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THE ART MARKET

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Los Angeles art market hot up

By Georgina Adam

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The buzz around the LA art scene is growing ever stronger as international galleries are opening satellite spaces



Aaron Curry's 'Weird Dude Concept' (2013), at UCCA

The buzz around the Los Angeles art scene is growing ever stronger. Hauser Wirth & Schimmel is opening a huge gallery downtown in 2016 while, next spring, the Berlin and London gallery Sprüth Magers will launch its new space at 5900 Wilshire Boulevard in West Hollywood with a show by John Baldessari. This week, meanwhile, the London-based gallery Ibid is inaugurating a warehouse space downtown with a show of the Brazilian-born, Vienna-based abstract painter Christian Rosa.

“We have been thinking about this move for some time,” says Ibid director Magnus Edensvard, “and we had already held pop-up shows in LA. A number of our artists are thinking of moving there, or anyway want to show there. So we are responding to their desires.”

I asked him what is stimulating the current rush to LA, a city known for its artists but, until recently, less for a strong collecting community. “Things are changing there. Indeed, the art schools and the local artists’ community are very strong,” he says. “And while the collector scene is growing as well, I am not relying on them alone – I hope to attract an international audience to the new space.”

The Rosa show opens on September 19 and features 12 large-scale paintings with the artist’s characteristic squiggles, marks and blocks of colour. And Edensvard is busy in London as well: on October 13 he launches Ibid’s new gallery space in Margaret Street with a show of three artists: Michael van den Abeele, Flora Hauser and Maria Taniguchi.

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Across the Pacific, Los Angeles artists are also in the news. The Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing unveils on Saturday *The Los Angeles Project*, a major new show of seven artists ranging from Sterling Ruby to Kaari Upson. Curated by UCCA director Philip Tinari and its chief curator Paula Tsai, the show includes some works, notably a huge, 13-painting cycle by Ruby, commissioned by Guy Ullens, the Belgian collector and founder of the centre.

“Ullens spent quite a lot of time in Los Angeles and became very interested in the art scene there,” says Tinari. “Paula has family connections in the region, and the show just grew organically.

“We are particularly pleased that all has gone well, as it is getting harder to show international artists in China,” adds Tinari, explaining that bureaucratic obstacles seem to be multiplying. The Chinese public will be able to see four films from Ryan Trecartin’s “Any Ever” series – the first time these manic, no-holds-barred works have been presented in China.

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Holding an art fair in Russia at the present time is a brave move. Of course, when Cosmospow was launched by Margarita Pushkina and former Christie’s specialist Sandra Nedvetskaia, Russia and Ukraine were not in the news as they are today. Since then, things have changed radically and I wondered if any of the 26 exhibitors committed to the event – which is billed as an “international contemporary art fair” and split roughly 50/50 between western and local galleries – would pull out. Not so, it seems, and the fair goes ahead, opening on Friday in the Manege in Moscow. One exhibitor is the London and New York gallery Michael Werner, whose director Gordon VeneKlasen told me: “We were strongly encouraged to participate by two of our biggest Russian collectors. Of course, the international situation has increased the complications [but] many other parts of the world are difficult at the moment – I would even be wary of doing a show in Scotland!”

He is taking works from a mixture of “blue-chip” and more emerging artists, including Marcel Broodthaers’ “Portemanteau” (1965), priced at about €2m.

“It’s our first time showing in Russia, so we really don’t know what to expect,” he says.

At the same time, the 17-year-old contemporary fair Art Moscow, due to open on Thursday, may be cancelled. According to The Art Newspaper, the event is under threat due the international situation as well as increasingly aggressive censorship, with director Vasily Bychkov citing possible pressure from “backstage experts” who may – or may not – come from the Russian Orthodox Church.

At press time the organisers did not want to comment on whether the fair was going ahead.

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Japan rarely hits the art market headlines but this week the Tokyo Chuo auction house achieved a price of just over ¥800m (\$7.5m) for a Ming dynasty painting – the highest made at auction in Japan. Tokyo Chuo specialises in Chinese art, sourcing its offerings from Japanese collectors; “Figures under the Pine Tree” by Qiu Ying (c1482-1559) was estimated at just ¥400,000-¥500,000. The firm has an eager audience among mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwanese buyers and the three-day, 1,500-lot session, also featuring works of art, bronzes and jades, did well, racking up a total of ¥4.4bn (about \$41m), well over presale expectations of about ¥3bn.

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The art market is often considered to be totally “unregulated” but, listening to art law specialist Pierre Valentin speaking last week at the Art Business Conference in London, this is not so. Aspects of the new EU consumer rights directive, which regulate “distance sales” (including sales over the internet) are many and complex, starting with the very definition of the term. Describing the rules as “draconian”, Valentin told an audience of art market professionals: “Don’t imagine that you can think, ‘I can’t be bothered with all this’”: not respecting the rules could be a criminal offence.

The conference (disclosure: I was an adviser) also heard that many professionals are not paying the artist’s resale right – the levy on resale of work by living or recently dead artists. A representative of the Artist Collecting Society – one of two such bodies in the UK – says that it has started legal proceedings against an unnamed auctioneer for not doing so. So what she termed the “honeymoon” period, when the directive was in place but not enforced, now seems to be coming to an end.

Georgina Adam is editor-at-large of The Art Newspaper

Photograph: UCCA

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