

Collecting

FTWeekend



Hidden depths
Larry Warsh talks about his collecting passions

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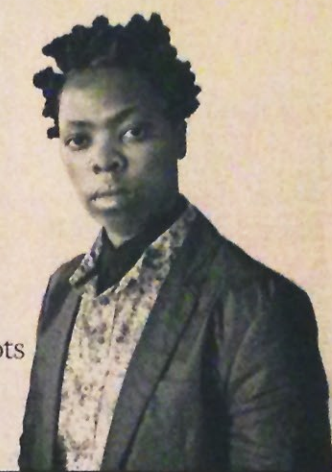


Around New York
From Old Masters to contemporary design

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Visual activist
Zanele Muholi shoots down prejudice

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What's not to like?

Fairs | The influence of art fairs has moved beyond the purely commercial into educating the public. By *Jan Dalley*

The land of like" was how outspoken art critic Jerry Saltz described Facebook after he was barred from its pages a few months ago for posting images that were considered risqué. Saltz was taking a pop at a way of thinking that cherishes polite and moderate approval but is discomfited by extremes. There is no "dislike" button on Facebook. It is the Land of Nice.

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'Laws of Motion (#6)' by Alyson Shotz, at Derek Eller Gallery at Frieze New York

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It's an appellation that could also be applied to large tracts of society — the substantial section that struggles with art in general, and with contemporary art in particular.

Contemporary art, however, has pulled off an interesting trick. Over the past decade and more, it has grown to such prominence on the general cultural landscape in the west that — ironically enough — the Land of Nice finds it harder and harder to object. You don't have to like the stuff, but you would be very obtuse to set your face in opposition to it. Art fairs have a great deal to do with this phenomenon — in fact, they may be almost completely responsible for it. By stage-managing a carnival atmosphere (only fun happens in

arents), providing great food and exuding a generally pervasive sense of cool, such fairs can push the boundaries of public acceptance and taste by seeming to give everyone a thoroughly good time. You'd be a killjoy not to "like".

Simultaneously, though, the fairs often set themselves the task of grappling with the bigger questions. Even though the talks programmes of all the big events take place in an atmosphere that is unlikely to be critical, for obvious reasons, some challenging discussions do emerge.

The Talks programme at next week's Frieze New York promises some sparky sessions. Saltz will be answering questions from the audience in a session called "Ask Jerry". He's a brave man (but many of us already knew that).

Another excellent indicator of the programme's tone is that many artists are speaking for themselves, rather than just letting people speak about them. This can be tough for some, but many, especially those of the younger generation, double up as writers, curators and even business people.

So, for instance, Casey Jane Ellison (who is known as a comedian as well as

an artist) is set to do a talk show-style panel about the aesthetics of female attractiveness. And all those last words, with the exception of "of", are in quotes. I'm guessing it's going to be lively.

All this is a very far cry from the real

business of the fairs, which is, of course, selling art — as fast and hard as possible.

At the so-called "front-loaded" fairs, among which Frieze London and Frieze New York are certainly included, as much business can be done in the first

few hours of the first VIP day as in all the rest put together. It's all about intensity, about the transience of the fair, the illusion that this is a one-time, rush-or-you'll-miss-it opportunity. This is probably less true at fairs than at traditional

auction houses, but that's the idea. And since it isn't possible to create the intensity of those first heady hours without the whole shebang that comes afterwards, the *mise en scène* becomes essential. After all, you can't be a "VIP" without there being an awful lot of "P"s who are much less "I" around. Tens of thousands of people who have absolutely no intention of buying anything queue to visit the fairs, drinking in the ambience at the same time as being part of its creation.

Frieze New York is now well established in its fourth edition. It is still housed in a fabulous giant tent on Randall's Island and still loyally supported by Deutsche Bank. It is a brilliant example of the entertainment value, as well as the commercial value, of art fairs. To those who say that fairs are a terrible way of looking at art, the response is usually: "Well, you're not supposed to just look at it." But actually, you are. Teaching the Land of Like to at least look is one of the best things art fairs do.

Frieze New York, May 14-17
friezeny.org



TJ Wilcox's 'In the Air' (2015)
Gladstone Gallery