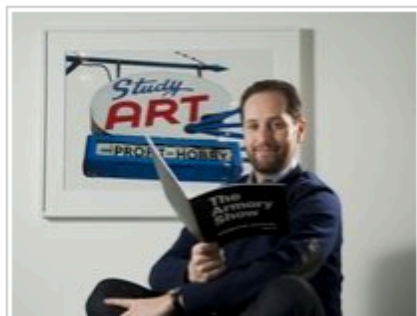


Fair game for art

Shows in the city expand and update as the market draws new players.

BY THERESA AGOVINO 

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STATE OF THE ART: Executive Director Noah Horowitz has "restructured and repositioned" the long-running Armory Show.

Photo: Buck Ennis

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Andrew Edlin became fascinated with "outsider art" in the late 1990s, when he sold collages made from postage stamps created by his deaf uncle. The pieces eventually won critical acclaim, and in 2001 Mr. Edlin opened a gallery featuring work created by untrained artists who often lived outside society's mainstream.

Mr. Edlin's involvement in the genre intensified last year, when he purchased the Outsider Art Fair for an undisclosed sum. He is hoping to cash in on the growth of art fairs in the city by breathing new life into the four-day event, which celebrates its 21st anniversary this month. He plans to add more galleries, change the venue and introduce curated exhibits.

"The fair is already legendary," said Mr. Edlin. "I just think I can bring the art to a much wider audience."

The local art-fair market is undergoing a period of rapid growth and change. Last May, London-based Frieze, which has been running a highly respected event in Britain for a decade, debuted on Randall's Island, adding to the more than a dozen fairs that took place in the city last year.

Others are on the way, while more established brands are expanding, changing their schedules or going on the block: The venerable Armory Show, one of the city's stalwarts that has been in the midst of sharpening its focus, is about to be sold, sources say. Critics complained the show had become too large, which created a springboard for other fairs to pop up, offering a better shopping experience.

Soaring art prices are also increasing demand for fairs. Major galleries may garner 50% of their revenue from fairs, while smaller ones could pocket as much as 75%. That's why gallery owners from Chelsea to Bushwick, Brooklyn, will shell out up to \$90,000 to be represented at a fair even though they already have a location in the city.

"Art fairs are extremely useful," said Elizabeth von Habsburg, managing director of the Winston Art Group, an art appraisal and advisory firm. "One way to educate clients is to take them to a fair and walk around with them to give them an easy opportunity to see what is out there."

Satellite shows

Frieze co-Director Amanda Sharp said the company decided to create a fair in New York because of the requests it received from collectors and galleries. It is different from other fairs because 65% of the 180 galleries that will set up in a temporary structure on Randall's Island in May will present exhibits that originate from outside the U.S.

"You have extraordinary galleries and strong auction houses here, but you didn't have anything that was the intersection between Beirut, London, Berlin and New Zealand," said Ms. Sharp.

Big fairs have spawned smaller satellite shows that run simultaneously, with either different kinds of art or works from less-established galleries.

There are at least four fairs that run in March to coincide with the two traditional behemoths of the New York scene, the Art Show and the Armory Show.

Frieze's entry last year, however, shook up the traditional lineup because Pulse, a contemporary satellite fair, opted to run in May along with Frieze instead of operating in March, as was customary. Additionally, the New Art Dealers Alliance held its first-ever fair in New York during Frieze.

This year, there are expected to be three new fairs taking place in May, including Cutlog, a Paris-based fair that is making its New York debut. Another is MasterWorks, created by Sanford Smith, a 30-year-plus veteran of the business. The show will run during Frieze at the Park Avenue Armory, although it might as well be called the anti-Frieze show because it showcases everyone from Old Masters to 21st-century artists.

"I'm counterprogramming against Frieze," said Mr. Smith. "But Frieze brings the collectors, and real collectors want to see everything."

Collectors' and gallery owners' dissatisfaction with the growing size of the Armory Show helped provide a fertile landscape for Frieze, sources said. The Armory Show hosted 289 exhibitors in 2010, and its executive director, Noah Horowitz, conceded that it just "didn't feel luxurious."

He said the show has become more selective: Last year, the Armory Show hosted only 228 galleries, and this year the number will fall to 210. Meanwhile, there will be about 14 lounge spaces at the fair, triple the number of 2010, and there will be fewer and wider aisles so collectors can see the art more easily.

Crucial exposure

"We have restructured and repositioned," said Mr. Horowitz, who was promoted to his current post last fall after joining the show in late 2011.

Mr. Horowitz declined to comment on rumors that the fair, which is owned by a division of **Vornado Realty Trust**, was being sold to Louise Blouin, an owner of several art publications such as *Art + Auction* and *Modern Painters*. Ms. Blouin and her representatives didn't return calls. She is also reportedly buying at least three other Vornado-owned fairs, including Volta New York.

"The fairs are like medieval marketplaces. Everyone is around, and things just happen," said Mary Sabbatino, a vice president of Galerie Lelong, which will have booths at the Art Fair and Frieze this year.

Ms. Sabbatino can't say how much of her sales comes from the various fairs she attends but says the exposure is crucial. "You need to be there, and you want to be there," she said. Fair owners don't get a cut of the sales. They make money by selling sponsorships, booths and tickets to the events.

This year, 40 galleries want to be at the Outsider Art Fair, up from 34 in 2011. That's just one change. It will be held this year at Center 548, a state-of-the-art space with Hudson River views, instead of its former location, a West 34th Street office tower. There will also be two special exhibits and a host of panel discussions—events that Mr. Edlin hopes will draw collectors. "I'm hoping that I'm making it better than it was before," he said.

SIDEBAR: ART FAIRS PAINT THE TOWN IN MARCH

THE ART SHOW

March 6-10

Park Avenue Armory

SCOPE NEW YORK

March 6-10

Skylight at Moynihan Station

THE ARMORY SHOW

March 7-10

Piers 92 and 93

INDEPENDENT NEW YORK

March 7-10

548 W. 22nd St.

VOLTA NEW YORK

March 7-10

82 Mercer St.

FRIEZE FRAME

180

NUMBER of galleries scheduled to exhibit at Frieze art fair in May

65%

PERCENTAGE of those galleries that will present work by overseas artists