

All the fun, less of the fair: the discreet charm of the London Art Fair

By Mark Sheerin | 16 January 2014

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Exhibition review: London Art Fair 2014, Business Design Centre, London until January 19 2014

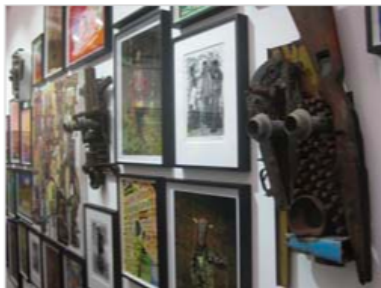


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Relaxed, manageable, uncrowded: London Art Fair can seem quite unlike an art fair. Gallerists are happy to converse. If you show an interest, they may even approach you. Security is low key (no bag checks on your way out). And the pulsating atmosphere of flash new money is lacking.

This is the lure of modern, rather than contemporary art. The Fair even has a museum partnership this year, with a stand given by the Hepworth in Wakefield. Curator Frances Guy has selected a fine array of modernist works to make the journey to London.

A cluster of selling galleries are squeezed alongside iconic pieces by Moore and Hepworth. Sombre shades on the wall and thick carpet underfoot both foster a more reflective experience. It is homely touches like this which make the wares at London Art Fair seem more attainable.



Display of African art from Jack Bell Gallery

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But it will take more than an occasional table and a vase of flowers to bring a bucolic green painting by Graham Sutherland (Crane Kelman) within reach. And a Francis Bacon print is still a Francis Bacon print, coming with a £20,000 price tag.

For most of us, that would require a second mortgage. So you may be better off going deeper into the Fair and finding something eye catching by a lesser known artist. There are other pieces to be found for the mere price of a second hand car.



In this way, you may discover a painted aerial view of a shimmering

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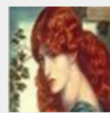
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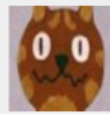
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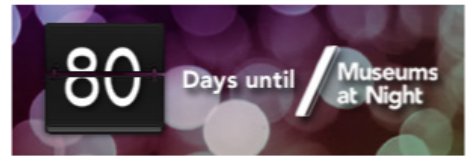
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Kyle Noble piece at John Martin Gallery

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desert village by Enrique Azocar (Gray Modern & Contemporary Art) or a macabre decorated horse skull by Kyle Noble (John Martin Gallery), or a recreation of Dall's lobster phone in X-ray by Nick Veasey (Mauger Modern Art).

The highest concentration of interesting work is even

tucked away in the cavernous Design Centre's wings. Art Projects have been a fixture at LAF for ten years now and offer London's less commercial, less central and often artist-led spaces a chance to find new followers.

In a model of helpfulness, a gallerist from Dalla Rosa offers me the chance to handle one of their evocative scrimshawed whale teeth by Kasper Pincis. He reassures me that no whales were harmed in the making of these pieces; the artwork is made of balsa wood.

Nearby, Justin Hammond is suited and booted for the launch of his annual Catlin Guide. This visitor is relatively familiar with the 2014 book, since I wrote the foreword. But with its artist-fabricated plinth and array of sold work, the stand is still impressive.



No discarded jacket, but a sculpture from the Catlin Guide

© Mark Sheerin

Art Projects reject the homely vibe of the main fair. Both Ceri Hand, from Southwar,k and Un-spaced, from Paris, paper their stands with vinyls from artists Hannah Knox and Éric Tabuchi respectively. The latter scares visitors with a plywood boat and backdrop of a reservoir with a plunging sinkhole.

Meanwhile, Sunday Painter bely their scruffy Peckham origins with a slick presentation of work together with Galeria Stereo from Warsaw. A highlight was a dark portrait sized wall piece by Rob Chavasse. Get close and you realise it's a fully functioning top end radiator.

The professionalism and imagination shown by the Art Projects make you wonder why LAF continue to sideline them. But it's no doubt to do with rents and the bottom line, which reminds us after all that this is a marketplace and not a museum. But the Fair does a good job of suspending disbelief.

At Cynthia Corbett gallery you'll find a reminder of just where you are. Luis Barba paints crowded salons in which contemporary and modern art hangs floor to ceiling, and art world celebs mill around wearing barcodes.

It seems like a harsh comment, but spotting at least one of her cast leading a tour through the excellent stand by Jack Bell, you'd have to say it's fair comment.

- Open 11am-7pm Friday, 10am-7pm Saturday, 10am-5pm Sunday. Admission £12-£17 (free for under-12s). [Book online.](#)

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