

Big Asian presence at London's Frieze art fairs, where strong sales belied Brexit fears that have led galleries to open spaces in Paris

- Hong Kong curator presents section on textile art, while Cambodian artist's performance art work has dancers in masks representing his country and China
- After London, the focus moves to Paris this week with opening of the FIAC art fair



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Booths in the "Woven" section of the Frieze London art fair. Sales were strong at the fair despite fears about the repercussions of Britain's exit from the European Union, which has prompted some London galleries to open in Paris, where the FIAC art fair opens this week. Photo: Frieze

Brexit and its repercussions. Political unrest. A national identity crisis. While artists and curators address these issues, the art market appears pretty unperturbed by it all.

In London this month, people were still buying art, and quite a bit of it, at the Frieze art fairs, despite fears that Paris will replace London as the European art hub; because of Britain's expected exit from the European Union, galleries are opening spaces in the French capital. White Cube recently announced the opening of a viewing space, and David Zwirner's new Parisian

space will make its debut this week ahead of FIAC – the Foire internationale d'art contemporain – the most prominent art fair on the calendar in mainland Europe.

The 17th edition of Frieze London and its counterpart Frieze Masters were the most international yet, with 290 galleries from 35 countries participating – a point of pride for fair director Victoria Siddall, who says it was “particularly important in this political moment”.

“London has always been a hub for people from everywhere to come, it has so many international communities that call it home,” she said. “Geographically it's a great meeting point and that's what this fair is built on. This strong international presence, coupled with major sales across both fairs, once again attests to London's importance as a global centre for art and culture.”



Textile sculptures by Mrinalini Mukherjee presented by Nature Morte Gallery at Frieze London. Photo: Frieze

Efforts to present a more international perspective, particularly an Asian one, were visible in the “Woven” and “Frieze Live” sections of the fair, put together by well established curators with knowledge of Asian contemporary art.

Curated by Cosmin Costinas of Para Site, Hong Kong, “Woven” featured textile art, from Indian artist Mrinalini Mukherjee's tactile sculptural creations at Nature Morte Gallery, to Pacita Abad's vibrant tapestries from the Philippines, to Hongkonger Angela Su's intricately sewn reflections on the city's struggles.



Cambodian artist Khvay Samnang's performance art work, *Popil*, features two dancers representing her country and China. Photo: Frieze

“The language of textiles has been a part of artistic practices everywhere in the world, but it’s also one which has been marginalised because of its association with women artisans and non-Western practices,” Costinas says. “The idea was not to make a textile art show or to show works by artists outside of the West for the sake of it, but to raise fundamental questions about art historical standards.

“The context of the UK is now in a very problematic moment, and the question of how the position of the UK is seen in the world is very relevant, as is how other countries are seen in a global context.”

Diana Campbell Betancourt, founding artistic director of the Samdani Art Foundation and chief curator of the Dhaka Art Summit in Bangladesh, curated “Frieze Live”. She commissioned artists who grapple with local issues that have international dimensions.



A visitor contemplates a work by Song Dong, presented by Pace Gallery, at Frieze London. Photo: Frieze

The highlight of “Frieze Live” was Cambodian artist Khvay Samnang’s *Popil*, consisting of two dancers performing a traditional Cambodian dance, that explored the connection between China and Cambodia. The dancers wore bamboo masks, crafted by the artist, that represented each country. Himali Singh Soin composed a surreal, poetic film about climate change, Brexit, and identity in the face of upheaval.

Asian contemporary art also featured in the fair’s “Focus” section. Edouard Malingue Gallery displayed sculptural installations by Shanghai artist He Yida. Also from Shanghai, artist Tang Dixin transformed the Aike gallery’s booth into a performative and participatory experience that promoted forced relaxation. Singapore’s STPI exhibited ethereal visualisations of home by Korean artist Do Ho Suh.

While results of the autumn auctions in London were slightly below estimates and expectations, with the exception of a Banksy painting, *Devolved Parliament* (2009), which sold for US\$12.2 million at Sotheby’s, exhibitors at Frieze London reported outstanding sales.



Tang Dixin promotes forced relaxation at the Aike Gallery booth. Photo: Frieze

Lisson Gallery placed all its works within two hours of the fair opening, while Pace Gallery sold a number of works in the first few hours by artists including Song Dong and Yoshimoto Nara. Hauser & Wirth reported record opening-day sales at both fairs, and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac sold several works by Georg Baselitz and Elizabeth Peyton to a private Asian collection.