

Chins Up on Day One of Pulse

By Chris Bors

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PHOTO GALLERY
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NEW YORK—Although uncertainty has been the theme of art fairs for some time now, an enthusiastic crowd was gathered today at the entrance to the **Pulse** art fair for the VIP preview at 10 a.m. Now in its fourth year, Pulse New York is described by director **Helen Allen** as "the city's largest art fair dedicated entirely to contemporary art," since the Armory has added a modern section — a description that may be accurate, if a bit misleading. Compared to the somewhat cramped Scope fair, however, which opened yesterday, Pulse certainly feels large, with deep booths that allow more breathing room and time to reflect on the work.

"I've become cautiously optimistic," said Allen, when asked about the economy and the state of the art market. "We're in uncharted territory for the under-40 set. The galleries have adjusted their expectations. A dialogue has opened up between galleries and collectors, and there is a return to connoisseurship." Allen admitted that some non-New York galleries had pulled out of the fair, deciding that it was not cost-effective to travel the long distance, but added, "Where else would you see 3,000 people by the end of the day? You are getting in front of the right curators, collectors, and journalists. It's an opportunity to get people engaged."

And engagement there was, with notable sales taking place at the preview. **Mark Moore Gallery** from Santa Monica, California, had a hell of a morning: Within the first four hours, it sold 12 of 16 paintings by Los Angeles-based **Allison Schulnik**, which were priced between \$2,500 and \$25,000. "We wanted to have maximum impact, so we mounted a solo presentation," said the gallerist. "Allison has gotten a lot of attention over the past three years." Among those that went were *Big Woolly Monkey Head* (2008), which sold for \$14,500 to a New York collector; *Three Girls* (2009), which went to a Canadian collector for \$16,000; and *Flowers for Long Hair Hobo #3* (2008), which went to a Panamanian collector for \$6,000. Moore, who did the first Pulse in 2005 in Miami after trying **Nada**, finds Pulse a better fit for his gallery and likes how the fair is run. Despite the huge success today, however, he said that the "lack of frenzy is refreshing" and mentioned that collectors appreciate having greater access to artwork now that the unprecedented sales boom has passed.

Others galleries making sales in the early hours of the fair, albeit on a smaller scale, were two of Pulse's more alternative offerings. The *Siense Shredder* is an annual journal printed in New York that incorporates art, design, literature, poetry, and music. Their booth featured art and design objects gathered from the first three issues, as well as the fourth, which is forthcoming, including an **Eva Zeisel** hand-blown glass piece from 1999 in an edition of 6, which sold for \$1,100. The dealers had also spotted collector **Beth Rudin De Woody** in their booth, who purchased a **Chuck Webster** portfolio last year. Their least expensive works on offer were **Brice Brown's** enamel on C-print paintings for \$800, while at the opposite end of the spectrum, **Joseph Cornell's** *Carrousel* (1950) was priced at \$140,000. The mixed-media collage on wood by Cornell is an original composition for a **MoMA** Christmas card printed two years later.

Another unusual booth was the small corner presentation by **Invisible-Exports** showcasing their Artist of the Month Club subscription print service. Every month, the New York-based gallery asks a different curator to select an artist to create an original work, which is turned into a print in an edition of 50. These are then sent out to subscribers for \$200 a month. There is a bit of faith involved in the project, since those who sign up don't know in advance who the selected artists will be, but after seeing the first few prints, joining would seem to be a no-brainer. They had already signed-up three collectors by the time ARTINFO stopped by, and more than half of the subscriptions for this year have already been sold. The first work in the series, **William Powhida's** *Post-Boom Odds* (2008), outlines the chances of "hot" artists actually mattering in 10 years. **Dash Snow** is listed as a long shot at 50-1, in part because of his "polaroid of a hipster snorting a line off cock."

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Although not everyone was lucky enough to rack-up a sale on day one, there was plenty of challenging, unusual, and high quality work on offer. At Santa Monica-based **Copro Nason Gallery's** booth, painter **Thomas Woodruff** was signing copies of the **Laguna Art Museum** catalog for "In the Land of Retinal Delights," a show focusing on artists who have graced the pages of *Juxtapoz* magazine. The booth had accompanying works on offer, including *Appetite for Destruction* (1978), a stunning and controversial painting by **Robert Williams**, the founder of *Juxtapoz*, which was being offered for \$350,000. The work features a robotic lover offering flowers to a woman who, with her underwear around her ankles, looks like she has been raped, while an alien pounces over a fence poised to attack. *Appetite* was used for the cover of **Guns N' Roses'** first album of the same name in 1987, before controversy forced Geffen Records to move it to the inside cover. Copro was also offering original art by the king of underground comix, **Robert Crumb**, like a cover of *XYZ Comix* from 1972 for \$100,000.

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foundation **La Maison Rouge**, **Antoine de Galbert**, had also made an appearance.

At **Rosamund Felsen Gallery's** booth, a collector stopped by trying to get a deal on **Steve Hurd's** *The Roar #3* (2009), an oil-on-canvas work of a lion for \$7,000. "Is it negotiable?" she asked. Felsen agreed to discuss it further, and the potential buyer said she'd be back. "There is a lot of uncertainty," Felsen admitted. "We don't know how long it will take to bounce back, or should I say creep back." The veteran dealer of 31 years, based in Santa Monica, said important collectors like the **Rubells** had stopped by her booth. **Kaz Oshiro's** *Fender Deluxe Reverb Amp 1* (2008-09), made of acrylic and Bondo on stretched canvas, was a dead ringer for an actual amplifier, although a bit more costly at \$20,000. Oshiro's work references artists **John McCracken** and **Donald Judd**, as well as the Finish Fetish artists.

The first day of Pulse seemed to be full of hope, and although it remains to be seen how everything will pan out over the weekend, (mostly) everyone started off the fair with his chin up and a positive attitude. For an economic downturn, collectors, curators, and artists came out in force, although most likely with thinner wallets.

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