

Frieze New York: The Woke Blue-Chip Art Fair

Alexandra Bregman Contributor 

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May 18, 2023, 06:06pm EDT

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Hannah Black Politics (7 Color LED Display), 2023 LED sign 101.6 x 20.32 cm (40 x 8 inches), ... [+] PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

Many art organizations purport investment in underserved communities, but until recently, Frieze was not distinct among them. Frieze Art Fair was founded in London in 2003 by magazine editors of a publication by the same name. Now in its 20th year, international offshoots of the fair have expanded substantially, with the first New York iteration in 2012, in Los Angeles in 2019, and in Seoul in 2022.

Despite the cohesion of each city's (and really all art fairs') aesthetics, each city does have its own distinct style. One might argue that, compared to London, New York is loud and proud to the point of vulgarity, versus the cool discretion of the British elites. So it's hardly a shock that Frieze New York this year epitomized the city's *je ne sais quoi* with its own brand of art-based activism.



Frieze director Christine Messineo stood in front of the Vote.org stand and reminded visitors to ...

[+] PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

The 10am VIP room had a tequila stand, free champagne, and a Barbara Sturm skincare booth, so one could theoretically get tipsy and then spend \$1000 on skincare before lunch. But juxtaposed with the truly unique anthropological subculture of wealth was a surprisingly socially minded organization, supported by the same people sipping from the champagne flutes. Vote.org, deemed the “largest 501 nonprofit, nonpartisan voting registration and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) technology platform in America,” supports the goal of “reaching historically underserved voters of color and underrepresented young voters.” Directly to the side of the Barbara Sturm serums and creams were free water bottles addressing the still-enforceable ban on serving food or drink to Georgia voters beginning during the 2021 elections. As I enjoyed my complimentary pear-ginger scone between sips of my privileged water, a Vote.org representative explained that the refusal to hydrate those queued to vote was a deliberate ploy by Georgian lawmakers to suppress people of color in their own communities. Frieze Americas Director Christine Messineo (and Executive Director of Plan Your Vote) later echoed these sentiments in a VIP address, urging fair visitors to think about the bigger picture.

They did. One museum board member told me she was specifically looking for artists of color in diaspora, while another university representative came from a public art fund aimed at education. Meanwhile, \$250 designs of by 100 artists for the Artist Plate Project

to support the [Coalition for the Homeless](#) were for sale at the entrance, aimed at supporting the homeless.

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“The purchase of just one plate can feed more than 100 homeless and hungry individuals,” the wall beside the sale read, “...Tonight, roughly 75,000 people will sleep in NYC shelters...”



Artist Plate Project designs to support the Coalition for the Homeless PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

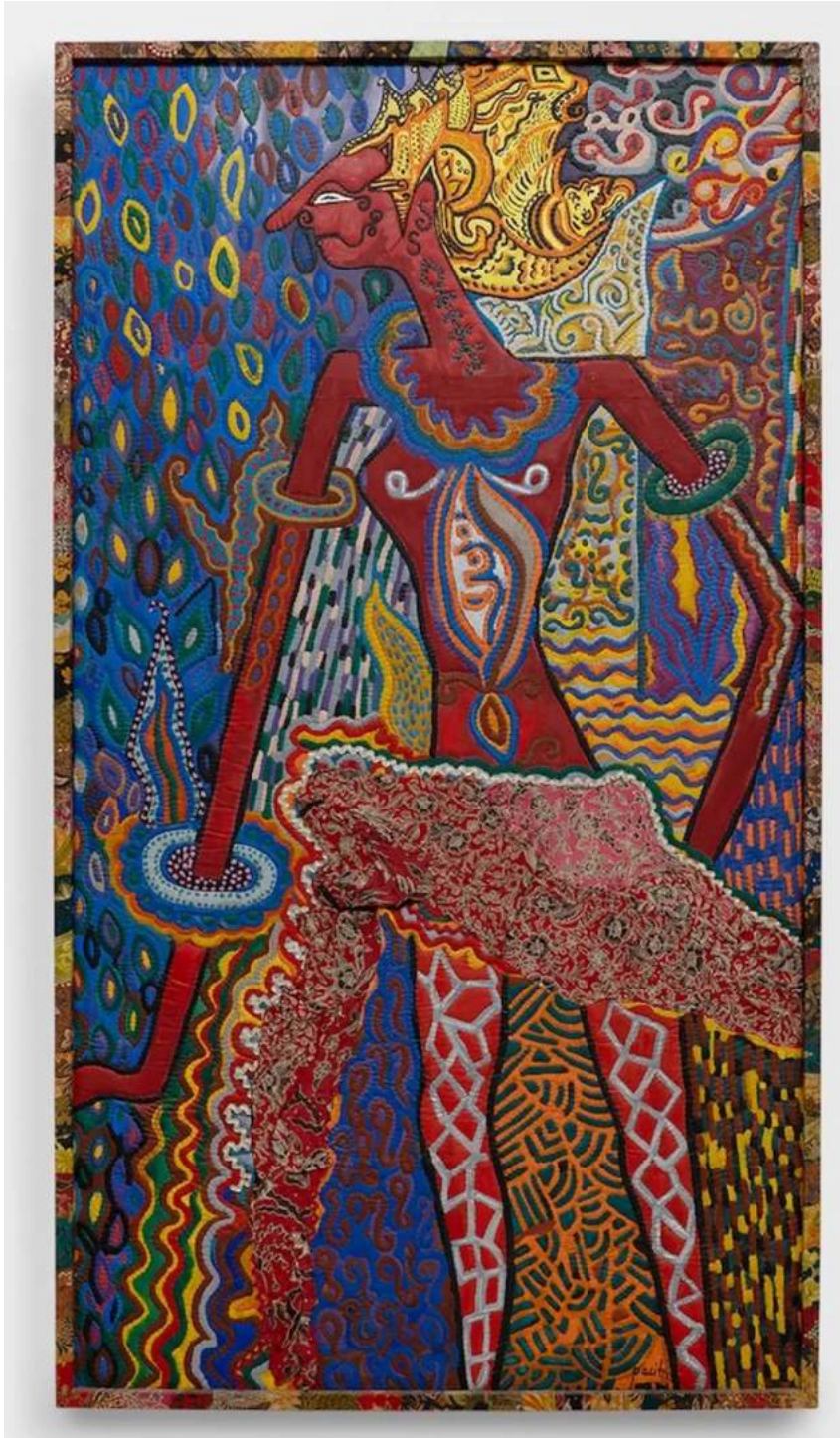
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The plates had lines longer than the bar, as eager collectors vied for the 250 plates in the limited edition alongside those with quietly lower budgets.

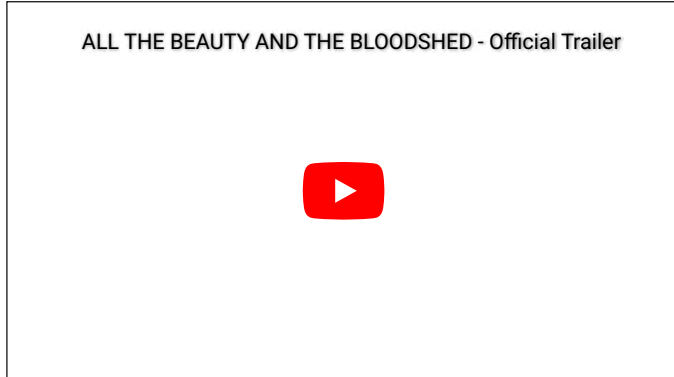
Once inside, the blue-chip art itself was still representative of diverse communities internationally. Pacita Abad (1946-2004), shown at Tina Kim Gallery's booth in tandem with an ongoing show in Chelsea, was a [Filipina artist whose nomadic lifestyle and love of color mutually influenced her work](#), looking almost like indigenous art traditions from painters as far-ranging as [Norval Morrisseau](#) or [Australian Aboriginals](#).



Pacita Abad (1946-2004) Rama, (1982) Fabric, painted and handsewn, trapuntoed, 96 x 53 1/2 x 3 ...

[+] PACITA ABAD ART ESTATE AND TINA KIM GALLERY. PHOTO BY HYUNJUNG RHEE

Even Gagosian, the quintessential veteran of blue-chip art in all its glory, chose to highlight [Nan Goldin, the outspoken activist photographer and filmmaker who recently switched to their gallery in March](#). Historically, Goldin made headlines for risking her reputation to launch a protest inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Sackler wing, in an ultimately successful effort to discourage funding from the opioid magnate family. Booth visitors debated the feminine and the power of Goldin's autobiographical film, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, while in the presence of the largest male-run mega-gallery in the world.



Each of these artistic and political choices confirm a changing of the guard, and a desire to focus on multiculturalism over the wealth itself. Frieze New York presented itself at the forefront of this movement, met with enthusiasm from all participating parties.

Frieze New York runs until May 21, 2023.



Alexandra Bregman

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