

All the fun of the fair

This review is about my first visit to the Frieze Art Fair in October 2008.

These are my thoughts, observations and lasting impressions of just some of the art that inspired me that day.

Frieze is a flamboyant, commercial 'market day' for investors, collectors and buyers of contemporary modern art. Held over four days, every October in a huge marquee in the middle of Regent's Park, London, it is a honey pot for collectors, artists, museum and gallery directors, the media, students and celebrities from fashion, cinema and music. This year there were 150 international galleries, fifteen specially commissioned artists projects, a sculpture park, talks, guided tours, films, music, books, magazines, children's workshops and educational experiences for all the family.

After navigating three swollen queues, a bank of cashiers and an endless curtained corridor of forbidden red carpet, I managed to get inside the huge white tent. Taking in 360 degree from the main meeting point desk, I was stunned by the diverse range of creativity I could see in just one minute. There was a twenty foot wall of spinning black and white geometric circles being powered by a lad on a bicycle in the Gagorian Gallery, a film featuring octogenarians screaming a song entitled 'no future' in Hauser and Wirth and very tall men in designer suits and long pointy shoes nodding gravely around a thirty foot red wax candle. It was noisy, weird and looked like fun – just like a Fair should be!

The most bizarre all round experience was Sirkus, the legendary music bar from Reykjavík. When the bar closed in January 2008 to make way for new development, Kling and Bang, Iceland's contemporary art gallery came up with the idea of dismantling it and rebuilding it as it was in its heyday for Frieze. Walking into this dark, funky bar with loud rock music, fairy lights, sticky floor and psychedelic PVC chairs was a treat for all the senses. You could even taste it.

Three Japanese tourists paid the freaky bar maids £9 for their tiny cups of Thule pilsner lager and started taking photographs.

I sat in a corner and enjoyed the hippy, grungy atmosphere. It reminded me of my old student bar, of youth, freedom of spirit and life without responsibility. A real time machine.

There were surprises around every corner and I was particularly drawn to large sculptures and unusual materials. You could get so close. You could see how they were made and the techniques used. The textures, materials, skill and craftsmanship. For example, a beautifully wood turned 'Long Face' and a red stone 'Slanted Face', both 120x60x60mmm were breathtaking in their execution. Tony Cragg, represented by Galerie Thaddaeus Ruppac, Paris, had captured the jowls and veins of hanging facial muscle and tissue. The soft undulating folds made you feel the ear lobes, noses and cupped mouths were fighting gravity and stretching to the floor.

A warrior figure 'untitled' by Thomas Houseago (Herald Street Gallery) stood over two metres high. Made from wood, graphite, tuf-cal (a strong fibre plaster), hemp, iron, oil stick and painted white, he was on the point of either lashing out at me or fleeing in fear.

One of my favourites of the day was by the French/American sculptor, Louise Bourgeois, entitled 'I see you through me' (etching, watercolour, pencil, fabric and wire on paper, 150x123mm). Two flattened figures communicating. The left one was short and round, filled with vibrant jewel blues and delicate shapes. The right one was tall and willowy, made of thin wire and covered in blue netting. She is fluid and graceful. I thought it was a tender moment, perhaps between mother and child.

Hidden behind two animal transportation crates in the Galerie Neu, Berlin, was a stunning contemporary tapestry entitled Gala Picasso 2008 by Francesco Vezzoli. (hand made Gobelin wool, metal needles 3x4m). The figure in the process of painting looked cubist. Her body divided into strong shapes of soft pinks and blues. The red and gold female face trapped in the gilt frame looked surreal. Her acute angle drawing you into their room. She looked tormented and trapped in her gold prison. A 21st century tapestry, depicting 20th century art movements using a timeless craft.

The resin and acrylics were fascinating. In the Jablonka Gallery, Mike Kelley's fantasy metropolis skyline 'City 6' (wood and acrylic 136x55x55mm) looked good enough to eat. Pastel jelly towers, turrets and domes in muted pinks and peaches peeped through a soft layer of sparkling mist. In sharp contrast, Galerie Meyer Kainer exhibited work by Gelatin, a team of four artists who met in 1978. An eight-foot square of lime and emerald greens, acid blues and slimy browns. I was looking at the surface of a bubbling, pulsating, heaving pond. Faces, eyes and mouths stared and gasped for air, shoots and algae struggled through sludge. It was living and breathing.

I looked around. There was creativity here in all shapes, sizes and crafts. Hanging, floating and bubbling. Turning, spinning and flying. I had walked inside it, through, behind, underneath and on top of it. Listened, read, watched and got close enough to breathe on it. I could buy it in plaster, cement, acrylic, resin, wood, mesh and lead. Stuffed, welded, moulded and melted. The choice was endless.

I loved the fun and spirit of the Frieze Art Fair. I felt uplifted and positive. I learnt a lot, scrutinized techniques and buzzed with ideas. I'd had a unique and exciting opportunity to see inside the creative imaginations of international contemporary artists and most of all, a day to simply enjoy art.



Sirkus, the legendary music bar from Reykjavík.
Kling and Bang Gallery, Iceland



'Long Face' wood. 'Slanted Face' red stone,
Both 120x60x60mm.

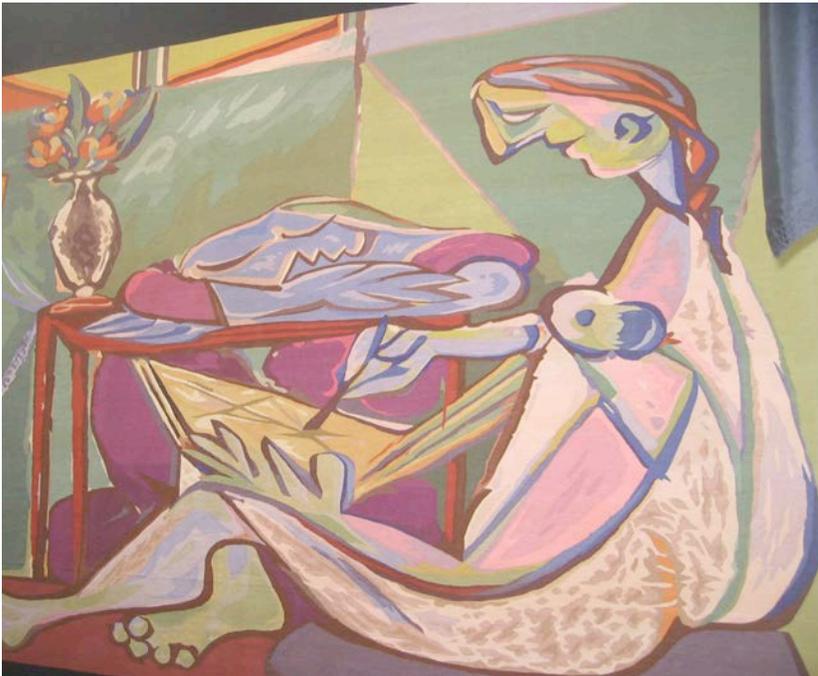
Tony Cragg, Galerie Thaddaeus Rupac, Paris



Untitled'

Wood, graphite, tuf-cal (a strong fibre plaster), hemp, iron, oil stick, white paint
2m x 1m

Thomas Houseago, Herald Street Gallery



Gala Picasso 2008

Hand made Gobelin wool, metal needles 3x4m

Francesco Vezzoli, Galerie Neu, Berlin