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Insider praise for Outsider art

New owner's decision to move Manhattan fair pays off as critics call for museums to accept self-taught artists in their collections

REPORT

New York. The big story at the 21st edition of the Outsider Art Fair (31 January-3 February) was the event's change in ownership. Founded in 1993 by the fair organiser Sanford Smith, it was bought last September by the gallerist Andrew Edlin, who had held a booth at the fair for seven years. One of the big decisions Edlin made was to move the event from its former location in midtown Manhattan, where it had been for the past five years, to Chelsea, where many of New York's major contemporary galleries have spaces. For Constantine Grimaldis of the eponymous Baltimore-based gallery, the move made sense. "Now we're in the heart of the art world," he said.

Jane Kallir, the co-director of Galerie St Etienne, was also quick to praise the fair's new leadership and direction. Explaining why her gallery returned this year after missing the previous two editions, she said that the event "seemed to be deteriorating during the past few years, and a number of us defected". Kallir added that the fair "has been re-energised partly by Andrew Edlin and new promotion, and partly through the quality of the work", which she maintained was higher than in previous years.

A considerable number of the 41 booths were occupied by galleries from smaller American cities, such as Lexington, Kentucky, which was represented by the non-profit Institute 193.



Outside the mainstream

Born in Prussia in 1892, Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern avoided serving in the First World War because of mental health problems, and was diagnosed as having schizophrenia in 1918. By the age of 27, he had already had two spells in psychiatric institutions, and in 1930, he was imprisoned for blackmail. Although his reputation grew after the end of the Second World War, his abilities declined after the death of his long-time companion, Martha Möller, in 1964. The artist was mostly forgotten when he died in 1982. *PP*

Meta (Physic) with Chicken, 1952, Galerie St Etienne, \$65,000

Others came from as far as Brussels and Tokyo. On the whole, dealers seemed pleased with their sales. Rob Tufnell, a first-time attendee from London, said the atmosphere was "much more positive" than the contemporary fairs he attended more regularly, with visitors "looking for new things rather than following trends". Tufnell sold

New owner Andrew Edlin has moved the fair to Chelsea

"a handful" of works by David Burton to new clients for £3,200 each. Reynald Lally, the co-owner of Galerie Bourbon-Lally in Petionville, Haiti, sold a painting by Daniel Belardinelli to a film producer for \$6,000. Kallir, whose gallery focuses on higher-end Outsider work, said she was in "serious negotiations" about a number of pieces as we went to press. "The major works will take longer to play out," she said.

The critical reception focused on the definition of Outsider art. The *New York Magazine* critic Jerry Saltz



called on museums to "integrate 'Outsider art' into their permanent collections and erase that distinction for good". Yet a number of gallerists disagreed, including Grimaldis and Tufnell, who see a clear divide between Insider and Outsider art. Edlin says that "the terminology is muddled", and that "art that speaks to a wider audience is referred to as 'Outsider' while art being made for the especially informed is referred to as mainstream". He adds: "Maybe it should be the other way around." *Pac Pobric*