

## The shock of the old at Frieze

The London art fair is shifting its focus from the exclusively contemporary to a dialogue between ancient and modern works. Alice Jones reports



At next week's Frieze, you will, funds permitting, be able to buy everything from an Egyptian granite statue of a baboon from the reign of Amenhotep III to a silicone sculpture of a fist gripping an iPhone 4 by the New York wunderkind Josh Kline. The former dates from 1350BC and will be on sale at Rupert Wace Ancient Art's stand; the latter was made in the last 12 months and will be shown by 47 Canal, a brand new Manhattan gallery.

As it enters its 10th year, the London art fair, byword for all that is most modish in modern art, is looking back. Five thousand or so years back, in fact. There will still be all of the usual up-to-the-minute action in Regent's Park: 175 contemporary art galleries from 35 countries, a section devoted to institutions under six years old showing work by emerging artists, and a marquee designed by London's hippest architects Carmody Groarke.

But the real novelty – call it the shock of the old – comes in the shape of that ancient Egyptian baboon and other old-timers in a smaller tent tucked just behind London Zoo.

This is Frieze Masters, the organisation's first art fair for historical art. A 15-minute walk (or for VIPs, a complimentary BMW shuttle ride) away from the main marquee, it will showcase over 90 of the world's leading galleries, selling art from the ancient era up to the year 2000. There will be medieval gargoyles at Sam Fogg and Richard Avedon's photographs at Gagolian with plenty of Picassos in between.

The people at Frieze are, somewhat counter-intuitively, calling Masters, "the most radical thing they've ever done". It's certainly a departure. When Amanda Sharp and Matthew Slotover founded Frieze magazine in 1991, it quickly became a bible for all that was most of-the-moment. When they set up the fair in 2003, it was with a firm focus on the most contemporary artists. Now they are flinging their marquee flaps open to all-comers, denizens of Old Bond Street and upstarts of Old Street alike.

Although some of the art at least will be carved from bronze and flint, framed in heavy gilt or woven from mediaeval thread, the organisers are keen that the new fair keeps pace with Frieze's cool branding. "There will be no stripy red walls", says Victoria Siddall, director of Frieze Masters. Instead, the theme is "light and air" with galleries permitted to paint their walls white or one of three shades of grey. The marquee has been designed by Selldorf Architects, a practice beloved by New York galleries to show off the era-spanning works in minimal and democratic style. "We want the focus to be on the work, to encourage people to look at everything, not to be put off and think, 'Red walls – that's not for me,'" says Siddall.

Why a historical fair now? Well, why not? The world's biggest art fair, Art Basel, has had an upstairs-downstairs approach for decades, selling blue-chip, established art on its ground floor and contemporary and newcomers on the first. And Slotover and Sharp can't have helped but notice the steady growth of PAD London, a fair dedicated to big-hitters of 20th century art and design in Berkeley Square, over the last five Octobers.

"But there isn't another fair like this", says Siddall. "It's not going to be like anything else we've seen before. It's thousands of years of art, all juxtaposed in one space." Typically for Frieze, it is riding a trend. The dialogue between ancient and modern is increasingly fashionable in the art world. In the last year, major institutions have staged culture clashes to great critical acclaim – Poussin and Twombly at Dulwich Picture Gallery; Wallinger and Titian at the National Gallery; Grayson Perry's take on Hogarth at Victoria Miro; and the current Royal Academy blockbuster Bronze which lines up Louise Bourgeois and Anish Kapoor with their Roman and Renaissance counterparts.

Commercially, too, a new fair makes sense. While the contemporary art bubble may have deflated a little since 2008 and Hirst's heyday, there is and always has been big money in the masters. "People are still keen to take a punt on something new or to invest in something they see as reliable," says Sarah Thornton, who examined the phenomenon of fairs in her 2008 book *Seven Days in the Art World*.

"It's the huge amount of artists in between that are the most precarious part of the market right now. Frieze Masters will bring out those people who like to buy at a higher price point, who like more established artists, who thought that Frieze was fun once or twice to see but that it wasn't really a shopping venue for them."

The flipside is that while a good proportion of the 60,000 or so visitors to Frieze London are expected to wander over to Frieze Masters, they may not be buying. "Frieze Masters is likely to be more expensive", says Thornton. "People who go to Frieze will definitely be interested in Frieze Masters but they may not be able to afford its wares." Still, while the credit crunch will hover over proceedings like a giant Jeff Koons inflatable, expanding the offering for 2012 is a canny way to keep people interested.

"One would expect this year there will be rather less Greek, Spanish and Italian collectors in for Frieze", says Thornton. "But there will be people who skipped 2011 who are going to come this year because there's something new to see." And that, after all, is what Frieze is all about.

*Frieze London and Frieze Masters, Regent's Park, London NW1 ([www.friezelondon.com](http://www.friezelondon.com)) 11 to 14 October*