bolts stuck through it and then discarded, its young sapling invisible to all but Penone, who exposes it to the light once again.



"Albero di 8 m, 2000" and "Albero di 10 m, 1989" by Giuseppe Penone. Wood. Exhibited with Marian Goodman Gallery. Artist and art critic James Croak is in center. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Penone's series is the poetry of art that is all but lost in the mayhem of most market-driven art fairs, although what is distinctive about this fair is the attempt at poetry. Even if it too often falls short here, in recent venues it was beside the point and banality was the goal. Many of these fairs seemed like a tornado tore through the late F.W. Woolworth and a curbside sale is underway of twisted tchotchkes left from the storm.

The respected Middle East art magazine Bidoun has gone around the bend with a booth of art world memorabilia for sale: "insignificant objects touched by the most significant hands of our time." The creepy stall contains such items for sale as curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist's expired passport, Pictures-Generation wit Cindy Sherman's eyeliner, and a gold tooth from conceptualist Lawrence Weiner.

Other oddities for sale include Tony Shafrazi's prescription medication, a signed rock by land artist Robert Smithson, and Princeton theorist Hal Foster's breath mints. Most of the items are viewable on auction site [Paddle8](#). There are no words.

There were a few high notes in tune: Richard Prince has a large installation from Instagram of women he apparently met online. It has a compelling voyeur feel to it, viewing the free-form fantasy of online mating.



“New Portraits” by Richard Prince. Exhibited with Gagosian Gallery. Photo by Sage Cotignola.



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Larry Bell was a major minimalist sculptor of the '60s specializing in sheets of glass with reflective coatings. Bell and his work seem to have largely disappeared, but one new work in the show is a clear and welcome addition to this artist's unusual genre. Michelle Lopez and her *Smoke Cloud II* 2014 offers large sheets of glass with imperfect coatings, making part of the glass a mirror and the rest a clear pane. This is a quality work that stood out.



“Smoke Cloud II (diptych)” by Michelle Lopez, 2014. Tempered architectural glass, ultraviolet light, tin, silver, nitrate, varnish, wood, 88 x 120 inches. Exhibited with Simon Preston Gallery. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

64-year-old Gary Panter is revisiting the late '70s cartoon art of the Lower East Side. It looked a tad nuts among the other attempts at depth around it, but an amusing curiosity nonetheless that brought some smiles.



“Untitled (Hanging Man)” by Gary Panter, 1989. Exhibited with Fredericks & Freiser. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Another piece to dwell on—and beautifully made, almost—was a wood carving of Quincy Jones, the record producer who has won 27 Grammys. The piece was created via a motorized wood lathe, probably following a scan of the clay original. Had the artist Xavier Veilhan chased the lathe carving

with some hand chisels to add undercuts that a lathe cannot do, the work would have been perfect. A few more hours Mr. Veilhan, to levitation.



“Quincy Jones” by Xavier Veilhan, 2015. Oak, plywood, acrylic paint, 48 1/4 x 20 1/2 x 25 1/2 inches. Exhibited with Galerie Perrotin. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Some of the old favorite text artists were in attendance, work that has been diminished by the constant posting of pithy posters on Facebook and other social media. But Barbara Kruger hit it on the head with her iPhone piece with apps entitled Pleasure, Greed, Contempt, Spite and others.



“Untitled (Connect)” by Barbara Kruger, 2015. Archival Print, 77 x 58 inches. Exhibited by Spruth Magers. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Ditto for Gilbert and George, the London team who have a strong work entitled *Fury*, 2011. The piece presents a stack of issues overlaid on a large photograph that prompt fury, clearly the prime emotion in the political dimension today.



“Fury” by Gilbert & George, 2011. 88.97 x 74.80 inches. Exhibited with Galleria Alfonso Artiaco. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

[Frieze Sounds](#) is a mixed addition to the fair. In too many instances, “sound works” by visual artists are full-on groaners: cliché ridden, ignorant of music history or structure, and about as useful as paintings by musicians.

Keren Cytter uses a warbling oscilloscope as the background continuum with inane lyrics whispered by non-actors with unimpressive voices; a 1960s Beatles experiment left on the cutting room floor, fished out of a dumpster and now littering the Frieze site. Hannah Weinberger repeats the didgeridoo wind instrument sounds that seemed so profound in the 1970s but now annoys like a

jerky B-movie sound track.

On the other hand, Cally Spooner and Peter Joslyn score by taking mundane instructions from an employer to an employee and setting them to music in classical diatonic structure, with few chordal extensions giving it a Gregorian sound: pleasant, clever and listenable; not bad.

Minimalist sculptor John McCracken seemed like an artist without relevance by the time of the go-go '80s, but now his peaceful and refined jewels lean against the wall as a quiet haiku in a punk rock world.

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“Flambeau” by John McCracken, 2005. Polyester resin, fiberglass and plywood, 108 x 17 x 3 1/2 inches. Exhibited with David Zwirner Gallery. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

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Carlos Garaicoa exhibits an architectural drawing of a wrecked building, a tremendous reversal of traditional architecture that seems more than just a stunt. There is a duende that only the Spanish can find in the commonplace.

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“Dudas sobre el paraíso terrenal” by Carlos Garaicoa, 2014. Ink and graphite on Arches paper. Diptych. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

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“Dudas sobre el paraíso terrenal” by Carlos Garaicoa, 2014. B/W laminated photograph mounted on aluminum. Diptych. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

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Such is the attempt of so much work at Frieze New York, backtracking by a new generation toward a depth eschewed of late, hopefully toward something better than they inherited.

BASIC FACTS: Frieze New York presents its fourth edition May 14 to May 17, 2015 on Randalls Island, New York. For details and to purchase tickets and transportation to Randalls Island, visit

www.friezenewyork.com.

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