



# Back for Second Year, Seattle Art Fair Expands and Sparkles with New Energy

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by Amber Cortes

It was a cool, clear summer night in downtown Seattle, and thousands of people were waiting on line to get into CenturyLink Field stadium—a line that stretched for a quarter mile almost all the way to historic Pioneer Square. They weren't waiting for a Mariners or Seahawks game, or to rock out to Guns N' Roses. They turned out to see art, lots of art. The Seattle Art Fair, the brainchild of Microsoft billionaire Paul Allen and produced by veteran art fair impresarios Art Market Productions, was back for its second year in a row.

And it had grown. Nobody really knew what to expect when the art fair took Seattle by storm last year. After all, it was the first art world mega event of its kind in a city better known as the home of Amazon, grunge rock, and Starbucks than for blue-chip galleries and high-end art auctions.

This year, the art fair seems to have hit a stride, with more art packed into the 200,000-square-foot event center than last year and more than 85 national and international galleries represented (up from about 60 last year). Both Pace and Winston Wächter were among the many galleries that returned this year (Gagosian was one major player that did not), citing positive sales results from last year as one of their reasons for deciding to come back.

And how's it looking so far for galleries as compared to last year?

"Well this year is gangbusters," according to [Greg Kucera](#), owner of the eponymous Seattle gallery. "Last year was good business," Kucera said. "This year is great business."

By opening night the gallery had already sold 12 pieces, he said, a feat his gallery hasn't equaled at an art fair opening in many years. For context, he noted that he has been "at almost every art fair in Seattle, and outside of Seattle, that you could ever name." Kucera is thrilled to finally feel that "hometown bounce," he said: the benefit that derives from being a hometown gallery at an international art fair in your own backyard. He acknowledged that there is a big advantage in knowing who is who and what it is that people in the local collector community are looking for.

"I think people in Seattle weren't sure whether they should take it seriously last year," Kucera said, "but now I think people have really realized that this is an important event, and if they turn out and support it, it will come back every year and be bigger and better."

This year Los Angeles curator Laura Fried came aboard as artist director for the fair, curating a variety of solo projects instead of one large, specialized exhibit like last year. Among these individual works were: a set of foam and fabric seats collaged and assembled by [Wynne Greenwood](#); a diorama of a CIA-monitoring station by Roxy Paine; and an interactive sculpture of

motion-activated cymbals by Dawn Kasper, among others.

There was also a good amount of art not for sale: a pop-up exhibit off-site at Pivot Art + Culture curated by Juxtapoz Magazine and Takashi Murakami, and a video exhibition featuring an archive of public access television pieces and works by contemporary artists curated by project space Public Fiction in Los Angeles and the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle. In addition, there were more off-site and performance-related events than last year.



Public Fiction's exhibition, "A Witness and A Weapon: Middle Grays, Color Bars, and the comma in between" installed at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.

Douglas McClemont of Marlborough Gallery in New York City, one of the new galleries at the fair this year, had high hopes for Seattle sales this year. "We already have reserves on some work," he said, "and there's a huge amount of interest what's at the booth." It no doubt helps that the gallery represents the esteemed Seattle glass sculptor Dale Chihuly, an artist who is "instantly recognizable," McClemont said. "He's like the Elvis of Seattle artists."



Dale Chihuly sculpture exhibited with Marlborough Gallery at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



Detail of "Blue Persian" installation by Dale Chihuly exhibited at Marlborough Gallery at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.

At the opening night Preview Party, sweetness was abundant: cupcakes and champagne floated around the wide aisles as potential patrons and art-gawkers alike took in the eye candy. At the [Claire Oliver Gallery](#) booth, an entire table dripped and overflowed with delicate, intricate glasswork in the mixed media work *Laid (Time-) Table with Cycads*, 2015, by Beth Lipman. Equally rich was the wall installation *The Order of Things*, 2016, by Lauren Fensterstock.



Exhibited with Claire Oliver Gallery of New York at the Seattle Art Fair are, on right, “Laid (Time-) Table with Cycads” by Beth Lipman. 2015, glass, wood, adhesive, paint and metal, 92 x 192 x 57 inches. On left is “The Order of Things” by Lauren Fensterstock. 2016. Wood, shells, mixed media, 78 x 94 x 24 inches. Photo by Amber Cortes.

PDX Contemporary was back, featuring new works by Pacific Northwest folk artist Jeffry Mitchell. This year the gallery had set up in a larger space to contain Mitchell’s earthenware vessels and whimsical, textured, and slightly subversive ceramic animals. Two cold, imposing graphite replicas of IBM supercomputers by sculptor Adam McEwen took up the center of one aisle, and warranted their own security guard. Equally a nod to Tony Smith and Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the graphite sculptures *Blue Gene 1* and *Blue Gene 2* are part of the artist’s recent examination of movement.



Art by Jeffry Mitchell exhibited with PDX Contemporary Art of Portland, OR at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



“Blue Gene 1” and “Blue Gene 2” by Adam McEwen at Seattle Art Fair. Exhibited courtesy of the artist and Pretzel Gallery of New York. Photo by Amber Cortes.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a major collector of American modernism who returned to the fair this year said that he noticed a difference in the air right away.

“There’s more energy,” he said, “There’s more interesting art, there’s more dealers, there’s more ... action. It definitely is more upbeat than last year. I think the dealers were encouraged by what happened last year and I feel like there is more buying energy than there was.”

He admitted that last year he was “dubious” about a large scale art fair like this coming to Seattle. “There’s just too damn many art fairs, everywhere. I didn’t feel like anybody needed another art fair,” he said. But the quality of the art this year left him “a little more convinced” than he was last year—certainly convinced enough to buy two major pieces from the booths on opening night. “It just feels much more stable,” he explained. “The first year is never stable until you see if there’s a second year. And then a third year. And then a fourth. Seattle won’t ever be a New York or an L.A. But they’ll be back.”



Kim Simonsson ceramic Moss People sculptures exhibited with Jason Jacques Gallery of New York at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



Examining art at Wildwood Press of St Louis at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



Examining art exhibited by ZIEHERSMITH of New York at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



Picture taking at Galleri Urbane of Dallas at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



Examining a wall of Andy Warhol at David Benrimon Fine Art of New York at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



Mixed media sculptures by Patti Warashina exhibited with Abmeyer Wood Fine Art of Seattle at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.



Examining works by Yorgo Alexopoulos at Bryce Wolkowitz Gallery of New York at Seattle Art Fair. Photo by Amber Cortes.

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**BASIC FACTS:** Seattle Art Fair held its second edition from August 4 – 7, 2016 at CenturyLink Field Event Center in Seattle. Click [here](#) for details. To see coverage of last year's fair, click [here](#).

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