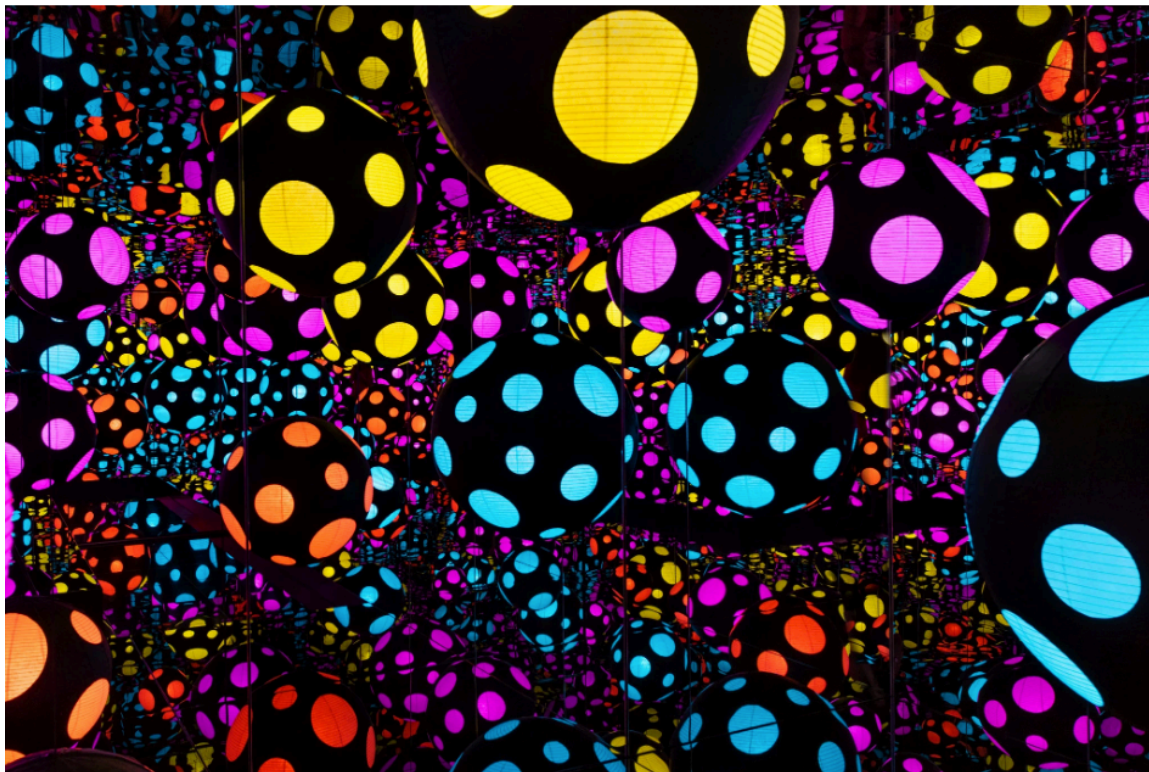


# The New York Times

## In London, a Frenzied Frieze Week in the Shadow of Brexit



"Infinity Mirrored Room," by Yayoi Kusama, at the Victoria Miro Gallery in London. Ms. Kusama's magical and eminently Instagram-friendly installations tend to be hugely popular. via Victoria Miro Gallery

**By Scott Reyburn**

Oct. 5, 2018

LONDON — “I wanted to sit between Mrs. May and Mr. Macron,” said the contemporary art dealer [Thaddaeus Ropac](#), recalling the seating arrangements at a brunch he hosted last month in his gallery in Salzburg, Austria, for the leaders of the 28 countries of the European Union.

The visit to the gallery took place during a [two-day summit meeting](#) to discuss Britain’s departure from the European Union, the process known as Brexit. During the [late-morning break](#) on the first day, Mr. Ropac, an Austrian who also runs high-end galleries in London and Paris, talked to Prime Minister Theresa May of Britain about how the London art market could suffer if tariffs were imposed after Britain’s withdrawal.

He told Mrs. May that the London art market was more than twice the size of that of the rest of the European Union put together, he said.

“There must be a way to lobby for London to be a free market for all after Brexit. Or else it will move to Europe,” Mr. Ropac said in his gallery in the Mayfair district of the British capital on Monday, in the hectic prelude to the art fair Frieze London this week.



“Image mit Haus” (“Image With House”), a painting by Georg Baselitz included in the exhibition of his works from the 1980s at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London.  
via Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac

And Mrs. May’s response to his concern?

“She said she was aware of it,” Mr. Ropac said.

The worries about Britain’s exit are coming into sharper focus for the art world. Last year, Britain accounted for 62 percent of the European Union’s art sales by value, according to [a report by Art Basel and UBS](#). London’s status as a powerhouse of the market was obvious during the week of Frieze, with the city teeming with foreign visitors, drawn by the surfeit of high-quality fairs, dealer exhibitions and auctions.

“It’s an excuse to come to London,” said Patricia Cronin, a New York-based artist who currently has an exhibition at the [Tampa Museum of Art](#). “Galleries put on their best shows. There’s so much to see, and it’s so international.”

Mr. Ropac, for his part, was showing more than 70 paintings, sculptures and drawings by Georg Baselitz from the 1980s, regarded as one of the most influential periods of the German artist’s career. Though most of the works on view were on loan for the exhibition, seven paintings were available for purchase. The typically expressionistic 1988 oil on canvas, “Image mit Haus” (“Image With House”), was among the early sales, priced at 1.4 million euros, or about \$1.6 million.

Over in the neighborhood of Islington, the Victoria Miro Gallery was exhibiting new works by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, including a freshly fabricated “Infinity Mirrored Room.” Ms. Kusama’s magical and eminently Instagram-friendly installations are hugely popular, and all viewing slots have been booked. Her last show at the London dealership, in 2016, attracted 80,000 visitors, according to the gallery’s co-director Glenn Scott Wright.



**“Toxic,” a 2018 work by the New York-based painter Mira Dancy, was exhibited by Night Gallery of Los Angeles. It sold for \$36,000. Tim Doyon/Night Gallery**

Works by the venerated Ms. Kusama (who is the subject of a recent [documentary movie](#)) also attract lengthy lines of buyers. According to Mr. Scott Wright, Victoria Miro is currently negotiating a museum sale of this latest “Infinity Room,” priced \$1 million to \$2 million. The gallery has also sold three new pumpkin sculptures, for \$1.5 million each, and five large-scale paintings from the artist’s “My Eternal Soul” series, for \$850,000 each.

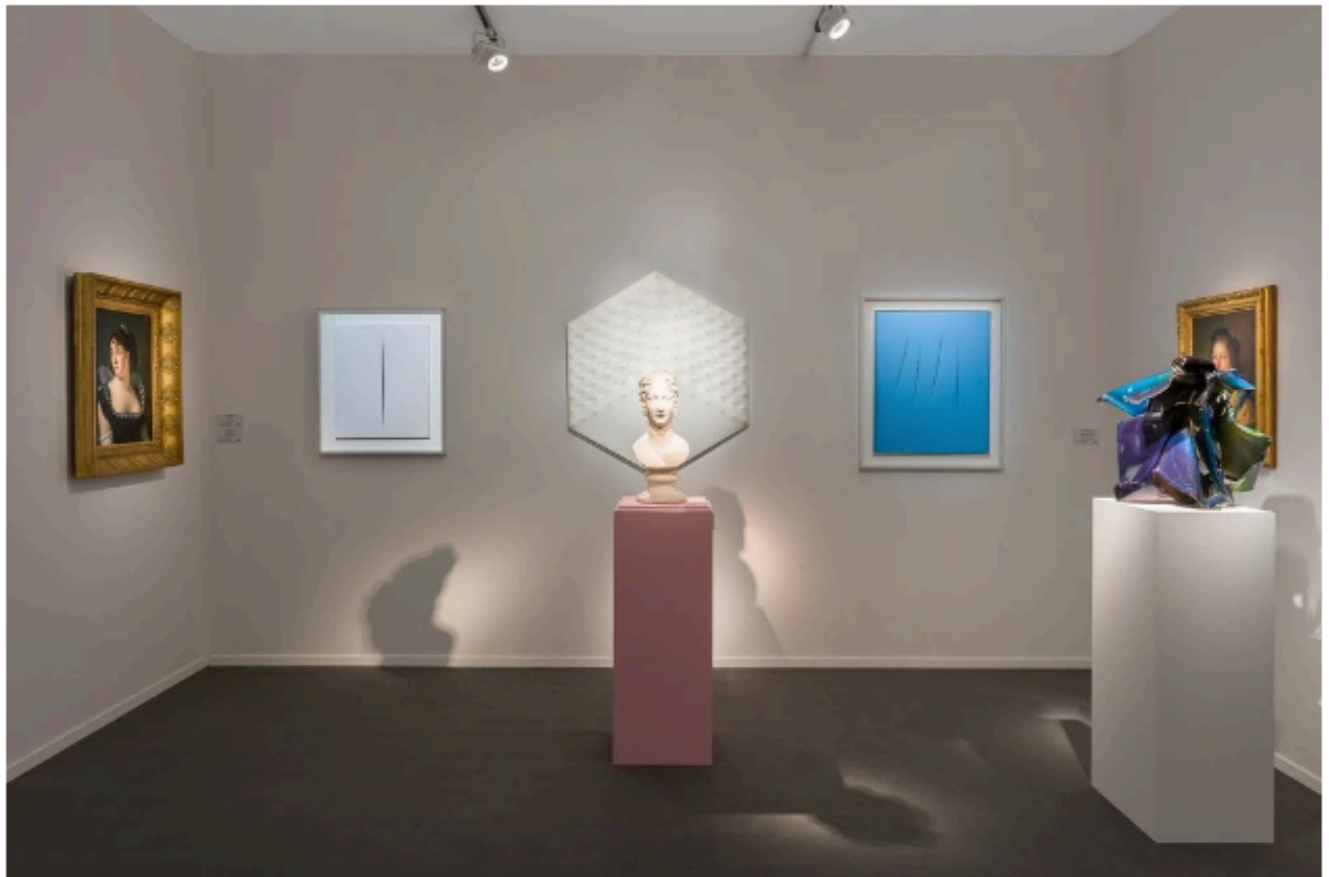
And there was plenty going on at Frieze itself.



This year's 16th edition of the main contemporary art fair, which was held in Regent's Park, featured about 160 international galleries. Pre-21st-century pieces were on show at a further 130 booths at its nearby sister fair, Frieze Masters, now in its seventh edition. Both events previewed on Wednesday.

According to the organizers, the two fairs attract some 60,000 visitors, but the crowds were conspicuously denser at the contemporary art fair, where the work on display is younger and the price points generally lower.

Night Gallery, based in Los Angeles, was participating for a fourth year in the section of Frieze devoted to emerging dealerships. The financial challenges facing smaller galleries at fairs have become a [hot-button issue](#) in the art world.



**An early 19th-century bust by Antonio Canova flanked by 20th-century Italian artworks at the booth of Robilant and Voena at the Frieze Masters fair. via Robilant and Voena**

“For the first time, we’ve just about covered our costs. I can exhale,” Davida Nemeroff, the founder of Night Gallery, said at the Wednesday preview, having sold five works from her stable of artists for a total of \$110,000. Ms. Nemeroff said that half that amount had gone to the gallery, which had to pay \$14,500 for its booth, , including lights and fittings, plus at least \$40,000 in further expenses such as freight and accommodation.

The growing reputations — and prices — of her artists helped. On Wednesday, “Toxic,” a triangular canvas from 2018 by the New York-based painter Mira Dancy sold for \$36,000. Four years ago, a similar work by Ms. Dancy would have sold for \$6,000, according to Ms. Nemeroff.

Frieze no longer has quite the same degree of cool it had in the mid-2000s, when the groundbreaking Young British Artists, like Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, topped international collectors’ shopping lists. But the event still generates plenty of sales, albeit at a slower pace.

Two 20-inch abstracted heads by the Romanian painter Adrian Ghenie, for example, sold for about \$200,000 each, one from the Pace Gallery and one from Mr. Ropac's booth. (The head in the Ropac sale bore an unmistakable resemblance to President Trump.)



**A 1954 painting, “Study to Homage to the Square,” by Josef Albers, offered by the San Francisco dealer Anthony Meier. For many, it was the gem of the Frieze Masters fair. The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2018; Photograph by Christopher Burke, via Anthony Meier Fine Arts**

It was telling, however, that an eight-foot-square abstract by Mark Bradford, who represented the United States at the 2017 [Venice Biennale](#), was missing from the announced sales at the booth of the megagallery Hauser & Wirth by the end of Wednesday. It was priced at \$4.25 million but was “on reserve for an institution” by Friday, the gallery said.

Increasingly, seasoned collectors avoid the first crush of Frieze and opt instead for the more sedate rhythms of Frieze Masters, where the art ranges from the ancient to the modern.

“The key is to mix it up,” said Marco Voena, partner at the international dealership Robilant and Voena, who sold an Antonio Canova plaster bust from about 1813 of Caroline Murat, Napoleon’s sister, to a South Korean

collector of modern art for about \$1 million at the Wednesday preview. He also sold a blue Lucio Fontana single-cut “concetto spaziale” abstract from 1964 to a European collector for \$500,000, he said.

Out-and-out masterpieces are hard to find even at Frieze Masters, but for many, the gem of the fair was a 12-inch brown and yellow “Study to Homage to the Square,” from 1954, by the American artist Josef Albers. The many “Homage” abstracts that Mr. Albers made from 1950-76 can be a little repetitive, but this example, offered by the San Francisco dealer Anthony Meier, was fresh from the collection of the artist’s studio assistant and was distinguished by its early date, untouched condition and rare original frame. It quickly found a buyer, priced at \$625,000.

Despite busily trying to do business, British-based dealers said that Brexit remained a concern. A weaker pound after the withdrawal could encourage buyers, but would owners want to sell their art here? That question loomed again on Thursday, when a trophy work by Jeff Koons, “Cracked Egg, (Blue),” valued at 10 million pounds, or about \$13 million, failed to sell at Christie’s.

“Ultimately, the effects will be decided by whatever the tax benefits and special encouragements are to do business in Britain,” said Brett Gorvy, co-founder of the dealership Lévy Gorvy, which has spaces in London and New York. On Wednesday at Frieze Masters, the gallery sold a 1963 neon installation by the pioneering French conceptual artist François Morellet for about €1 million to an unnamed buyer.

“Europe just hasn’t got the art market centers that can compete with London,” Mr. Gorvy added. “Could Paris take over the art world again? I don’t think so.”

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