

ARTINFO

FRIEZE ART FAIR 2011

"We're Living in a Topsy-Turvy World": Frieze Director Amanda Sharp on the Vogue for Contemporary Art (and Why There's Room for the Old Stuff, Too)



The entrance corridor to the 2010 Frieze Art Fair

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Courtesy of Frieze

Frieze Art Fair executive director
Amanda Sharp



Courtesy of Frieze via Flickr

Frieze Art Fair 2010 in Regent's Park
London

LONDON—There seem to be no limits to the rise of **Amanda Sharp**. Together with her business partner **Matthew Slotover**, she has in 20 years become one of the art world's major players.

Frieze, the contemporary art magazine they started with artist **Tom Gidley** in 1991, is now a central reference in the field, and London's **Frieze Art Fair**, which was launched in 2003, is going from strength to strength, presenting this year an estimated \$350 million worth of contemporary art. Exclusively featuring young galleries, the **Frame** section was added in 2009 to critical acclaim; 2012 will see the debut of **Frieze New York** and London's **Frieze Masters**, dedicated to non-contemporary — i.e. 20th century on back — art. A few days before the official opening of the big tent in Regent's Park, Sharp spoke to **ARTINFO UK** about her new ventures, how the art market is faring in the economic crisis, and the art world's fascination with what's next.

What are you most looking forward to this year?

There are so many things! But most importantly, it's the projects that the galleries are presenting. There's something like 20 special stands in the main section of the fair, 14 of which are solos. For us it's also lovely to see some galleries who haven't done the fair in a couple of years returning, like **Chantal Crousel**, **Donald Young**, **Andrea Rosen**, or **Konrad Fisher**. There are galleries doing it for the first time that I think are going to be great to see, for example **Pace**, or the younger gallery **Rodeo**.

Frame is a really fresh section this year. There are so many new names in there, both galleries and artists. It's definitely a place where people can make discoveries. We've got new architects, **Carmody Groarke**, who have probably done the most radical redraw of the fair in many, many years. It looks and feels very different. They've taken all the social stations outside of the main structure and built these beautiful pavilions. It brings a refreshing vitality to the fair that you notice right from the minute you walk towards it.

One of the things we also always look forward to is the projects program. **Sarah McCrory** is the curator this year, and she has chosen some well-established artists like **Christian Jankowski** or **Pierre Huygue**, and some emerging artists like **LuckyPDF** and **Peles Empire**. The **EMDASH Award** winner, who is an Iranian artist based in Germany, has taken **Trisha Brown's** seminal piece on the rooftops of New York and recreated it in Tehran, with a very political overtone. The performance is presented on 12 screens, and I think it's really one of the highlights that people should look out for.

Frame was launched in 2009. Did you feel at the time that Frieze was losing some of its edge?

I think what we realized is that, because it had gone from being the young kid on the block to an established fair which had a lot of importance for people's businesses generally, the decisions that the selection committee were making had to be very careful, perhaps overly careful. When you bring somebody new into the fair, the space has to come from somewhere — that means that someone can't be in it any longer. And for a gallery who has been in the fair, to not be included the following year could be extremely problematic. We are only finding space for maybe six new galleries each year. That was a concern for us. We are the only leading fair that focuses exclusively on contemporary art. "What's next" is something everyone in contemporary art is fascinated by. So it was very timely for us — if not overdue — to find a way to include new voices.

Zoo Art Fair in London, which closed after their 2009 edition, used to play part of this role.

Zoo was initially a British art fair. For the first few years, there were no international participants. Frame is not a British section by any stretch of the imagination. There's now another really great younger fair, **SUNDAY**, which is really international. I think what that shows is that Frame can coexist very happily alongside a young fair. And in fact, there's some interesting overlap between Frame and what happens at **SUNDAY**. We do see some migrations of galleries between the two, because, hopefully, between us, we are covering many if not most of the really interesting galleries around the world.

INDEPENDENT in New York and SUNDAY have both moved away from the traditional booth presentation. Is this something you would consider for Frieze?

A lot of people over the years have tried to play with different ways of doing that. I really encourage both us and our colleagues to keep taking risks. The important thing of course is to ensure that the galleries can do their work, and that the audiences have a rewarding experience. When I go to a fair, I'm interested in finding information, learning, seeing things, and I want to have access to that. If I'm in a space, I want to know who to go to and ask questions when I see a work. There are some guidelines, or guiding principles that help me, as a visitor, to get a lot of value from a fair. And they may not be the same as when I'm viewing exhibitions.

So Frieze Art Fair is not getting rid of the booths just yet.

You never know, do you? We are providing a service, and if that would be the best choice for next year, then we'd make it.

How do you feel that the economic crisis is affecting the art market — and, without asking you to be a seer, how do you feel it might impact on this year's edition of the fair?

I'm not an economist. But we are still seeing that galleries are doing business. The people in general are buying art without buying money to buy art, which is a significant difference from the 1980s. These are not leverage purchases, which give them a better long-term prognosis. We are seeing more galleries applying to participate in the fair, and our advertising revenue is rising in the magazine. So there are very few direct indicators I have a personal relationship to [about how the art market might be affected]. We are seeing a reapplication rate for the fair higher than it has ever been. We are certainly not seeing any greater number of gallery closures than there have been historically. As I understand, and I could be wrong, there are lots of good works coming into auction, with high estimates. It's obviously an extraordinarily challenging economic time, but how this affects the art market — which is a very small market on a global scale — is very complicated. Obviously, I can't predict how the fair will go this week, but I can say that the galleries are taking it very seriously and they seem to be bringing along very good works.

Frieze Masters and Frieze New York are two major developments for the fair. You've described Frieze Masters as "applying a contemporary approach to pre-21st-century art." What do you mean exactly?

I suppose it's a fair that is going to include art, which, the day it was made, felt that it was doing something challenging, innovative, and new. And that could be true in the 14th century as much as it is true today. So many artists I know have such a deep interest in objects and artworks from earlier periods that directly inform their practice. When I first came into the art world, people weren't interested in contemporary art, they were only interested in older art. It's almost as if we're living in a topsy-turvy world, everything has changed. And contemporary art isn't without a history or a lineage. There are a lot of works out there that I think people will find interesting and exciting to see, whether it's a work from the 1960s or 1970s, that maybe haven't been in the public eye in years, or some fantastic piece from an antiques dealer. Put these objects together within a beautifully designed, contemporary environment and you start to feel these conversations beginning to happen.

Having contemporary artists doing talks at the fair, and discussing how certain historical material is important to them, is a very contemporary approach that we can bring, and perhaps no one else could. We are working with architect **Annabelle Selldorf**, who herself lives with an old master painting next to a **Donald Judd** piece. When we walked in and started talking about the concept of the fair, she grasped it immediately. There are a lot of audiences out there for contemporary art, and there's a parallel audience for older work. It would be great if we could create a critical mass of activity in London, during the week that other people now refer to as "Frieze Week," which could be for anyone interested in art. That's what we are hoping to achieve.

Tintoretto was shown in the Venice Biennale, and Documenta 12 included mogul miniatures and Iranian carpets. Mixing periods seems to be very much part of the zeitgeist.

I think there is something in the water. Look at the **Grayson Perry** exhibition that has just opened at the British Museum. It feels like the conversation people want to have right now.

Ancient art is also a much less volatile investment than contemporary art. How much did this inform your decision to launch Frieze Masters?

That wasn't something we looked at, actually, when we made the decision to do the fair. That's true, though. If something has been ratified for centuries then there is less volatility around the appreciation of that work. But it wasn't why we did the fair.

Your second big new venture is Frieze New York. Did you feel that the Armory wasn't able to fulfill its role any more?

I think that what we can provide is a truly international fair of top quality in New York, and that's what we want to do.

Surely, that's what the Armory is, or was?

Historically, the Armory has been a really wonderful fair. But I think that you'll see that the kind of galleries participating in the Frieze New York fair have a very different profile from the kind of galleries that have been participating in the Armory in recent years. There is not much overlap. We are doing a different fair.

How would define it?

Again, Frieze New York will be an international contemporary art fair, showing the best quality galleries from around the world. That is the core activity.

How would qualify the gallery scene in New York, compared to London?

The geography of the city makes for quite a different scene. Manhattan is a very small place and, therefore, if you go to somewhere like Chelsea, you can walk down one block and see 30 shows. That means that the amount of time you spend looking at a piece, or looking at a show might be different from the time you would spend in London where you have a travel more. But then, if you are in New York and travel to the Lower East Side, to Bushwick, or if you go up to Harlem, again that changes the nature of your interaction. Wherever you are, you are embedded in the culture and taste of the place. London and New York have different histories, and different types of collecting. There's an extraordinary depth of contemporary art collecting in New York that goes back decades and that we don't have at the same level in London. But London is changing.

Last year you said that "there's room for improvement for us in the presence of galleries from emerging countries." You have a few more countries in the fair this year, but do you feel that, overall, this is still the case?

It's an area where we will work hard to continue to improve. It's very difficult when you go into a place that doesn't have the same history, culture and economic system to actually work out at what point, and with whom to start a relationship. But it's absolutely front-of-mind.

Can we imagine a Frieze Delhi in 2015?

You know what? Anything is possible.