

# At Frieze, the Elite Browse and Forage

By GUY TREBAY

"Just go with it," Patty Smyth, the rocker, said to her husband, the tennis legend John McEnroe, urging him to tip up a coupe of Bobby Burns, a potent cocktail of whiskey, sweet vermouth, Bénédictine and a twist of lemon. "Go with the flow."

It was just past noon on Thursday, as the Frieze Art Fair, the hugely successful contemporary art extravaganza from London, opened. Despite a biblical rain, its sinuous white tent, designed by the Brooklyn company SO-IL, was bright and looked already like a local landmark in what is after all just the second year of the fair.

There were three separately timed V.I.P. entries to the fair, the first at 11 a.m. for heavy-hitting collectors, the second at 2 p.m. and then another in the evening. As if to underscore the point that there is always a further level of importance and inclusion, another door opened to the elect, the artist Liz Glynn had constructed the Vault, a Prohibition-style bar within the vast Frieze tent on Randalls Island, and secreted it between booths C36 and C31.

Entry to the Vault could be gained only by way of keys distributed, ostensibly at random, by artists sent to wander the aisles.

Each key came in a safe-deposit box envelope, those small, stiff oblongs that close with a reassuring snap. The envelopes contained printed instructions to seek the unmarked door, knock three times and wait for a door-keep to slide open a peephole.

Once inside, patrons like Ms. Smyth and Mr. McEnroe exchanged their keys for numbered boxes placed on a bar by an attendant. Each box contained props Ms. Glynn described as tools for Borgesian allegory: a papier-mâché dagger, a bleeding heart, a paper rose.

"Is it like a Cracker Jack or something?" Mr. McEnroe asked, as Ms. Glynn handed him a box of stuff to prompt a performance-art narrative the bartender improvised while filling jiggers and shakers.

It was. The prize, of course, was reveling in the knowledge that you were on the inside.

It is well established that over the last



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Above, John McEnroe and Patty Smyth at the Vault, a Prohibition-style bar, at the V.I.P. opening of the Frieze Art Fair. At left, Joanna Przetakiewicz, second from right, spent close to a million dollars on two works.



decade the seasonally migrating creatures at the top of the economic food chain have turned the pursuit of contemporary art into a defining marker of wealth and social status. They move across continents and oceans — Frieze this week, Venice later in the month for the Biennale, Switzerland in June for the august Basel Art Fair, granddaddy of them all — in a pack, showing all the signs of what the collector Don Rubell on Thursday termed "a herd mentality." They browse and they forage. They consume voraciously.

"I bought already a Piotr Uklanski and a Jeppe Hein," Joanna Przetakiewicz, a collector based in London and St. Moritz, said early Thursday afternoon, tapping open her smartphone to check the details of an hourlong shopping spree during which she had spent close to a million dollars on just two works.

"I am going to buy as well an Anish Kapoor," Ms. Przetakiewicz added, referring to a wall-mounted stainless steel disc with an asking price she said was 650,000 British pounds. "But I want it in pink."

If Frieze does not quite induce the Su-

permarket Sweep buying frenzy that sometimes characterizes fairs like Art Basel Miami Beach, said Bethanie Brady, the director of the Paul Kasmin Gallery, the level of sales activity in its first hours surely reflects a boom-time mentality, at least among those occupying the upper rungs of the economic ladder.

"The Walton Ford is sold already," Ms. Brady said, referring to a painting of a tiger by an artist whose work forms the centerpiece of an auction at Christie's on May 13 of 33 artworks culled from collectors and artists by the actor Leonardo DiCaprio and sold to raise money to benefit the environment.

The Ford painting cost roughly \$950,000, Ms. Brady said.

As she spoke, a parade of the fine and fancy wandered about. There was Renee Rockefeller. There was Lauren Santo Domingo, wife of a Colombian billionaire and a founder of Moda Operandi. There was a posse of other young socialite pretties. There was Young Kim, partner of the brilliant punk impresario Malcolm McLaren



At right, the actor Andrew Garfield walks by a Jack Pierson piece about drug dealers and movie stars. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, above, who attended the show.



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and heir to his fortune. ("Every time punk gets mentioned, she gets wheeled out," Ms. Kim said sternly, referring to the designer Vivienne Westwood, who features prominently in the punk show that just opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "All the ideas were Malcolm's.")

There was Emmanuel Perrotin, a French gallery owner set to open a space on Madison Avenue next September, because, as he noted, "the money is here, not in France, where the majority of the rich people have left." There was the actor Andrew Garfield, framed by a Jack Pierson artwork about drug dealers and movie stars. And there was Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, surrounded by handlers and in company with his decorator, Jamie Drake, who was toting an enormous black bag.

The mayor was not taking questions, his aides said, perhaps to deflect further controversy over his outspoken support of the Frieze Art Fair which, unlike other local art fairs, employs low-wage, nonunion labor, although located on public land.

Despite the inclusion at the fair of more

work by women than in the past, among them the revered political artist Nancy Spero, Frieze tends to avoid the pressing social issues of the day — unless, that is, the issues concern jokes best understood by those on the inside.

Not far from the gate where the chauffeured Escalades that are the Honda Accords of the One Percent disgorged their passengers, a small protest was being staged by union organizers and attended by the mayoral candidate John Liu.

The thin blondes in their kitten-heeled Manolo Blahniks and obligatory Birkin bags strolled right by it, attention fixed instead on the 80-foot red balloon dog by the Los Angeles artist and provocateur Paul McCarthy. Was it a jab at the artist Jeff Koons, whose own balloon dog sculptures of stainless steel cost tens of millions and who has not one but two separate retrospectives opening here this week?

Or was it a reminder that bubble markets are like blowup puppies? All it takes is one sharp prick and . . . well, we all know how that story ends.