

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

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The Frieze Art Fair, Frame by Frame – A diary of a visit on the first day of the Frieze New York on Randall's Island

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Camped out in a luxe tent on Randall's Island, Frieze New York plays home to nearly 200 art galleries from around the world, all angling to lure eyes and ideally great sums of money with entrancing and bewildering works of contemporary art. Since 2012, the fair, an extension of a longer-running model in London, has established itself as a significant presence on the global art-fair circuit.

It is also a fertile zone for people-watching, with dealers and collectors outnumbered by curiosity-seekers there to take in the spectacle. The fair opened on Thursday and runs through Sunday. Here's a diary of a visit on the first day:

10:29 a.m.: The first ferry departs from a dock at 35th Street, treating riders up the East River to a commute more serene than any in New York.

10:58 a.m.: Once on the island, we overhear someone talk of a rumored \$8 latte.

11:24 a.m.: Artist Jonathan Horowitz's installation "700 Dots" attracts a scene to the booth for Gavin Brown's Enterprise, at which fairgoers sit and paint a black dot on a white canvas with materials provided. When done, the painters get a \$20 check signed by the artist. "It's important that a person give it their all," Mr. Horowitz said.

11:36 a.m.: Delicate displays of chewing gum and other detritus collected from New York streets by Yuji Agematsu fill the booth for Real Fine Arts. The gum one, priced at \$9,000, hasn't yet sold. "We're still waiting for things to figure themselves out," a representative from the gallery said.

11:51 a.m.: At a booth for a gallery from Italy, we admire a large work on paper by Joan Jonas, the 78-year-old American artist who is currently the toast of the Venice Biennale. Status: sold, for \$25,000.

12:39 p.m.: Near a large, shifting monochromatic painting with radiant purples and pinks by the German artist Matti Braun, a woman comments to her friends, "There's a little Miami for you, ladies."

12:50 p.m.: In a massage chair in the middle of the floor, placed by Korakrit Arunanondchai for the series Frieze Projects, a man appears to be asleep—until he fidgets into position to take a selfie.

1:04 p.m.: Another Frieze Projects hit, "Tribute to Flux-Labyrinth," features a mysterious maze of rooms conceived by the experimental Fluxus group in 1975. We puzzle over doors that can only be opened abstractly, walk on squishy stairs, roll over marbles and fill out an absurdist questionnaire—all before exiting past a row of moaning men in gold shorts with protruding bellies. "I'm glad you survived," said Cecilia Alemani, the curator of Frieze Projects.

1:29 p.m.: Lunch is bratwurst and an artisanal cola outside. Going back in, the thought occurs to keep sunglasses on since the light inside the tent is so bright.

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1:45 p.m.: At the booth for a gallery from Colombia, the description of a work by Rosemberg Sandoval includes the best material at the fair so far: “stabbed paper.”

2:09 p.m.: Ken Tisa’s erotically charged paintings and ceramics entice at Kate Werble Gallery’s booth, many of them new to the show after others sold on the advance VIP day. “We did really well,” one of the minders said.

2:22 p.m.: In a section for nonprofit groups, a large painting by Richard Serra looms at the booth for SculptureCenter in Queens. A few collectors were vying to buy it for its \$70,000 asking price—they had expressed interest, the representative said, and were “going back to measure spaces.”

3:22 p.m.: Bumping into Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, we ask about the art-fair experience and hear, from his friend and collaborator Kjartan Sveinsson, “It’s amazing how much amazing art there is in the world,” his droll tone suggesting something other than sincerity.

3:36 p.m.: A large sculpture of a lizard holds a rice ball aloft—a vision realized by Pietro Roccasalva. The rice ball was evidently made by a restaurant in Midtown. The piece sold, for \$90,000.

4 p.m.: Comfort comes in the form of a fluorescent wood chair designed by Mary Heilmann, whose work is also now on an outdoor balcony at the new Whitney Museum. “We got a lot of inquiries since the Whitney opened,” dealer Cristian Alexa said of the veteran artist’s work. “It was a reactivation.”

5:11 p.m.: A group of paintings by Picasso and Jean Dubuffet prove far older than most everything at the fair, but both are still alive and kicking. Neither had sold yet, but dealer Esperanza Sobrino was unfazed. “It goes to show a modern classic can go next to a work made yesterday,” she said.

6 p.m.: Extremes of contemporary art converse in work by the frazzled Austrian Franz West and cool California minimalist John McCracken at the booth for David Zwirner. Both sold well on the preview day, according to director of sales Justine Durrett, who said that Frieze was smart to time the fair alongside active auctions in the city in May. About the art on show, she added, “It’s the yin and the yang.”

6:34 p.m.: We board the boat back, eyes blurry with looking.

7 p.m.: Mike D of Beastie Boys makes his way among others spilling toward the dock. All seem pleased, despite having never left, to be back in New York.

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