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Art13: pop stars mix with artists at London's latest contemporary art fair

One Direction's Harry Styles and Arsenal owner Stan Kroenke joined known art collectors at Art13, the latest contemporary art fair to be hosted by London, says Colin Gleadell.



Zhu Jinshi's Children's Dreams (detail) Photo: Zhu Jinshi

By Colin Gleadell
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Captains of industry and pop stars rubbed shoulders with artists and collectors from all over Asia, Europe and America at London's latest contemporary art fair, Art13, which closed on Sunday after welcoming nearly 25,000 people.

Talk of the opening night was Harry Styles of boy band **One Direction**, who bought Ben Turnbull's small gun-behind-glass sculpture, In Case of Emergency, and several other works for his new house.

Other guests included Ron Dennis, executive chairman of the McLaren Group; Britain's wealthiest resident, steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal; and American businessman and majority shareholder in Arsenal Football Club, **Stan Kroenke**, all spotted strolling the aisles of Olympia's Grand Hall in Kensington.

And then there were the known art collectors: Uli Sigg from Switzerland, Charles Saatchi and Fatima Malecki from London, the Americans Don and Mera Rubell, Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo from Italy, and Dasha Zhukova from Russia.

Less well known here, but potentially the most important to the market, were the collectors from China, Indonesia, and the Gulf, who have opened their collections to the public and were gathering with their European and American counterparts for the first known private museum summit to discuss the issues they face and the possibilities of cooperation.

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The summit and the public discussions that ensued involving these collectors were symbolic of the ambitions of Art13 to embrace the global art market under one roof. How successful it has been is open to question. The quality of exhibits was mixed as were levels of sales, but there was no doubt that the event is full of potential. Frieze it certainly is not, to the relief of many, with not one exhibitor taking part in both fairs. Nor is it comparable to the Islington art fair, which is entirely British with lashings of earlier 20th-century British art. Its timing was perfect, with no distracting auctions in London or major events elsewhere, while the presentation was unpretentious, if needing a little tidying up in places.

The success of the fair, though, will be judged by exhibitors ultimately on the level of sales. Exhibitors had not been overly ambitious, and while there were relatively few works pitched at £250,000 and over, it was encouraging that some of these had sold. Still looking for a buyer was African artist El Anatsui's massive, £1 million-plus shiny bottle-top tapestry that hung over the entrance. A mirror painting by Michelangelo Pistoletto was on reserve priced at £302,000, while there were as yet no buyers for a large pair of pale abstract paintings by Korea's leading living artist, Lee Ufan, at £300,000.

Top sale of the fair was £350,000 for a recent Banksy painting, Guantánamo Bay, showing a lonely figure cowering before the rolling waves of a calm, idyllic beach at sunset. The artist's former dealer Steve Lazarides had placed it above a fireplace in his booth designed to resemble an unkempt squat. Other relatively big-ticket items to sell were Indonesian artist Nyoman Masriadi's warrior-like painting Godlike, reproduced on this page last week and priced at £230,000 by the Gaja Gallery from Singapore, and a vigorous Fifties abstract painting by the little-known Hungarian painter Judit Reigl, which sold to a British collector for £200,000.

Reigl's works, shown by Hungarian gallery Kalman Maklary, were one of the revelations of the fair, and show her to have been a significant figure within the European avant garde at the time.

Asian and Middle Eastern art was one of the main attractions. Art advisors from the fair's sponsors, Citi Private Bank, made the latest Chinese art star, abstract painter, Zhu Jinshi, the first stop on their tour for clients. Showing thickly encrusted light-filled abstract paintings with Pearl Lam from Shanghai and Hong Kong, Zhu recently made a big impression in America with an exhibition at the influential Rubell Family Collection in Miami. The paintings at Art13 were small by comparison, and selling at prices between 80,000 dollars and 150,000 dollars. At a lower price level, Lawrie Shabibi from Dubai sold out of paintings by Asad Faulwell and sculpture by Shapour Pouyan to Middle Eastern and American collectors who had never been to the Dubai gallery.

Catering to the less conventional, the fair mounted a number of performances including one by Alice Anderson, whose gallery, Rifle-maker, sold two 6,000 pounds sculptures based on the strands of hair which feature in Anderson's dance performances, while the Fine Art Society sold a laser light installation by Chris Levine for 35,000 pounds.

Art13 is scheduled to take place again this time next year, when hopefully its future will be more fully realised.

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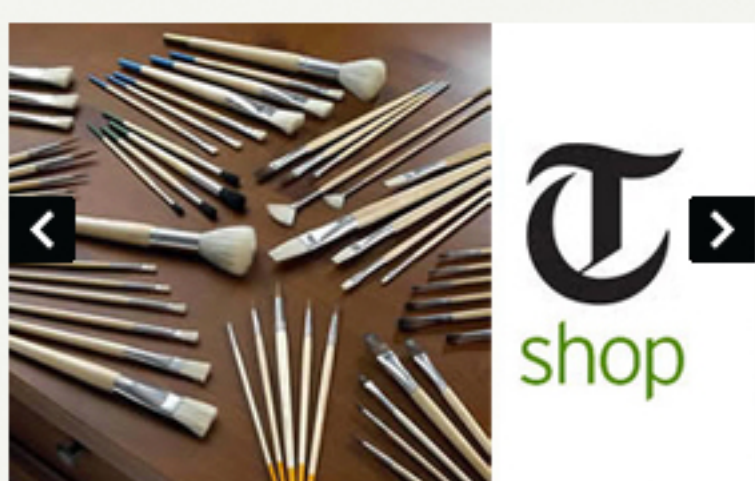
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