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ART FAIR DIGEST: AOTEAROA ART FAIR 2024

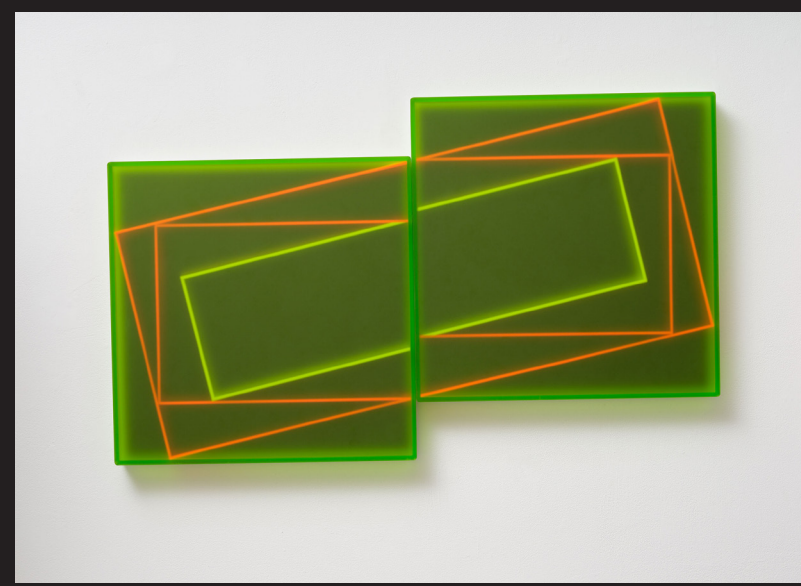
18-21 April 2024

“There are mille-feuilles the size of tables at Dom Pérignon ... [the] crowd wears variations of what I'd like to call 'evening beachwear' (dressy kaftans); they would not be out of place at a *White Lotus* resort.” So writes novelist Marlowe Granados of last year's Art Basel Miami, major pitstop on the ever-growing international art fair circuit and famous for being the unabashed libertine of the bunch. If valuing art can seem like an act of divination, it's almost comforting that an art fair's success can be calculated basically to the dollar amount—and perhaps also by its number of parties.

How will this year's Aotearoa Art Fair measure up? With new branding, a new

executive team and a new venue (they'll be swapping one ripple-roofed venue for another, moving to the Viaduct Event Centre after many years in the Cloud), gallerists, artists and collectors are looking forward to seeing further change ups to the art fair formula. These speculations join the perennial ones: What unsung medium will see a meteoric rise? Will there be anywhere to get a glass of water? Have the Nats inspired market confidence? Who is the latest YBA (Young Bankable Artist) to have on your radar? What shoe will everyone be wearing?

Read on for your unofficial digest of the largest event in Aotearoa's art market calendar.



LEFT TO RIGHT
Käryn Taylor, *Reality Shift*, 2022, cast acrylic, edition of 3, 80 x 48 x 4 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Sanderson Contemporary

Gretchen Albracht, *Leaf fall Autumn*, 2022, acrylic and oil on Belgian linen, 122.5 x 250 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Two Rooms

Philippa Blair, *Samba*, 2023, acrylic and mixed-media on canvas, 178 x 152.4 cm (4 panels). Courtesy of the artist and Orexart

TRENDING ...

Post-AI Painting

After Covid, *The Guardian* reported an “exodus” of people moving from cities to rural areas or smaller towns. For many residents, the pandemic had turned once bustling centres of social life and prosperity into claustrophobic and lonely cash-sinks, and they were allegedly flooding the countryside as they’d left it centuries earlier at the start of the Industrial Revolution. But do simple, slower times beckon? Belief in the pastoral idyll often peaks in times of uncertainty, and uncertain times these surely are. With the initial allure of the NFT

wearing off while anxiety about the effects of AI continues to grow, we predict a reassertion of physical media, but bearing the influence of its challenger. Look out for Peata Larkin’s code-inspired acrylic paintings on silk at Milford Galleries and Two Rooms, Grace Wright’s deconstructive takes on the baroque at Gow Langsford, or Sarah Drinan’s scenes of contorted bodies aglow and smudged as if we were viewing them through a greasy screen, a selection of which will be on view at FUTURES.



Sarah Drinan, *Untitled*, 2024, synthetic polymer and oil on linen, 100 × 110 cm. Courtesy of the artist and FUTURES

Established Women Artists

At the end of last year Gow Langsford presented *Dynamic Women* in their Kitchener Street space, an exhibition featuring many of the New Zealand women who made a mark on local Modernist painting. Works by Adele Younghusband, A. Lois White and Louise Henderson all featured, and these same artists sold strongly at Webb’s *Twenty* auction in July. With whispers of a ‘Modern Women’ exhibition in the pipeline at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, the forecast seems firmly in favour of female

artists whose contributions to Aotearoa’s aesthetic and cultural lexicons are being given long overdue attention. Might it also extend to our *living* female artists? Several of Aotearoa’s most prominent will be showing at the fair, so make sure to visit Orex Art to see Philippa Blair’s bold abstract canvases, Two Rooms for some quintessential Gretchen Albrechts, and Bergman Gallery who’ll be showing Rarotongan artist Sylvia Marsters.

Sylvia Marsters, *Should I Go*, 2024, oils on extra fine linen, 20.8 × 29.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Bergman Gallery



PENDING ...

Your Autumn Holiday

This year’s fair falls squarely in the middle of the school holidays, so expect attendees to be childless types with inheritance to burn and guest rooms to decorate. Alternatively, those with children to entertain can always take them to Squiggla, which will be offering its mark making drop-in workshops for the duration of the fair. The kids might also like to

stare into the bottomless, hypnotic voids of Robert Jahnke’s light sculptures, some of which will be on view at Paul Nache, but make sure they don’t get too starry eyed; Virginia Leonard’s ceramics—Leaning Towers of Resin—will be on display in the same booth, and also at Gow Langsford.

The opening night, on the other hand, is strictly R18.

Australian artist and master-vivisectioner of luxury, privilege and narcissism, Michael Zavros, who is showing at the fair with Starkwhite, will orchestrate a performance work reportedly involving a champagne tower. We hope it’s of a scale to rival Basel’s mille-feuille (though the fair’s usual one glass ration doesn’t inspire much faith).



Stephen Ellis, *Unfolding 1*, 2022, coloured pencil on Lana paper, 53 × 53 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Sanderson Contemporary

Escapism

The first months of 2024 have been fraught, and though there are artists tackling this frontally—Tame Iti’s artfully conceived Waitangi Day hīkoi, for example—it is largely not within institutions, nor is the work often an easy sell to the average collector. Showings like Ngahua Harrison’s with Te Manawa will be few and far (the photographer is a sharp critic of ongoing land dispossessions in Te Tai Tokerau Northland), but that’s not to say that the mood of the times won’t be reflected elsewhere via weighted-blanket-type aesthetic comforts (giving new

meaning to art’s ‘soft power’). Expect slice-of-life domestic scenes, florals, miniatures and sfumato.

Some artists manage to find a midpoint between crisis and comfort, though. Stephen Ellis’s drawings are both surreal and serene, unsettling considerations of environmental decline through the modest, demanding and absorbing medium of ink pen. See his work alongside that of Zara Dolan, Jon Tootill, Wi Taepa, Simon Kaan and Kāryn Taylor in Sanderson Contemporary’s booth.



Zhu Ohmu, *Organ Pipe Mud Dauber #14* and *Organ Pipe Mud Dauber #15*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and McLeavey Gallery. Photo: Cat Morrison

Artist-run spaces

With no dedicated artist-run initiative programme or project at the fair this year, there will be fewer emerging artists presenting work. Several gallerists are electing to show the early-career artists from their stables though (see: Hannah Ireland at Jhana Millers; Jamie Te Heuheu at Starkwhite; Sung Hwan Bobby Park at Föenander Gallery; Zhu Ohmu at McLeavey Gallery). It might also usher in a renewed focus on those who find themselves in the strange valley of the mid-career.

Ensuring a good supply of new energy and ‘discoverables’ is always difficult for fairs, with expensive booths making gallerists more likely to present their well-known and high-ticket artists. Among the more

interesting attempts to do this recently is Frieze’s ‘Artist-to-Artist’ series, for which eight prominent artists, including Olafur Eliasson, Tracey Emin, Simone Leigh and Wolfgang Tillmans, invited emerging artists from their galleries to present work at the fair—a smart way of including lesser-known artists while vesting them with an insider’s endorsement that reassures potential collectors. We hope the Aotearoa Art Fair will look to initiatives like this in future years. Alternatively, there’s always the possibility that the proverbial Anti-Art Fair could flourish, where young artists, curators and gallerists who want a piece of the pie, at a distance, don’t stop to wait for the invitation.

Spending?

Despite the slight easing of inflation over the past six months, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand has remained firm on the official cash rate, holding it at 5.5 percent and indicating that it will remain so until at least mid-2025. They’re still looking to slow household spending to bring inflation within the target 2–3% range. How this will impact trade at the fair remains to be seen. Former art columnist for *BusinessDesk* Briar Williams put it so to *Art News*: “Discretionary spending hit a hiatus in the second half of 2023 after two years of unprecedented highs, which saw significant interest and buying activity across all areas of the art market. Heading into 2024, spending remains cautious and at the Aotearoa Art Fair, I think we can expect reasonably focused buying from collectors. Interest will be strong for those artists in high demand, but many galleries are opting to show a

selection of artists on their stands, which will help engage the wide range of buyers who generally attend this type of event.”

If there’s one thing that this recession has made clear, it’s the inestimable convolution of the global market. Boundaries and borders have never felt more outdated, despite renewed enthusiasm for them during the pandemic. Martyn Reynolds’ is one artist showing at the fair (with Sumer) whose work understands these major shifts and how they have upended the old categories of political ideology. His latest pieces, he says, are a ‘mood board’ of Liberalism—features figures such as Emmanuel Macron, Manuel Valls, Zhou Enlai and Richard Nixon, stills from *The Kardashians*, *Seinfeld* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, brought together with forms reminiscent of hammers and sickles.



Martyn Reynolds, *Black Hook Tarmac*, 2020, anodised cast aluminium, uv print, 48 × 30 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Sumer