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At FOG Design and Art Fair, Efforts to Court the 'Independent-Minded' Collector Pay Off in Brisk Sales and a Buoyant Mood

Dealers report strong opening sales at the 10th edition of the fair.

Sarah Cascone, January 19, 2023



FOG Art and Design Fair at Fort Mason Festival Pavilion in San Francisco. Photo courtesy of FOG Art and Design Fair.

The reports of the San Francisco art scene's death are greatly exaggerated. That was the consensus at the opening night gala for FOG Design and Art, which is celebrating its 10th edition.

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While certain news outlets may have focused on the closing of mega gallery outposts, FOG is proof that there is still plenty happening in the Bay Area, with a vibrant collector base eager to ensure it stays that way.

The fair, held on the water's edge at the Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture, might not have the star-drawing power of a certain Los Angeles fair, but can Frieze boast that Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi was on hand for its opening? We also spotted actor Owen Wilson. (He was a little camera-shy but told Artnet News he was looking forward to all the art after enjoying a meal at State Bird Provisions the previous evening.)

Paul Pelosi and Nancy Pelosi at the gala opening for the 2023 FOG Art and Design Fair at Fort Mason Festival Pavilion in San Francisco. Photo by Drew Altizer. Now a decade in—it succeeded the SF20 fair, which ran from 2008 to 2011—FOG has become an increasingly important date on the international art calendar. A San Francisco edition of Miami Beach's Untitled Art Fair briefly threatened to upstage FOG, but only held four editions before quietly falling victim to the pandemic.

FOG, meanwhile, came roaring back in 2022, and continued to build on that momentum last night, with dealers reporting strong sales and marveling in the evening's upbeat energy.

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Jenny Sharaf, *Elevated Conversation*, installation at the entrance to the 2023 FOG Art and Design Fair 2023 at Fort Mason Festival Pavilion in San Francisco. Photo by Devlin Shand for Drew Altizer Photography.

Multiple top-shelf open bars, plus a caviar and vodka shots experience from Jenny Sharaf as part of her installation *Elevated Conversation* at the fair's entry, and ice cream carts offering Kahlúa, rum, and Prosecco floats, probably helped with that—platinum tier gala tickets for six guests were priced at \$10,000, so there was a lavish spread of food and drink uncharacteristic of most other art fairs.

That's because the fair is an important benefit event for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The celebratory vibe can put a damper on serious business—sales were “pretty good, especially when the focus is the social aspect of the party,” Jennifer Bindman, director at San Francisco's [Jessica Silverman](#), told Artnet News. (Among them a [Judy Chicago](#) stained glass light box edition that had sold for \$125,000, while a refabricated version of her 1965 sculpture *Rearrangeable Rainbow Blocks* was on hold with an institution for \$500,000.)

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Works by Judy Chicago flank San Francisco gallery Jessica Silverman's booth at FOG Art and Design Fair at Fort Mason Festival Pavilion in San Francisco. Photo by Phillip Maisel.

But it's also the time when the museum has first choice of the design objects on offer, purchasing with funds from the [FOG Forum](#), supported by over 50 Bay Area architecture and design firms. The accession committee, working at lightning speed, especially by museum standards, has purchased over 55 works from FOG over the years.

"It's really made an impact in what we've been able to do with our collection," Joseph Becker, SFMOMA's associate curator of architecture and design, told Artnet News. "The art world is coming to us, so we're able to see things that would take a lot of extra effort to see on our own."

This year's selections hadn't been finalized yet, but if you looked closely you could spot red placards around the fair marking the works SFMOMA had on hold, including a trio of [Roberto Lugo](#) teapots.

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An overhead view of the 2023 FOG Art and Design Fair at Fort Mason Festival Pavilion in San Francisco. Photo by Katie Johnson for Drew Altizer Photography.

The real stars of the night were undoubtedly the local collectors, philanthropists, curators, and dealers who drive the Bay Area art engine all year long. They were out in force and dressed to the nines, in bold fashion choices to rival even the glitter of Art Basel Miami Beach. (I don't think I've ever seen so many women of a certain age in sequins.)

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Increasingly, FOG is also casting a wider net when it comes to visitors.

“It’s definitely being taken more seriously, not as a regional fair, but as a destination fair,” Tatem Read, a director at San Francisco’s [Berggruen Gallery](#), told Artnet News, citing good opening sales, including a work by [Paul Kremer](#).

“I know so many advisors, collectors, and curators who have come to town this week, and FOG is the nexus,” exhibitor Rebecca Camacho agreed. She opened her eponymous San Francisco gallery, [Rebecca Camacho Presents](#), in 2019, after two decades working for local dealer [Anthony Meier](#), and had already sold five works in the fair’s opening hours, all priced around \$10,000.



Rebecca Camacho, owner of San Francisco gallery Rebecca Camacho Presents, with paintings by Los Angeles artist Max Jansons at FOG Design and Art. Photo by Sarah Cascone.

The booth featured a solo presentation of colorful floral paintings by Los Angeles artist Max Jansons up front, and a wider selection of artists in the gallery program in the back section.

“It’s a great way to start the year,” Camacho added.

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For out-of-state dealers, it has perhaps taken a few years to crack the code when it comes to appealing to Bay Area collectors, with galleries taking different tacks to try and appeal to the monied tech crowd.

“People think that tech people want art that has to do with technology. But what they really want is what the history books tell them art is,” San Francisco gallerist Micki Meng told Artnet News. “If I’m coding all day, do I want like a coding work? Probably not!”

“I think the first FOG, there was more LED lights, but we’ve seen that trend dissipate,” Wayee Chu, a venture capitalist and SFMOMA board member, told Artnet News.



Shio Kusaka, (*line 149*), 2022.

But while tech-themed work is a no-no, there was definitely a focus on California artists, particularly those with Bay Area ties. A standout that was also a fitting nod to the fair’s inclusion of design were ceramic vessels by Los Angeles-based Shio Kusaka at David Zwirner.

Also from L.A. was Claire Tabouret, who was debuting a new series of wall-mounted stained glass transfers of her watercolor paintings, framed in gorgeous African

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mahogany forms created by her husband, Nathan Thelen. Five of the six works in the “Altar” series sold on night one, for \$45,000 each, at Los Angeles’s Night Gallery.



Claire Tabouret and Nathan Thelen, *Altar (pink)*, 2023. Five of six works in the series, each priced at \$45,000, sold from Los Angeles’s Night Gallery at FOG Art and Design in San Francisco. Photo courtesy of Night Gallery, Los Angeles.

A stunning booth from New York’s Michael Rosenfeld Gallery was more specifically a Bay Area homecoming for Claire Falkenstein, who lived from 1908 to 1998. Her lyrical sculptures were paired with works on paper by her more famous contemporaries, including Elaine de Kooning, Lee Krasner, and Alma Thomas.

“Claire was a major artist in San Francisco in the ’40s whose story isn’t well known enough,” Zachary Ross, a senior associate at the gallery, told Artnet News. “She came up with a way to fuse metal and glass, welding the metal and melting glass into it.”

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Claire Falkenstein, *Untitled* (ca. 1965). Photo courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York.

In a fair with a decidedly contemporary bent, the booth was a welcome nod to art history—and remarkable in spotlighting an artist who was new to me despite solo shows during Falkenstein’s lifetime at venues including SFMOMA, San Francisco’s [de Young Museum](#), and the [Crocker Art Museum](#) in Sacramento.

Presenting a lesser-known artist with an interesting story—be it contemporary or historical—was a popular tactic from dealers hoping to appeal to the Bay Area collector, described to me multiple times as “independent-minded.”

It seemed to be working. Komal Shah, a local collector who worked for tech companies such as Oracle and Netscape before diving head first into the art scene in 2008, told Artnet News that she had already bought a sculpture by 89-year-old California Light and Space artist [Helen Pashgian](#) at Lehmann Maupin.

And, after discovering the artist’s work at the Ugandan pavilion at last year’s Venice Biennale, Shah snapped up a floor-to-ceiling basket woven sculpture by [Acaye Kerunen](#) at Pace for \$75,000.

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Komal Shah at the gala opening for the 2023 FOG Art and Design Fair at Fort Mason Festival Pavilion in San Francisco. Photo by Drew Altizer.

Chu and her husband, Ethan Beard, a Google and Facebook veteran, were also approving of what they felt were more diverse offerings, particularly the textile works by [Sonia Gomes](#) showing at Pace. (The collecting couple are also among [the founding donors](#) of the new ICA San Francisco, which [opened last year](#).)

“We love how expansive it’s gotten, though there’s still a lot of work to do,” Chu said.

“The artists who are hanging on the walls are not who you would have seen 10 years ago,” Beard added. “A lot of galleries are rethinking of who they show and why they show it.”

A decade might be generous—as recently as 2020, writer [Fanny Singer](#) (the daughter of Alice Waters, famed chef of Berkeley’s Chez Panisse) [bemoaned](#) the fair’s offerings as “white, male, straight, celebrated: FOG has a type.”

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Nobuyoshi Araki, *Pola Eros* (2010–12). Photo courtesy of Ratio 3, San Francisco.

If you need proof that things have changed over the last three years, look no further than what had to be the buy of the night: a selection of Nobuyoshi Araki and Daido Moriyama Polaroids, encased in custom-made freestanding Plexiglas frames that transform the instantly developed prints into jewel-like objects. Priced at just \$800 each, they were selling like hotcakes at San Francisco gallery Ratio 3.

“It’s been fun. People get excited by them. When they decide on one, they decide on two, and suddenly they are getting six,” director Chris Perez told Artnet News. “These are the grandfathers of Japanese postwar photography.”

He discovered the unique photographs during a trip to Tokyo last the summer and held a gallery exhibition of 400 of them over the fall.

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Art publicist Wendy Norris, of San Francisco's Minnesota Street Project, purchased one of the \$800 Polaroids by Nobuyoshi Araki and Daido Moriyama, on offer at FOG Design and Art by San Francisco gallery Ratio 3. Photo by Sarah Cascone.

"The first night of FOG is the night to be here and to find the real special gems," local art publicist Wendy Norris, who had snapped up one of the photographs, told Artnet News. After 18 years of running her own firm, she was finally going in-house this week, to run comms at San Francisco's gallery and artist studio complex, the Minnesota Street Project.

She was appreciative of the Polaroids' three-figure price—"To be able to buy something at an art fair that is not exorbitant for a regular human is a beautiful thing"—but also wanted to give a shout-out to Bay Area galleries, praising them for being willing to sell to you, "even if you're not a top 50 collector."

FOG Design and Art is on view at the Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture, Festival Pavilion, 2 Marina Boulevard, Landmark Building C, Suite 260, San Francisco, California, January 18–22, 2023.

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