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New Fairs and Blue Chip Dealers Descend on San Francisco to End Debate Over City's Art Market



Rendering of new Berggruen Gallery designed by Jennifer Weiss Architecture. Courtesy of Berggruen Gallery.

Living up to the city's moniker, 2016 was a golden year for San Francisco's art scene. In May the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) reopened after a three-year renovation that saw the institution double in size, tripling its gallery space, to become the largest museum of modern and contemporary art in the U.S. In April, Pace Gallery opened a new permanent space in Palo Alto, while Larry Gagosian opened his first gallery in San Francisco—a 4,500-square-foot space around the corner from the revamped museum.

Additions and expansions continue apace in 2017. This Friday, the stalwart San Francisco dealer John Berggruen will open his new 10,000-square-foot, three-story gallery next to Gagosian's. Berggruen is closing his small space on Grant Avenue near Union Square, where the gallery has been located for the the past 45

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years, to make the move. The dealer is the latest to continue the exodus from downtown.

It remains to be seen whether Gagosian launching in San Francisco will create a domino effect among other galleries. Regarding the prime location near SFMOMA, Berggruen points out that he leased his new space before Gagosian. “I prefer to say Gagosian is our neighbour rather than the other way round,” he quips. The septuagenarian San Francisco-born dealer had been due to open his new gallery last year, but “there were delays because of building work and permits,” he says.

For Berggruen, SFMOMA is key to the recent growth in the city’s art market, and now forms the center of a growing cultural hub in the city that also includes the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the Contemporary Jewish Museum. “It was a critical decision for us to be near SFMOMA, which has brought trustees, collectors, promised gifts, and sheer energy to San Francisco,” Berggruen says. “It’s a wonderful moment for our art community.” More than 240 collectors reportedly raised \$610 million for the museum’s capital campaign and donated 4,000 works of art.

The UNTITLED art fair is also making its debut in San Francisco this week. The fair originally launched in Miami in 2012 and its founder and director Jeff Lawson has been looking for a second location for the past three years. He says he decided on San Francisco because the city’s “artist-focused ethos” matched that of the fair. “San Francisco has an incredibly vibrant cultural community and a long history of important artist-run spaces, nonprofit organizations, and art schools,” he says. Similarly, the World Photography Organization will inaugurate a sister fair to its three-year-old PHOTOFAIRS | Shanghai, PHOTOFAIRS | San Francisco, later this month.

With 55 exhibitors UNTITLED’s San Francisco fair is around half the size of its Miami edition, which in December hosted 130 exhibitors. Of those, 15 galleries are participating in the inaugural West Coast edition. “San Francisco gives us the opportunity to work with exhibitors we have not been able to work with in Miami Beach due to longstanding relationships or prior obligations,” Lawson says. Big-ticket additions include Galerie Perrotin, Galería Max Estrella, and Andrew Kreps, who launched a temporary gallery in San Francisco with Anton Kern last April. The joint venture was part of the Minnesota Street Project, a complex of

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subsidized studio and gallery spaces founded last year by the Silicon Valley venture capitalist Andy Rappaport and his wife Deborah to enliven San Francisco's art scene.

For many, philanthropic collectors such as the Rappaports, coupled with a younger generation of tech patrons, are what distinguishes San Francisco's art scene. Many of SFMOMA's board members come from the tech sector, including Jim Breyer, who was an early investor in Facebook, and Thomas Weisel, who has backed several Silicon Valley companies. Meanwhile, Instagram co-founder Mike Krieger and Jawbone creator Yves Béhar are regulars at exhibition openings in the city.

Claudia Altman-Siegel, who opened her gallery in San Francisco more than seven years ago, says the collector base will become stronger as the youngest generation of tech entrepreneurs matures. "Most people begin to support the arts later in life as they become more financially stable. In San Francisco, the average age of our new collectors is something like 29, so we still have a long way to go together," she says.

A younger generation of galleries are also rising through the ranks, including Et Al. and 100% gallery. "This generation of galleries grew up with art fairs and digital image sharing, and is very connected to the international art world," says Altman-Siegel, who is showing a solo presentation of work by the New York-based photographer Sara VanDerBeek at the FOG Design + Art fair. Photographs are priced between \$10,000 and \$40,000.

The fourth edition of FOG, which opens on Thursday and runs through Sunday, is attracting an increasingly international roster of galleries. Heavyweight newcomers this year include Gavin Brown's enterprise, Gagosian, Kurimanzutto, Paula Cooper Gallery and Lévy Gorvy—a new collaboration between the New York- and London-based dealer Dominique Lévy and former Christie's head Brett Gorvy.

Lévy says she was compelled to participate in the fair after "witnessing the energy and the support of collectors from the region" last year. The gallerist also pinpoints a longterm commitment to modern and contemporary art in San Francisco, which matches her program. Lévy Gorvy is showing works by Joel Shapiro, Pat Steir, and Carol Rama at FOG for undisclosed sums. Offsite, at Grace Cathedral, the gallery is presenting Yves Klein's groundbreaking performance

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Monotone-Silence Symphony for the first time in San Francisco. (Artsy is the online partner for the event.) “There is a true commitment to the legacy of Yves Klein in San Francisco,” Lévy says. “SFMOMA is one of the first of American museums to substantially preserve the artist’s work, and one of most substantial repositories of Klein works in the world.”

Douglas Durkin, an interior designer and one of the founders of FOG, which is supported by SFMOMA, believes the market in San Francisco and the greater Bay Area has arguably more engagement with the wider art community than in other cities. “Those engagements will take time to develop, but the signs are already pointing towards a reality and not just an investment,” he says.

The statistics back him up. Galleries numbers have steadily increased since the fair launched in 2014; this year it is maxed out at 45. Perhaps more tellingly, 8,000 visitors attended the fair in 2016, almost double the numbers since the inaugural edition.

As for the future, Durkin hopes the whole art ecosystem in San Francisco and the wider Bay Area “will inspire participation on deeper levels.” In the face of rising rents and some of the most expensive real estate in the U.S. he also hopes that the city can find a way to not only support the selling of art, but also its creation. “A healthy vibrant arts culture is not only great for our economy, it’s great for our souls,” he says.

—Anny Shaw