

Dallas Art Fair in Review



Chris Duncan at Halsey McKay Gallery. Sun In Clouds (6 Month Exposure), 2022. Oil, UV exposure, time on fabric. 40 x 32 inches.

Photo by Vittoria Benzine.

Dallas demands to be ridden like a mechanical bull. Thursday's VIP Preview and Champagne Soiree kicking off the Dallas Art Fair bucked me with a frenzy of excitement, some nerves, and a whole lot of fashion. At the Karma booth, Sara and Maddie of Garza Interiors told me this was an event to see and be seen. Afterwards, I found the surrounding downtown blocks pristine but quiet. It was early art fair ennui, and I felt lonely. Seeking food to blunt the sensation, too tired for choice fatigue,

I asked a group of locals where to eat. They invited me to join them.

Such is the spirit of Dallas's famously growing art scene, spurred by historical wealth, soaring population, and Southern hospitality. These are not aloof collectors, I learned. They want to be involved, build real relationships, their fires fanned by acclaimed institutions—Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Contemporary and Nasher Sculpture Center, publications like Glasstire and PaperCity, an ever-expanding roster of impactful galleries like Cris Worley Fine Arts and 12.26.

Founded in 2009, the Dallas Art Fair is an annual invitational intermingling local art galleries with global talent for the appraisal of traditional collectors and curators, but also the education and enjoyment of the larger creative community. Even the fair's incredible interns are artists of all varieties who spend four days rubbing shoulders with institutions from the global stage.

Of this year's 83 exhibitors, ten hailed from the metro area, including LA-based Various Small Fires, who christened their Dallas location on Friday night with a group show of Texan artists while Josh Sperling signed copies of his first book with Galerie Perrotin at the Joule Hotel's artfully-appointed gift shop next door. Back at the fair, six additional Texas exhibitors joined the lineup, offering a wider survey of the state's scene.

Overall, the Dallas Art Fair imported 67 galleries from domestic hotspots like Denver and Birmingham and far-off destinations like Dublin and Dubai. NYC dominated with a total of 25 exhibitors, but Mexico and LA maintained strong presences as well. I learned mostly from Uber drivers about the cultural connection between Dallas and California—legions fled the Sunshine State to skirt restrictions during the pandemic.

Fashion Industry Gallery (F. I. G.) has housed the fair since its inception, a sometimes contested choice that truly complements its constructive chaos. Most art fairs transpire in sterile, spacious halls. The Dallas Art Fair unfolds like a riddle over two incongruent floors, each with its own winding turns that set the scene for surprise discoveries. Dutch artist Jan van der Ploeg flew in from Amsterdam to paint colorful geometric murals at the event's entryway, organized by Berlin-based Taubert Contemporary.



Raffi Kelenderian at Miles McEnery Gallery. Emilia, 2021. Oil on linen. 48 x 36 inches. Photo by Vittoria Benzine.

Extracurricular programming stayed svelte—a Zoom call with Kaloki Nyama from the Venice Biennale, a VIP tour of The Warehouse, and a live talk titled “The Roaring ’20s: Growth of Arts in Dallas” moderated by Billy Fong of PaperCity in conversation with Cris Worley, Jeremy Strick of the Nasher Center, and Will Hathaway of Night Gallery.

“We’re not just a pleasure palace,” Strick remarked of Dallas’s cultural scene. I wondered if it was true when Hathaway claimed the art world is outside of politics, but found the idea worth unpacking. Worley noted Dallas has acquired a newfound taste for figurative work, where portraits had been previously reserved for family and famous people. Maybe in tandem with a greater interest in identity, she pondered.

Kasmin, Marlborough, and Perrotin anchored the fair at its entryway. Kasmin Associate Director Hannah Thunhorst told me this year marks their second appearance—last time was 2018. Kasmin’s curatorial decisions mirrored their peers’, an even spread of the current roster that balanced contemporary collages by Elliott Hundley to suit the scene against art historical education like six ‘Lyric Suites’ by Robert Motherwell, who also appeared at Van Doren Waxter.

Wallhanging artworks packed the booths, but many breached the boundaries of pure painting. Bill Arning presented Wayne Gilbert following the artist’s successful debut at NYC’s Outsider Art Fair this March. Gilbert uses unclaimed cremated remains to create art—new life—in the organic materials’ natural hues. I learned black ashes come from open casket funerals, from plastic fillers used for cosmetic purposes. With or without acrylic paint, these works are stunning if you have the stomach. Gilbert has written the name of every deceased person included on the back of each canvas.

At Halsey McKay, Chris Duncan’s pensive oil paintings listed UV exposure and time as mediums. Inspired by accidentally leaving his sheets in a sunlit window, the artist harnessed UV light’s capacity for mark making by leaving his canvases out to bask over six months. Resulting impressions create illusory landscapes and clouds alongside the moon, two unique and indirect

representations of sunlight in one piece. Silk velvet artworks by Travis Boyer at The Valley flourished with fungus, dye stippled in some places by a fervently loaded fabric pen but splotched elsewhere with watercolor whimsy.



Thomas Agrinier, *The Flight Into Egypt* (after Rembrandt), 2022. Ink and oil on canvas. 84 5/8 x 65 inches. Photo courtesy of Hollis Taggart Contemporary.

Blouin Division devoted their prime window-lined booth to experimental artworks like exaggerated trompe l'oeil by Tammi Campbell, sculpting acrylic paint to mimic bubble wrap and packing tape, a comment on forgotten byproducts of art world logistics. Mark Hagen's relief sculptures at Saenger Galería found final touches in frames of titanium anodized with Diet Coke, which owner Bernardo Saenger said helps keep the artist's studio free from ants who love regular Coke's sugar but boast no taste for aspartame. Even traditional figures hovered between realities, like Thomas Agrinier's "The

Flight Into Egypt (after Rembrandt)” at Hollis Taggart Contemporary.

The fair’s succinct programming meant more room for bullish serendipity. Moll Brau executed renegade performance art with her work at Martha’s Contemporary, flexing deltoids and chopping hair from her own canvas to the tune of Chaka Khan’s “I’m Every Woman.” Hair also appeared on canvases by Hiva Alizadeh at a collaborative showcase from The Flat + SARAHCROWN foregrounded by bedazzled vintage rackets from Leonardo Ulian. Albertz Benda made material their booth’s focus, showing Brie Ruais alongside Angela Anh Nguyen and ceramics by Jake Clark that call out Texas institutions like Whataburger.



Evita Tezeno, Acquisition via Luis de Jesus. Joy, Compassion, Generosity, 2022. Mixed media collage and acrylic on canvas. 48 x 48 inches. Photo courtesy of the Dallas Art Fair.



The Dallas Art Fair Foundation Acquisition Program, which director Kelly Cornell told me was modeled after the Tate's Outset program, utilized this year's \$125,000 grant to add ten new works to the Dallas Art Museum's permanent collection—unexpected choices and classic beauties, like a homoerotic vase by Krzysztof Strzelecki called "Olympia" via Anat Ebgi, "Joy, Compassion, Generosity" by Texas native Evita Tenzeno via Luis De Jesus, and "Untitled (laborer)" by Kaloki Kyami via Keijsers Koning, which recently relocated from NYC to Dallas.

Ariel De Sal of Thierry Goldberg said she noticed more return attendees day after day in Dallas than larger events like Art Basel Miami. Collectors are invested, she said, in putting the city on the map. Deals typically go down through Sunday, but since 2014 Saturday night's The Eye Ball has marked art week's culmination and Dallas's social occasion of the season.

This year's apocalypse-themed bash enveloped attendees with fog, gnarls of lush vines, drinks served from scientist's tongs by bartenders in hazmat suits to the tune of performances by DJ Tony Schwa, Grammy Award-winning Mark Guliana and more. I nearly broke 3.5 years of sobriety at an afterparty, it was that crazy. The best way to conquer the bull is knowing when to dismount. From the dance floor to museum walls and art fair halls, Dallas's powerful personalities sing a siren song to stay on. Wild souls succumb. Swing into the stirrups and try your grip any time. WM

– Vittoria Benzine