ART & DESIGN | ARTS

Everything you need to know about L.A.'s February 2023 art fair extravaganza

Chris Pohl/Artworks, The The Training

BY GRACEY STEVENS | STAFF WRITER
FEB. 2, 2023 | 4AM ET

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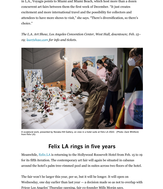
Ready your comfort shoes, Russian vodka and eclipse eyewear — it's art fair season.

Large, L.A.-art fairs (unlike Art Basel Miami Beach, despite Miamian angst, an unwinnable politics and COVID-19 concerns) have been, and are, back, included binding aspects. Fair dates were more staggered as well, with Dec. 2, Art Week's opening in mid-January and three additional art fairs — Frieze Los Angeles, Felix LA and Spring Break Art Show — in the week before Valentine's Day, and Art Week's closing in early March. Frieze, the fair, this year, is held twice — and all at once. The Frieze mount is 50% bigger than ever with more international participants, full video capacity and curator-led added to the mix. Five art fairs will run concurrently starting Feb. 15.

So what's back, what's new and where to start?



The exterior fence art at the 2019 Frieze in Beverly Grove that is not there

L.A.'s longest-running art fair returns

The 20th edition of the L.A. Art Show — the city's longest-running art fair — will be held in the Los Angeles Convention Center's West Hall (both Feb. 15-19). As the fair's name implies, it's a showcase for local artists, and this year, the fair's focus on Black artists is the art fair world's. @LAartshow is L.A. area and Instagram-life is a hotbed of global galleries, artists and collectors. Art happenings kept set happenings on events calendars, and the L.A. Art Show wanted to take advantage of the moment.

"We thought it'd be beneficial for collectors and galleries and attendees — for everyone — to have a coordinated art event, to go to multiple venues," LAAF director and producer Kassandra Voyagis says. "We conformed the dates for 2019 as well."

The L.A. Art Show is larger this year than last, with more than 100 participating galleries from around the country and internationally, compared with by last year, all showing modern and contemporary art. It will also feature a large Black artist focus. Voyagis says. In addition to its European Pavilion, the fair is debuting a Japanese pavilion, featuring six galleries, and will be showing more South Korean galleries than in the past, to be all.

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"It's been a tough couple of years everywhere, for everyone," Voyagis says. "But it's easier to travel now than the previous two years and I wanted a more international component. And we have such a large Korean community in L.A."

The fair's long-running INTERNATIONAL + contemporary section curated by Marina Abramovic, Jeffrey Deitch and Jeffrey Deitch's Los Angeles Projects, which has featured Asian artists and international art institutions and galleries, will be adjoining the global climate crisis through multimedia presentations and interactive experiences. The Museum of Latin American Art, for example, will present L.A.'s best-regarded artist Judy Baca's three panel, double-sided mural "Masterpiece Mural: Where Gold Meets Green" (1990-2000) and Los Angeles Contemporary Archeology Ensemble will present Korean artist Bae Yiro's spectacular-minded, site-specific multimedia installation, "Eternal Light," inspired by Michelangelo's "The Last Judgment."

"It's about education and resources and community engagement," Voyagis says of the fair's focus. "We want to be a place where people can come together and feel on the first floor, in this programming and there's no profit on our end."

As to whether or not there are enough collectors to sustain five simultaneous art fairs in Los Angeles, Voyagis points to Miami and Miami Beach, which host more than a dozen fairs during Art Week and Art Basel Miami Beach. "Miami has been a tremendous enrichment and more international travel and the possibility for collectors and attendees to have more choice to visit," she says. "There's diversification, so there's choice."

The L.A. Art Show, Los Angeles Convention Center, West Hall, downtown; Feb. 15-19; laartshow.com. For info and tickets.

Kassandra Voyagis presiding over the training for visitors to work at a booth at the L.A. Art Show. (Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP)

Felix LA rings in five years

Meanwhile, Felix LA is returning to the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel from Feb. 15-19 in its fifth year. Founder Jeffrey Vallance's fair has been a fixture of Hollywood Week and around the hotel's pales (see vintage photo) and set to swim across two floors of the hotel.

The fair's tent has larger this year, per se, but it will be longer. It will open on Wednesday, one day earlier than last year — a decision made so as not to overlap with Frieze Los Angeles Thursday opening, but co-founder Willie Brooks says.

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"[Frieze's] in Santa Monica and we didn't want to bottleneck people driving back and forth on I-405 so, we so elected to space that out," he says.

Felix LA along will feature by international exhibitions, about 40% of which are new participants, and a curated section called Felix Focus, which highlights "emerging contemporary art devoted to artistic black writing, which is a social critic. We're a much different experience than walking into a back-door with a ticket and sort of being herded around. A big ballroom, gallery after gallery after gallery. You can take a break and sit around the pool," he says.

Highlights this year, Brooks says, include selected projects such as Andrea Zittel's High Desert Test Sites Trailer, B. with exhibit ceramics and other objects from the Joshua Tree-based nonprofit, as well as a particularly moving piece by the New York-Based gallery X Hug From the Art World. It will display about an artists Instagram feed, which was created by Jeffrey Vallance and Willie Brooks and with a balloon drop in a David Dickson figurine perched near the hotel's David Hockney pool. Pool.

"It's a joke at the art world, it's a joke at artists. It's really fun," Brooks says.

Woman isn't worried about the fire hairs raining into one another's attendance because the fairs are all distinct.

"People seek out parts of each fair that are more interesting to them," he says. "If you're interested in contemporary art, you can go to Frieze and see a lot of that. If you're really sound in an contemporary art, Frieze and Felix will have that covered. The L.A. Art Show might have more historical [modern art] presentations. I think there's a little something for everybody."

Felix LA, the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, Hollywood; Feb. 15-19; felixla.com. For info and tickets.

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Frieze's Sigrid Sandmann in the Frieze tent, curated by Anne Kirk and Andrew Kirk of Kirk Gallery in Paris, at the Frieze Los Angeles in Beverly Grove

Spring/Break Art Show LA is taking place in unique locations

At Spring/Break Art Show LA, also opening Feb. 15, that distinction means showing contemporary art by emerging and mid-career artists in unique, historic or undeveloped architectural locations. Last year it occupied a former opaque mansion in Culver City, where it will again be housed this year in Spring/Break's stage a series but due to COVID but the same tent filled by more square feet of the industrial-looking Jack Ryan Gallery in Culver City. This year, it will occupy the former Sears building on the edge of the downtown L.A. Arts District.

"That juxtaposition of disparate elements is the key," says fair co-founder and co-director Andrew Gori.

Spring/Break Art Show LA is a curated fair but, organized around an annual theme, of which independent curators participate by exchange for the fair taking a cut of sales. This year's theme is "Spectacle" and includes immersive experiences. The theme creates a dialogue between artists who are from Los Angeles. The fair's artists feature about 60 curated exhibitions — last year there were 40 — and 60 first-selling participants before it opens.

"We realized a lot of the people we would be showing wouldn't be able to afford renting real estate at a fair, especially emerging artists and curators spending their own money to go from artists one there," Gori says. "So we give independent curators free space and we not all sales through us and our online platform and we take 20%. That way we can encourage more groundbreaking, less commercial projects."

Works at Spring/Break Art Show LA span mediums, including painting, sculpture, installation, photography, performance and multimedia. Last year's theme was "Neo-medieval" — "a time of plague," Gori says. This year, in response to a feeling of "Spectacle" in the world, the fair will include a performance by Los Angeles artist Ian Lynch," working in "Neo-Mexicana," Gori says. The inspiration comes from the Mesoa painting "La Dépouille ou Charles V" (The Lanscheu on the Grave) depicting young Indentures enjoying a photo omnibus, semi-clothed, "appreciating the body, the embiuers, Indentures pleasure — a lot city from the dark ages of the Neo-medieval show," Gori says.

How does Spring/Break Art Show LA aim to compete with the bigger art fairs during such an active art moment in the city?

It doesn't. Gori describes the fair as having a "symbiotic relationship."

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Artists' artwork is displayed outdoors by the Bonn artist collective in Spectacle, at Frieze Los Angeles 2022. (Photo courtesy of Frieze Los Angeles)

Frieze is taking over the Santa Monica Airport

If Spring/Break Art Show LA is the little fair, then Frieze Los Angeles would be the big one. Frieze's tent will be pitched at Santa Monica Airport, open Feb. 16-19 (Thursday morning, Feb. 15 and on through Sunday, Feb. 19 in the afternoon) art fair's biggest L.A. presentation to date, with more than 120 galleries representing 20 countries and a sprawling, pith larger exhibition space. That means work on view in both the exhibition tent, the airport's Barker Hangar and outdoors around the airfield.

The fair limited attendee capacity last year through timed, staggered entry, this year it's instituting the same ticketing system, but it's back to a full pre-pandemic capacity. It expects to meet its pre-pandemic headcount of about 35,000 attendees over four days.

The fair will bring back its longstanding Frieze Projects, which commissions site-specific installations and large-scale sculptures. The managing director for Frieze Art and co-curating the site works, Ace Ezra Narayan, founding director of Art Los Angeles, says the projects are intended to be a kind of significant artistic statement for the city, and there will again be one of the fair featuring artist-led and community-oriented nonprofits.

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But this year's iteration of the Frieze series — featuring younger galleries and emerging artists — is particularly exciting, says Christina Mossiere, director of Frieze Los Angeles and Frieze New York. Frieze will not only be larger, but also wider in scope. It will feature 10 L.A. galleries that have been in operation for 10 years or less and 10 galleries from Latin America, Africa and Asia that have never exhibited in Los Angeles. The presentation, in the Barker Hangar, is curated by the Mother Art Center's Amanda Sisco, who previously was at the Lunas Museum of Narrative Art. So she brings both a local and national perspective and will work with curators across Frieze Foundation.

"Since I've known Frieze, it's always been this fair for discovery," Mossiere says. "And if you watch the trajectory of the galleries who have participated in our Frieze series — Commonwealth and Council, Chateau Shatto, François Ghebaly, Night Gallery — they've now sitting within the main fair. So that Focus section becomes a place for people to be visible to the main fair. And as we continue to grow, it becomes even more critical."

Highlights of the Focus presentation, Mossiere says, include two up-and-coming photographers: Tiffany Chung, who's displaying her detailed globes, "to be a queer photographer and to have been in the Venice Biennale and exhibition, with beautiful portraits," she says — and Mark McKnight's work in Paul Soto. "The most seductive gorgeous black and white silver gelatin prints I've ever seen in person," she says of McKnight.

Mossiere also notes presentations, in the main fair, by Nyk Lucas of Gagosian, Rob Thompson at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery and Hong Sook-Jin at Hyundai Gallery.

Regarding the ethnicity mosaicism Frieze has sparked, Mossiere credits both Hauser global audiences and L.A. itself.

"We bring global galleries, collectors coming from all over the world, institutional groups and trustees coming in from all over the world, and I think anyone would be excited to engage with that energy," Mossiere says. "But also, I think people really understand Los Angeles as a center for art making and creativity."

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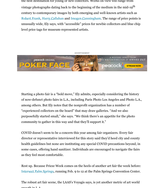
Frieze Los Angeles, the Santa Monica Airport, Santa Monica; Feb. 16-19; frieze.com. For info and tickets.



Amy Sadler, from Black Women Photo Training, Mexico, 2019, on view at Los Angeles Night Gallery in Photo Los Angeles, Frieze Los Angeles, Felix LA and Spring/Break Art Show LA

Photo Forward Los Angeles is debuting this year

Photo Forward Los Angeles is the new kid on the block, running Feb. 16 at Santa Monica's Bergamot Station (see review). The inaugural fair of the 10-year-old nonprofit Photographic Arts Council Los Angeles is especially intimate, with only a dozen exhibitors, mostly L.A. galleries with one from Portland and two from publishers. But it aims to be as broad and inclusive as possible. It's free to the public and accessible.

The guild's 70-start conversation and photo photographic arts, show a spotlight on galleries specializing in photography and hopefully sell some work.

"It's part of the mission of PAC to support the field and encourage participation in the community and the conversation, says Paula Ely, PAC executive director. "We thought this was an opportunity to expand our mission by creating a public space for collectors, artists, curators, writers and collectors to gather during the arts weekend in Los Angeles. We'd like to make it a permanent feature, we'll see how it goes."

The other art fairs will show photographs, but Photo Forward Los Angeles wants to the best destination for young or new collectors. Works on view will range from vintage photographs dating back to the beginning of the medium in the mid-19th century to contemporary photo-based artworks by emerging and mid-career artists. Robert Frank, Francesca Woodman and Gregory Crewdson's The range of prices ranges is unusually wide, Ely says, with "accessible" prices for novelist collectors and blue-chip level price tags for museum-represented artists.

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Starting a photo fair is a "bold move," Ely admits, especially considering the history of non-dedicated photo fairs in L.A., including Paris Photo Los Angeles and Photo L.A., among others. But Ely notes that the nonprofit organization has a number of partnerships and relationships with local institutions and galleries. "We have a prosperity mind-set," she says. "We think there's an opportunity for the photo community to gather in this way and that they'll support it."

COVID-based concerns be a concern this year among fair organizers. Even the Los Angeles Convention Center's requirement that all attendees show proof of health guidelines but some are anticipating special COVID protocols because, in some cases, affecting hand sanitizer. Individuals are encouraged to navigate the fairs as they feel most comfortable.

Beyond fairs, Bergamot Station Photo Week centers on the fair's another art fair the week before: Overland Photo Springs, starting Feb. 9 in its 10-year Springs Overland Series.

The cultural art fair scene, the L.A.Times's Voyagis says, is yet another metric of self-world

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growth in L.A.

"You see more galleries moving here and now you see it in the fairs," she says. "It's a sign of health in the art world, of L.A. becoming a city for art shows and for collectors to buy in. Now there's a platform for other fairs to come in the future — it's just going in that direction."

Photo Forward Los Angeles, Bergamot Station Arts Center, Danziger Gallery, Suite B1, Santa Monica; Feb. 18-19; photoforwardla.com for info and tickets.

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Deborah Vankin is an arts and culture writer for the Los Angeles Times. In what's never a desk job, she has live-blogged her journey across Los Angeles with the L.A. County Museum of Art's "big rock," scaled downtown mural scaffolding with street artist Shepard Fairey, navigated the 101 freeway tracking the 1984 Olympic mural restorations and ridden Doug Aitken's art train through the Barstow desert. Her award-winning interviews and profiles unearth the trends, issues and personalities in L.A.'s arts scene. Her work as a writer and editor has also appeared in Variety, LA Weekly and the New York Times, among other places. Originally from Philadelphia, she's the author of the graphic novel "Poseurs."

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