

ARTINFO

Penny-Wise or Pound-Foolish?

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LONDON—Now that they have all the trappings of noncommercial events—special projects, curated sections, panel discussions—it is sometimes easy to forget that fairs are the art world's marketplaces. Dealers pay—often very dearly—to rent booth space, and they are under considerable pressure to sell work. Given the dollar's current weakness against the pound (as of this writing, it was \$2.04 to a pound), London presents special challenges for American dealers.

So, how does the \$2 pound affect emerging American gallerists? While the cost of doing business in London is overwhelmingly high, according to a handful of dealers doing the less expensive Frieze satellite fairs—Pulse, Bridge, Zoo, and Year_07 Art Projects—the silver lining of the current exchange rate is that the prices of American artists' work might seem enticingly affordable to European collectors.

"The artwork will look really cheap," says Edward Winkleman, whose eponymous New York gallery is doing Year_07 Art Projects. "Then again, dealers are worried about things like going out to eat, things you just don't pay attention to in places like Miami. We have to be careful about our socializing."

Which can be difficult in an art world that has become increasingly event-oriented. "I know a gallery that is renting an apartment and having collectors come over there, instead of going out to a restaurant," says Winkleman. "There are some creative solutions."

Chicago gallerist Kavi Gupta has found some of them. For his first time at the Zoo fair he says he's had to come up with innovative ways to save money, including cutting down on staff. "I'm only bringing two staff members, and no extra installers for the booth," he says. "Also, we're staying in apartments, not hotels." Even so, he says he will end up having to spend a whopping \$5,000 to 6,000 on accommodations.

"The cost of doing business [in London] for an emerging gallery on a shoestring budget is very high," says Gupta. "I would love to take more chances and bring more large work, but the shipping is very expensive."

Leigh Conner of the Washington D.C. gallery Conner Contemporary agrees. She is participating in the Pulse fair's inaugural London edition. She sees the fair as an opportunity for European collectors to pick up works by emerging artists at a discount, but has decided to show a lot of drawings in her booth rather than large works that are expensive to ship.

Though returns can be very high in a booming market, art fairs in general are not cheap. The satellite fairs tend to be cheaper than Frieze, where a booth can cost as much as \$40,000 (and there's still a waiting list!), but they're still a considerable expense. A typical booth at Zoo is \$10,000; Year_07 booths are \$6,000. At Bridge, \$5,000 gets you a hotel room and a booth, all in one. It's a useful throw-in, because the tourist industry is catching on to the kind of money they can bring in from an art fair bonanza: Last year during the Art Basel Miami Beach fair, the Art Newspaper ran an article about price gouging at local hotels during the fair.

Over at Frieze, a few galleries have come up with alternative models that make booths more affordable. New York galleries Taxter and Spengemann and Guild and Greyskul are sharing a booth. A few aisles over, four galleries—Jan Mot of Brussels, gbagency of Paris, Raster of Warsaw, and Hollybush Gardens of London—have teamed up to form The Fair Gallery, with installations assembled by independent curator Aurelie Voltz.

But most galleries showing at the satellite fairs seem to be banking on the idea that the affordable look of work priced in dollars will be the key to a successful week. "We price in dollars so they will automatically see a huge discount," says Conner. "For younger collectors that can be a real boon."

"Because we aren't dealing with blue-chip artists, it's a good thing for price to appear to be half," says Scott Zieher of New York's ZieherSmith gallery, which is showing at the Zoo fair. "It could be like what happened at the Volta fair in Basel," he adds. "I wish I had a nickel for every time someone said, 'Is this 5,000 euros?' I would say 'It's 5,000 dollars' and their face would light up."

And some dealers are simply keeping price points low. "The work I'm bringing is around the \$2,000 price point, or 1,000 pounds," says New York dealer Michael Foley, who will be at Bridge. "And that could be very enticing to collectors."

Even though the dollar is also doing poorly against the euro, Winkleman points out that some galleries have considered doing the Artissima fair in Turin, Italy, or the FIAC fair in Paris, and skipping more expensive London altogether. Still, London is where the market is. Says Winkleman, "You go to Europe as a young gallery either to make a statement or to try to make some money with new European collectors. If you want to make a statement, you might go to Art Forum in Berlin or Artissima in Turin. If you are trying to make money, you probably go to London first."