

A Walk in the Park

The Frieze Art Fair 2011

Dr. Ayla Lepine talks to Frieze founder Matthew Slotover about the fair, and its impact on the contemporary art scene...



(Left):
Anahita Razmi
China Girl, 2009
Photo: C-Print
90 x 60 cm
Courtesy of the artist

(Right):
Becky Beasley
You're (I), 2010
Seamed matt gelatin silver prints
196.4 x 49.2 cm
Courtesy of Laura Bartlett Gallery

Slotover's business approach is effective within and outside the art world, as he advocates a balance between tenaciously pursuing goals and keeping ambitions in perspective.

Matthew Slotover, co-founder and owner of Frieze Magazine and the Frieze Art Fair, is in high spirits. 'Frieze Week' is a mainstay of the global contemporary art calendar, bringing everyone who's anyone to London just as leafy Regent's Park turns crisply autumnal. The Frieze atmosphere is always a fresh buzz as crowds totaling over 60 000 visit the Fair, meet creative leaders, and get acquainted with the bold, beautiful world of contemporary art from its hottest emerging talent to its biggest superstars. Next year Frieze expands with two fairs in New York and the launch of Frieze Masters, showcasing art history's finest from the ancient world to the turn of the last century.

Frieze Magazine began two decades ago and the Fair followed. It was always firmly associated with the rising popularity of Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst and the YBAs: an interview with Hirst was the main feature of the magazine's pilot issue. From its early days, Frieze Art Fair, with prices ranging from the low thousands to the millions, attracted a strong core of galleries with long, robust histories of representing top artists and building relationships between collectors and practitioners. Frieze Art Fair contains over 170 galleries in a bespoke space ranging over 200 000 square feet (that's over 30 football pitches) in London's stunning Regent's Park. This year Carmody Groarke, an architectural firm best known for their innovative exhibition designs, has designed the Frieze Art Fair's site. Their recent projects include the 'Masters of Italian Fashion' exhibition at Somerset House and 'The Surreal House' at the Barbican. Carmody Groarke's Indian Ocean Tsunami Memorial opened at the Natural History Museum in July 2011. The selection procedure for exhibiting galleries at Frieze is rigorous. Representatives from eight long-standing galleries form a selection committee who take three days to narrow hundreds of applicants to a core of exhibitors with international

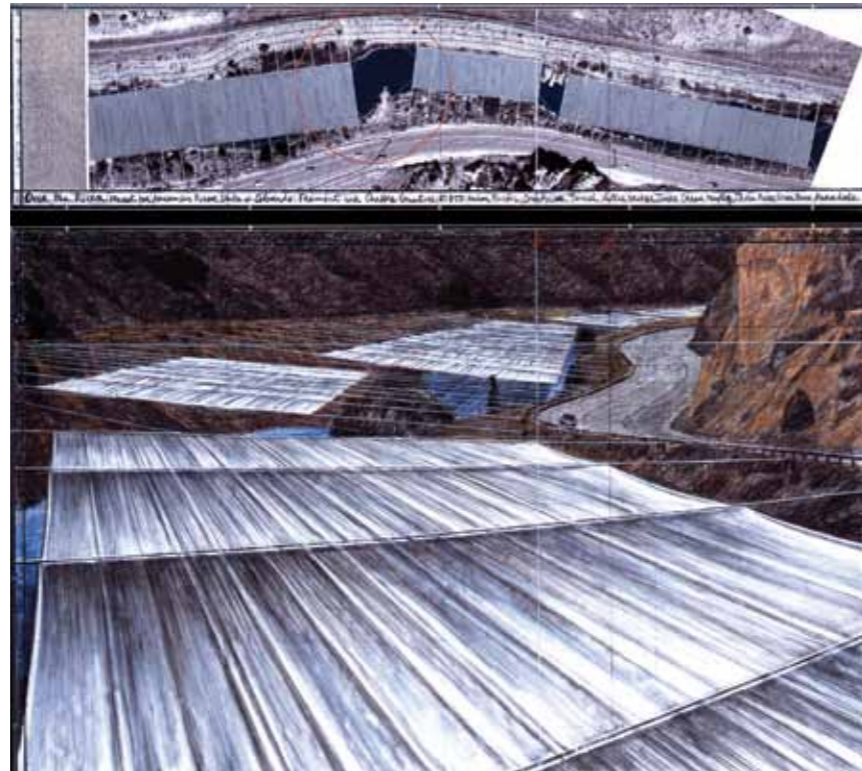


profiles, a reputation for integrity, a rich array of artists, and the right approach to the nuances of the art market.

What gives contemporary galleries the edge they need to succeed? In an exclusive interview for *The Market*, Matthew Slotover revealed, 'A successful gallery is a mix of efficient professionalism, reliability and, most importantly, great taste. They've got to attract the best of the best new artists.' Regarding the conceptual side of contemporary art and its ability to challenge, shock and even outright bewilder its viewers, Slotover is crystal clear: 'Challenging artwork and new ideas are great things. That's what ends up in the Tate. A lot of artwork can only be classed as decorative work buyers have overpaid for, usually because they don't know any better, they're unadventurous, and they haven't built durable relationships with galleries and artists.'

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So how do prospective collectors get started? And for a potential investor, is buying art like purchasing gold or playing the stock market? Most artists and serious collectors are involved in making and supporting art for the long term – often their entire lives. Chasing flash-in-the-pan trends or being led by assumptions that the biggest collectors are all hedge fund managers and Russian oligarchs are never real indicators for the art market. The smartest and most authentic way to be a collector – and the big sales of collectors' works at Christie's and Sotheby's attest to this – is to develop lasting relationships with artists you love and to get engaged with the art world and its people in a meaningful way. As for global economic crisis, there are huge challenges facing young artists and public funding for the arts. That said, long-standing commercial galleries like Lisson and Gagosian are going strong, and partnerships between



(Right):
Christo
Over the River, Project for
Arkansas River, State of
Colorado, 2011
Drawing
Two parts: 38 x 165 cm x 106.6 x
165 cm
Courtesy of Annelly Juda Fine Arts

"A couple of years ago people said that half the galleries would close. Look around you. Very few have shut their doors and the art market is remarkably resilient."

established and emerging arts organizations are more successful than ever. Slotover notes that, 'A couple of years ago people said that half the galleries would close. Look around you. Very few have shut their doors and the art market is remarkably resilient.' Frieze has played a huge role in keeping London's art scene buoyant. Many galleries make as much as 80% of their income at the Fair.

Contemporary art is big business and those who understand the market best have very impressive track records when it comes to sales and growth. Slotover's business approach is effective within and outside the art world, as he advocates a balance between tenaciously pursuing goals and keeping ambitions in perspective. 'It's modesty to realize when you're wrong and take good advice while still pursuing what you want to do. It's a line that has to be walked.' And who works with the Frieze founder? Slotover is uncompromising: 'Never take second best. The best people have to be involved everywhere, at every level.'

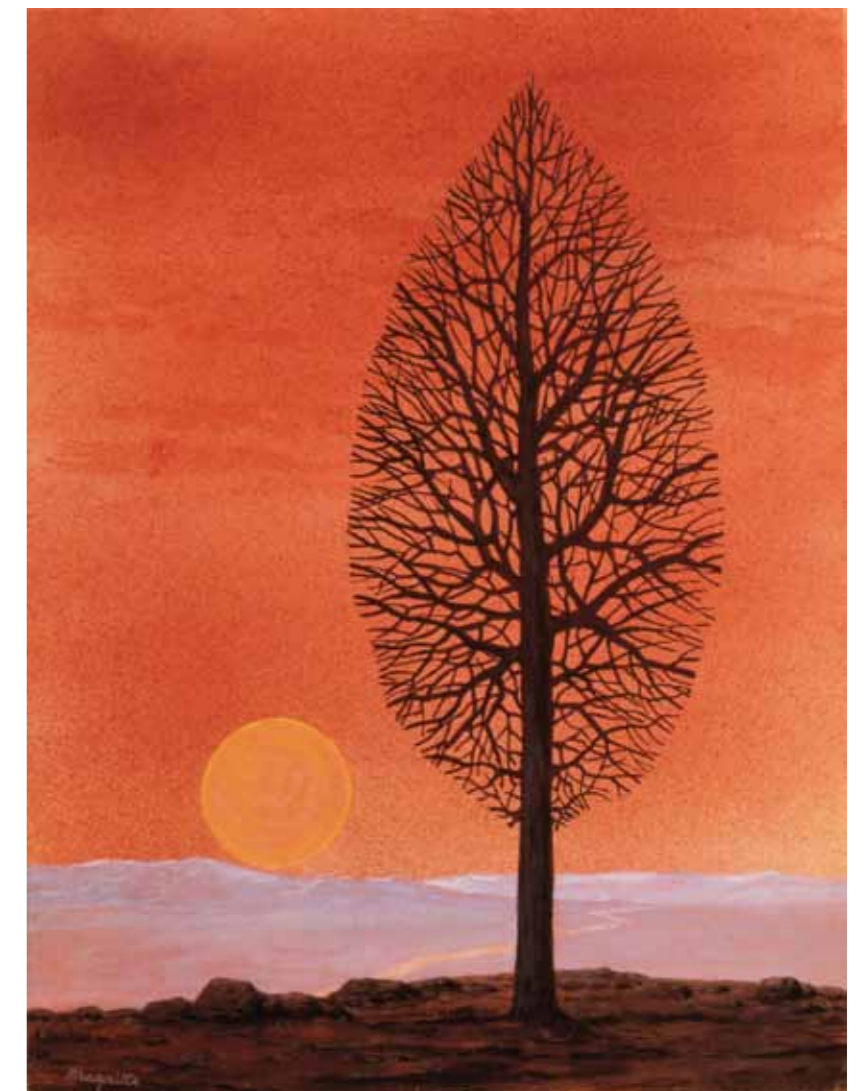
The galleries at Frieze do indeed number amongst the world's best, and their exhibits represent the highest benchmarks of artistic achievement. Surrealist René Magritte, for example, is one of the twentieth century's definitive artists. His witty images match pictorial clarity with a radical questioning of pre-conceived ideas about everything from identity and history to nature and space. His 1960 painting *La recherche de l'absolu* (*The Search for the Absolute*) will be part of Waddington Custot's Frieze exhibits. Its extension of the vein structure of a single leaf into the branches of a monumental tree, isolated in a softly glowing orange landscape, is a sight not to be missed. A different kind of surrealist vision characterizes Christo's large-scale 'environmental wrappings'. The duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude think big; they have wrapped the entire Berlin Reichstag and Paris' Pont Neuf bridge, turning the urban landscape into enormous works of art. Christo's drawings for *Over the River*, a 2011 project in Colorado, suggest suspended sheets of material that would transform spaces over this twisting body of water into several unique installations, creating new ways of viewing the natural world.

Frith Street Gallery will be presenting work by Tacita Dean, an artist whose work consistently receives international accolades. Her recent film portraits of artists such as Cy Twombly and Mario Merz are vibrant and thoughtful, and her art features in numerous national collections. Dean's *Reisenbett II* presents us with an impossibility – a craggy, pitted rock floating in inky space, denying gravity. Its serenity and stillness stimulates unease as much as it invites calm. Becky Beasley, whose work recently featured in *British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet*, is represented by the Laura Bartlett Gallery at Frieze. Her

images demand close, careful attention as their apparently everyday inspirations hold much deeper secrets. The power and compositional interest in her 2010 photograph *You're (1)* is conveyed in seams, folds, shadows and disjunctions. The flat surface is satisfyingly crinkly and impressively tactile, producing surprising harmony. As we adjust to Beasley's light and the image's subtle tones, it has more in common with a classical column from ancient Greece than anything banal.

Numerous major British galleries such as Lisson and Victoria Miro have exhibited at Frieze since it began nearly ten years

Rene Magritte
La recherche de l'absolu (The search for the absolute), 1960
Gouache on paper
35 x 27 cm
Courtesy of Waddington Custot Galleries





Tacita Dean
Riesennett II (floating), 2009

Blackboard paint, fibre-based print mounted on paper
220 x 440 cm

Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Amrian
Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris

ago. This year, Victoria Miro Gallery will feature Alice Neel and the legendary Japanese eccentric Yayoi Kusama. Lisson – who have just opened a new gallery in Milan - will present works by major artists including Shirazeh Houshiary and pop painter Julian Opie, who shot to stardom with his portraits of Blur for their album *Blur: The Best Of*. He's also worked with U2 and is a former trustee of the Tate. The Frieze season generates a pervasive atmosphere of excitement for all things contemporary in London. The city continues to be a hotbed of artistic and curatorial innovation. Frieze inspires many of its visitors to discover new artists and begin collecting off the beaten track; smaller up and coming galleries such as Hoxton's Gopher Hole, Deptford's Core Gallery (featuring experimental artist-curator collaborations) and Mayfair's newcomer Sumarria Lunn are the perfect places to start an art adventure. Frieze Week and the Frieze Foundation also mean that the Frieze Art Fair is much more than a marketplace. Curator Rodrigo Moura is giving the Fair a hot South American twist, showcasing new talent from Brazil. The Frieze

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Foundation's curator, Sarah McCrory, has planned a star-studded programme of talks and projects, including an idiosyncratic aquarium installation by Pierre Huyghe and an artist's collaboration with a boat dealer to sell a full-scale luxury yacht as a Frieze exhibit. The Foundation also founded the annual Emdash Award for new artists, attracting over 900 entries annually. The 2011 winner, Stuttgart-based Anahita Razmi, has produced a video work especially for Frieze. Her unique approach to gender and performance make her one of the season's biggest highlights.

For the Frieze first-timer and the budding art collector, those in the know offer practical yet eccentric advice: bring arty friends to keep you company, spend time making connections with artists and gallery representatives, never ask 'Is this a good investment?' as a first question, always buy art you love, meet strangers, wear comfortable footwear, sample the food, stay for the day, and enjoy the experimental performances and legendary expert talks. When Slotover anticipates what new visitors can expect from Frieze, he emphasizes the Fair's role of bringing innovative, contemporary art to the public's attention. 'If you want art that doesn't challenge you, Frieze isn't for you,' says Slotover. 'All great art was always challenging,' he explains, reminding us that artists from William Morris to Michelangelo were exceptional precisely because they were avant-garde trailblazers in their own generations. This season, The Market invites you to partake of London's thriving art scene – you might just meet 2011's Michelangelo.

By Dr. Ayla Lepine