

The art market

Still plenty of gain . . . Sales are steady at fairs and at auction

"No Pain" announced a painting by Kon Trubkovich on Marianne Boesky's stand at Frieze art fair; the dealer had, however, decided not to hang its pendant, "No Gain".

As London's premier contemporary art fair held its private opening this Wednesday against a backdrop of plunging stock exchanges and a global financial meltdown, and as clouds gathered and rain dripped on the vast white tent in Regent's Park that houses the event, the question everyone was asking was whether anyone would want to buy art in such a climate.

The answer was, perhaps surprisingly, a cautious yes.

Business was done, perhaps more slowly and at a lower level than in previous years, but sales were made, including an Antony Gormley sculpture for £220,000 at Thaddeus Ropac and a hanging shark by Ashley Bickerton which sold for about the same amount at Lehmann Maupin, as did a brightly coloured Hernan Bas, which went to an American museum.

Some of the bigger galleries sited at the entrance to the fair, including Hauser & Wirth, even reported a sell-out early in the day, and the long queues even to VIP events told their own story. "It's not a debacle," said Todd Lewin, who advises the collector Adam Sender. Nevertheless, said Marianne Boesky, clients were taking longer to make up their minds and the frenzied buying fever of previous years had disappeared. The fair ends on Sunday.

Meanwhile, steady business was reported at DesignArt London, which is being held in a tent in Berkeley Square. This smart, slick fair offers furniture, design and sculptural objects in room settings, and, as its French organiser Patrick Perrin points out, there is always a market for functional items.

An instant success was furniture carved out of solid blocks of Carrera marble and inlaid with brightly coloured flower motifs using the traditional *pietre dure* technique by Mark Quinn, best known for his frozen "Blood Heads" (the National Portrait Gallery is currently attempting to raise £350,000 to buy the fourth in the series). The Quinn pieces are produced in editions of eight and 11 pieces were sold on the first day, including a desk and chair, weighing in at two tons and costing £80,000 (Carpenters Workshop Gallery).

Galerie du Passage sold all of its set of 14 Alexander Calder tapestries at



Licence From top: 'No Pain' by Kon Trubkovich at Marianne Boesky's stand at the Frieze art fair; also at Frieze, 'Lost' by Hernan Bas at Lehmann Maupin, sold to a US museum

£9,400. They were made of plaited sisal fibre in Guatemala in 1974, and were Calder's contribution to helping the victims of the earthquake in that year. Like Frieze, DesignArt London ends on Sunday.

Another tent will be run up in Berkeley Square next year when the London flagship antiques fair organised by Lapada, the association of art and antique dealers, is held there. Lapada has lost its previous home, the Burlington Gardens premises behind the Royal Academy, which have been rented to the Christie's-owned gallery Haunch of Venison for three years. This has forced a number of art fairs to look for other homes. Lapada says the new location in Berkeley Square is more expensive but admirably central: the number of dealers will be increased from 70 to 90, and the fair will run from September 24-27.

Royalty retains its fascination even in staunchly republican France. As predicted in this column some months ago, Christie's sale on Tuesday of souvenirs from the Parisian apartment of the late Comte and Comtesse de Paris, an Orléanist pretender to the French throne, was hugely successful, raising almost £2m, more than double pre-sale

estimates. More than 2,000 people sifted through everything from Louis Philippe's reading glasses to a lock of Marie-Antoinette's hair entwined with one of her husband's. One of the most poignant items, a purse embroidered by the queen while in the Temple prison, was bought for £75,600 – far above the £9,000-£11,000 estimate – by a Chilean fashion museum.

Artcurial, backed by the aeronautics group Dassault, is the third biggest French auction house, behind Sotheby's and Christie's (Drouot doesn't count as it is a grouping of smaller salerooms). Now Artcurial has bagged a prestigious new recruit. Serge Lemoine, formerly director of the Musée d'Orsay, has been appointed artistic and cultural adviser to the group. He will work in Artcurial's Champs-Élysées HQ organising exhibitions in the ornate neo-classical building. The appointment echoes many similar moves from the museum to the commercial worlds – most notably Lisa Dennison, who left her job as director of New York's Guggenheim to go to Sotheby's last year.

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