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'Art14, London's Latest Fair, Sheds Light on Another Market'

By Coline Milliard

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Coline Milliard, Friday, February 28, 2014

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Art14, opening night. (© Written Light)

This could be the decisive moment for Art14. Its inaugural edition Art13 (some marketing genius suggested a name that changes every year) was deemed a success, yet with art fairs starting out is the easy bit. Establishing oneself as a fixture on the already-crowded fair calendar is another matter. With its global outlook, Art14 has managed to create a buzz, and this year has cannily involved some of the world's top collectors, including Budi Tek, Patrizia Sandretto Rebaudengo, and Don and Mera Rubell, in their Global Private Museum Summit. But is anyone really buying?

One of the most interesting things about Art14 is that it's not Frieze, which means that it isn't a fair where one is sure to find familiar exhibitors with their host of vetted contemporary artists. During the private view yesterday, many visitors were wondering exactly what it was they are looking at as they encountered galleries they'd never heard of and artists virtually unknown in the West. Although unsettling, this might prove to be a smart strategy. The fair is casting itself as alternative, an introduction to new markets and art worlds – one which is positioned as an equal to London's main fair (significantly, the booth price per square meter at Art14 is £360 (US\$602), almost exactly the £362 (US\$605) charged at Frieze for their top spots). Prices at Art14 are much more inclusive though, starting at a few hundred pounds and topping around the half million mark.

Art14 is the brainchild of Tim Etchells and Sandy Angus, who previously launched Art Hong Kong. It is therefore unsurprising that Asia is one of the main focuses of the fair. Like last year, 25 Asian exhibitors have made the trip. Right by the entrance, the Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore-based Pearl Lam Galleries set the tone with *Alchemy* (2014), a brightly colored installation of totems by the Korean artist Choi Jeong Hwa. The gallery reported several sales in the fair's first hours, including a painting by Zhu Jinshi, *Old Cycas Tree*, which sold for £195,000 (US\$325,798) to a UK-based collector.



Art14, opening night. (©Written Light)

Some of the works quickest to go were also the most classic. Four Bridget Riley works on paper at London's Karsten Schubert found a new home immediately after the opening, reportedly selling in the region of £100,000 (US\$167,276). Following a global trend, modern art is stronger this year at Art14, something director Stephanie Dieckvoss says she's keen to see continue. Budapest's Kálmán Maklár Fine Arts is showing a 1954 abstract painting by the Hungary-born French painter Simon Hantaï, who is enjoying a renewed popularity in the wake of last summer's Centre George Pompidou retrospective. The piece is priced in the region of £100,000 (US\$167,276) and was yet to find a buyer at time of writing. Maklár has been more successful with Judit Reigl, another Hungarian-born French artist close to the Surrealists (her first show was organized by André Breton). The gallery sold her large abstract painting *Outburst* (1956) for £220,000 (US\$367,400) to a British collector, confirming the interest for the artist, now in her 90s. Another modern highlight was the focus on painter F.N. Souza at the booth of Delhi Art Gallery. "For us, to be museum quality overrides everything," the gallery's Kishore Singh told artnet News. Having recently set up shop in Mumbai, the gallery "had to make a debut in London," he continued, hoping, in part, to appeal to wealthy individuals from the sub-continent who made the capital their home.

Despite these positive signs, the fair is still finding its feet. More than thirty galleries didn't come back for Art14's second year. Though, approximately fifty have joined. "It sort of happened," says director Dieckvoss of the increase in total exhibitors, "we've had a lot of interest this year. But I don't want to grow anymore—or at least, not significantly." Expectedly, all newcomers hope for new clients, whether they are based in the UK and wish to break into the Asian and Middle-Eastern market, or vice versa. "Europe is the center of the world for art," says Liyun Wang from Bangkok's Tang Contemporary, an exhibitor at Art Basel in Hong Kong and in Miami who is showing in the UK for the first time. From a Western perspective, these foreign galleries are also the most interesting, as the fair has so far managed to attract mainly second and third-tier exhibitors from Europe. Dieckvoss says she wants to cater to both young and established galleries, but the real big players—the likes of White Cube, Sadie Coles, Hauser & Wirth—remain conspicuously absent. "You wait," jokes the fair director, although she's aware that such additions might weaken Art14's USP.

The director of a major London gallery (not showing at Art14) told artnet News he felt there was "a lot of dross like at the London Art Fair," but also some real finds. These include a bijou presentation of works by the color photography pioneer Raghbir Singh at Mumbai's Jhaveri Contemporary, which is showing at Art First, a section dedicated to galleries that have never shown in a London fair before. Fairly modestly priced (between £3,000-8,000/ US\$5,012-13,366)—and despite the photographer's recent exposure in London institutions—the prints hadn't found buyers when artnet News visited the booth. It confirmed a fairly slow start for the fair as a whole. But Art14 dares to be different—Virginie Puertolas-Syn, a director at Pearl Lam Galleries talked about the fair "breaking the conceptual art diktat"—and forging a new path comes at a price. It's an ambitious bet which may well work out in the medium term, although confirmation hasn't come just yet.