



CLAMOUR AND DISSONANCE ON THE PARISIAN LANDSCAPE

CONTEMPORARY ART

Paris. Contemporary Art Week is back and braver than ever before, symphonising with the buzz that Paris is trending, particularly compared to its eternal rival, London. That score is borne up by the arrival of great international establishments, such as the recent opening of the Paris branches of Hauser & Wirth and Mendes Wood (see page 23 of the main feature); the extensive programme planned at the Parisian exhibition sites; and the relocation of several auctions from London to Paris (see page 30). And to support the players in this orchestration, the French government just announced the application of a reduced VAT rate on artwork, a well-planned and cunningly staged bombshell (see page 10 of the main feature).

For most spectators, Art Basel's replacement of the FIAC is the clearest sign of the crescendo, despite the limited room within the ephemeral Grand Palais where the fair will be held while waiting to return to the Grand Palais next year. Art Basel has reinforced the presence of great international galleries and, better yet, has gained the endorsement of a number of art dealers who influence foreign collectors. So unequivocally, in fact, that the changes were only marginal upon its arrival last year. Among the 140 galleries of the main section, barely ten booths changed exhibitors in 2023, and nine of those are regular clients of the MCH Group which organises Art Basel in Basel, Miami and Hong Kong (the American galleries Blum & Poe and Pace, the German Thomas Zander, and so on).

It's anyone's guess what page MCH is on, since 86 % of the Parisian exhibitors participate in the Basel (and Miami) events. As Daniel Templon points out (see page 16), the array of galleries is so exceptional that purchasers will surely increasingly favour Paris and its many charms to the much smaller city of Basel. In fact, that is not the only ambiguous decision on the part of MCH, which – according to the same Daniel Templon – is apparently preparing to change the name of the fair from "Paris+ par Art Basel" to "Art Basel Paris", as if the brand

name were more important than the name of the city where the event is held. It is also worth noting that despite the great promises that this major event could build bridges towards other areas of French creative expression – such as fashion, the cinema, and video game development –, it has still not begun to take a first step in that direction.

There is a great deal more turnover among exhibitors in the "emergent gallery" section, where 11 of the 14 dealers are new. Once again, one might question the strategy of MCH: none of the newcomers in that section is French, as if emerging French creation were insignificant. French creation in general does amount to something: 30 %, which is the percentage of French galleries present at Paris+. And that number is largely overestimated, since those galleries represent a great number of foreign artists.

This arrangement of *lento* (the insufficient space at Paris+ to accommodate all the galleries that deserve to exhibit) and *allegro* (the arrival of foreign collectors in Paris) forms a rhapsody for secondary events. From one year to the next, there is a certain stability with the establishment of Design Miami / Paris, quite a complicated name for a fair (partially held by MCH) that exhibits... design (see page 14).

But there, again, the weak representation of the French scene is just as puzzling. Apart from Moderne Art Fair, which will be pitching its tents on the Champs-Élysées in what is mainly a platform for secondary galleries, the other "off" fairs are especially intended as showcases for interna-

tional creation, from the well-named Paris Internationale to the unambiguous Asia Now and Also Known As Africa (AKAA). Clearly, a considerable number of French galleries will be missed at this Contemporary Art Week, loosely corresponding with those exhibiting at Art Paris in the springtime.

Parisian effervescence – if not the Parisian scene – is indeed swelling, but let's not be too hasty to forget London. Thirty-three galleries will show at both Frieze London, to be held one week earlier (October 11th to 15th),

and Paris+. And Frieze is no longer a local affair, since it was taken over by the American behemoth Endeavor among its recent sweep of acquisitions (the Armory, Chicago). One thing is for sure: the contemporary art market truly is big business.

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