



Art Travel: Beyond Frieze, London Offers Bountiful Feast for Art Lovers

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by Charles A. Riley II

Even without the [Frieze Art Fair](#) in town, London is a moveable feast for the artful traveler, and it is all the more compelling this year for those who have not visited in some time because it offers a first look at the controversial new wing of the [Tate Modern](#) as well as a number of recently opened galleries and, from September 24, 2016 to January 2, 2017, a blockbuster exhibition of Abstract Expressionists at the Royal Academy (see separate story [here](#)).

The broad range of attractions at Frieze (October 6 to 9, 2016) is more than enough to induce [Stendahl syndrome](#), but London's unfailing ability to place cutting-edge art in historical context is one of its great strengths.



Frieze, London, 2015. Courtesy of Frieze.



Sculpture Park at Frieze, 2015. Courtesy of Frieze.

As in New York, the main Frieze fair is divided into three sections. The most promising of these is "Focus," dedicated to "young" galleries and emerging artists, and it's appropriate and helpful that the Focus booths are solo affairs. Among the booths that should not be missed are: [Chewday](#), which will have works by [Gabriele Beverage](#) juxtaposed with Neolithic idols; [Arcadia Missa](#), with London-based artists; a virtual reality project by [Jon Rafman](#) at Jesse Seventeen; and a painting installation by [Celia Hempton](#) at [Southard Reid](#).

There is also a retrospective "The Nineties" section, selected by Geneva-based curator Nicolas Trembley, that revisits such significant exhibitions as [Richard Billingham's](#) photographic series, "Ray's a Laugh," that appeared in the landmark "Sensation" show at the Royal Academy in 1997.

The third section is for live performance, curated by Fabian Schöneich and Jacob Proctor. The "Live" section is not the only place where performance-based art may be found, though, because Frieze

also includes a huge installation by the Mexican artist [Soto Climent](#) at the entrance to the fair, a spider web of found materials that will be “animated” by live acrobats.

Frieze has summoned a top-tier roster of international galleries and artists, including many names familiar from New York such as [P.P.O.W](#) and [Hauser and Wirth](#); a [James Turrell](#) installation at [Kayne Griffin Corcoran](#) (Los Angeles); a major sculpture by [Philippe Parreno](#) at [Pilar Corrias Gallery](#) (London); Munich’s [Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle](#); and [The Third Line from Dubai](#).

With all this art to take in and digest, it is sometimes difficult to find cranial space for more information, which is why I often forego the lectures and panel discussions at fairs. In the case of Frieze, though, I find that the topics are often too good to pass up, and this year is no exception. This year’s theme of “borders” is timely enough, considering the messy surprise of the Brexit plebiscite that hangs like a cloud over the city.

The lunchtime talks in the fair’s auditorium feature artist and writer [Hannah Black](#) (on race, class and gender); Dutch artist [Erik van Lieshout](#); and the always provocative [Jill Magid](#), who “infiltrates” systems of power from the Liverpool Police Department to the U.S. Army. On Sunday, October 9, there will be a “summit” on the “crossing over” enlisting audience participation.

While Frieze and Frieze Masters in Regent’s Park are the place to be this week, visitors at any time of year should carve out some time to experience the Switch House, the major new addition to the Tate Modern, best approached on foot across the Millennium Bridge to the South Bank. That pedestrian catwalk offers a clear view of the sharp edges of the museum’s torqued tower by architects Herzog & de Meuron.



Tate Modern, London. Courtesy of Tate.

Nearly six million visitors are expected this year, and the day I went it seemed as though eight million of them were waiting for the elevator to take them to the tenth floor viewing terrace with its wraparound views of the Thames and the city. Under the aegis of director Nicholas Serota since 1988, the Tate has become a powerhouse in the museum world and certainly the dominant force in London. Its strength is reflected in a hefty acquisition fund to be spent at Frieze London, nearly \$200,000 in value, to be announced October 6.

Since 2000, the Tate has been on an acquisitions binge that is showcased in the Switch House installations of, for instance, [Louise Bourgeois](#) and a fantastic [Wilfredo Lam](#) show on view into January 2017. The addition, with the flickering light of its lacy brickwork apertures, is certainly spectacular. Still, the amount of space dedicated to stairways and places for the millions to “meet up” seems, to this visitor, to be excessive, with space in the galleries (which become smaller on the upper levels) sacrificed for public areas.



“The Sombre Malembo, God of the Crossroads” by Wilfredo Lam. Tate Modern.

The ninth-floor restaurant is as austere and character-less as an Ikea showroom. Gamely taking on New York’s MoMA in the highly competitive areas of Pop and Abstract Expressionism, the Tate Modern has a global agenda that bears interesting comparison with the old Tate across the river on the Millbank, accessible by foot or ferry, where the English accent prevails in the magnificent rooms devoted to the Pre-Raphaelites, [Turner](#), and British Modernist painting and sculpture by [Ben Nicholson](#) and others.

While on the South Bank at the Tate Modern, those in search of fun should amble along the bankside to the [Barbican](#) and its Curve Gallery, where a free and bizarre interactive show called “[The Gulch](#)” is on view September 29, 2016 to January 8, 2017. Installed by the Welsh artist [Bedwyr Williams](#), it puts the visitor through “physical and metaphorical twists and turns” along a route that puts the cavernous space to carnivalesque use.

The talk of the town when it comes to contemporary art is the opening of the five-storey megagallery [Cabinet](#) on the former grounds of the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens (a staple of literature and art from the time it opened in 1661). Charles Asprey, who has done so much to introduce modern German art to a broader public, is the main investor in the gallery, which had been based in Old Street. The opening exhibition, October 1 to December 17, 2016, features paintings by [Jim Nutt](#), and the gallery also represents such artists as [Martin Creed](#) and Turner Prize winner [Mark Leckey](#).



Artwork by Jim Nutt. Courtesy of Cabinet, London.

As elsewhere in London, the archaeological significance of Cabinet’s new digs is compelling, that layering of an ultra-cool gallery dedicated to the art of the moment on a centuries-old site that was similarly devoted to the astonishment of those seeking entertainment. When I line up my London itinerary, I make sure to frame the contemporary art with an historic context.

Mayfair is full of blue chip galleries, including [Pace](#) and [Gagosian](#), but they are not necessarily first on my list. At least once during any visit I take a short stroll to the [National Gallery](#) to renew my acquaintance with favorite paintings by [Velazquez](#), [Raphael](#), [Michelangelo](#) and [Rembrandt](#)—all of which unfailingly comment on the brand-new work I saw the day before.

I like to slip into the Church of St. Martin in the Fields when I am in or near Trafalgar Square and catch a brief concert featuring Mozart or Brahms. I enjoy stopping in at Christie's, not just because I expect to see the top-lot [Francis Bacon](#) or [Picasso](#) about to be auctioned, but because there are inevitably, in the smaller galleries, Old Masters and English paintings that do not make it to the previews at Rockefeller Center.



Christie's London. Courtesy of Christie's.

With an extra day, I might have a look at the [Courtauld collection](#) for the Cezannes. Or if I am in a particularly traditional mood, the mansion that houses the [Sir John Soane's Museum](#) and the William Hogarth series "The Rake's Progress," just to remind myself that whatever politics or the contemporary art market may have in store, there will always be an England.

BASIC FACTS: Frieze London and Frieze Masters, October 6 to 9, 2016 in Regent's Park, London, UK. <https://frieze.com/fairs/frieze-london>

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