

FINANCIAL TIMES

The Art Market: All astir in Paris

By Georgina Adam

Fiac sales flow, wealth tax avoided, Power 100 list revealed

'Big blonde in a red dress' (2012) by Chantal Joffe, sold at Cheim & Read at Fiac

In the run-up to Paris's leading contemporary art fair, Fiac, which opened on Wednesday, only one subject was on everyone's lips and seriously spooking dealers. This was the possibility that works of art worth over €50,000 could be included in France's wealth tax; at the same time the amendment was being hotly debated by the French parliament.

Like the Loch Ness monster, this measure comes up regularly, and is as regularly squelched. This time French dealers, museum curators and even leading mayors raced to denounce the proposal as dangerous for France's cultural heritage, and on the eve of Fiac all breathed a massive sigh of relief when the prime minister announced that the majority would not support the amendment, effectively killing it.

With that out of the way, exhibitors at Fiac still had to contend with the fact that France is preparing to introduce a 75 per cent top tax rate. Hundreds of high-priced apartments have gone on the market as France's wealthiest prepare to flee to Belgium, Switzerland and England. But early sales were encouraging. "The Fiac crowd is international," noted Gordon VeneKlasen of Michael Werner, who sold a piece by Aaron Curry at \$75,000 and a Per Kirkeby at €50,000 in the first hour of opening. Sadie Coles found an unexpected buyer for Sarah Lucas's "Yes" (2012), a



stocking-stuffed female body with a rifle poking from between its legs, tagged at £75,000: it sold on the first day to a Middle Eastern collector. An American bagged Hayv Kahraman's "Disembodied 7" (2012) from Third Line gallery at \$40,000. Even French buyers were active, and snapped up works by Louise Bourgeois, Jack Pierson and Chantal Joffe at Cheim & Read.

The other talking point in Paris was the quasi-simultaneous launch, by two of the world's leading dealers, of vast new art spaces. First off was the Salzburg-and-Paris dealer Thaddaeus Ropac, who unveiled a huge complex at the decidedly gritty Porte de Pantin with two shows: Anselm Kiefer and Joseph Beuys. The former factory, elegantly revamped, offers vast white spaces with 40ft ceilings, hung with paintings and sculptures by the decidedly prolific Kiefer. Thirty-eight paintings and sculptures, priced from €300,000 to €1.2m, were on offer, and by the time Fiac opened over half had sold. A second building held the Beuys show, documenting his 1969 performance *Iphigenia*. At the opening a white horse was placidly munching on hay in one corner, a reminder of the now mythical performance when Beuys recited Shakespeare and Goethe to a white quadruped.

Then, on the eve of Fiac, Larry Gagosian launched his newest outlet, sited in the private Le Bourget airport complex. The former warehouse offers more vast white spaces, revamped this time by the French architect Jean Nouvel. "I guess that quite a few visitors to Fiac will be passing by here," said Nouvel. "This space also shows the transformation of Paris as an art destination, it is extending, and no longer bounded by the périphérique." Again, Kiefer was centre stage with an installation of wheat in a caged enclosure entitled "Morganthau Plan", a reference to a project, mooted but soon abandoned after the second world war, to turn Germany into an agricultural nation.

Thematic exhibitions spanning the historical and the contemporary are all the rage: the Royal Academy has *Bronze*, one of the most acclaimed shows the institution has put on for years. In the commercial world, Robilant+Voena is celebrating marble and paint with *White*, which includes sculpture and white reliefs and paintings from antiquity to the present, ending with white marble doors by Ai Weiwei (until December 14).

In Paris, the Italian dealer **Tornabuoni Art** has turned his attention to fire, which was much used by Arte Povera and Zero artists to explore new ways of making art. The exhibition, curated by the noted French curator Daniel Abadie, starts with Burri's 1953/54 "Combustione", made by burning a hole in a canvas, and continues with French artist Arman burning and shattering violins and chairs, as well as works made by smoke, shadows and flame by Yves Klein, Jannis Kounellis and Mimmo Rotella. A poignant work is Chen Zhen's "Bibliothèque" (1992), a glass-fronted cabinet containing the ashes of Chinese newspapers. Works by the French artist Bernard

Aubertin use spent matches. Prices range from €10,000 to more than €1m (until December 22).

Art Review's annual Power 100 list is always the opportunity to see who's up, who's down in the art world, at least according to the editors. This year's list, released on Thursday, sees one remarkable jump, that of Sheika Mayassa of Qatar, the world's biggest – and most discreet – art buyer, who catapults from number 90 to number 11. The biggest dealer in the world, Larry Gagosian, nudges up to the number two slot from number four, while other biggies – Wirth, Zwirner, Glimcher (Pace), Goodman and Jopling (White Cube) are arrayed in the top 20. At first place is Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, director of this year's quinquennial Documenta. You might not think anyone would take such lists too seriously but, let me tell you, having compiled it once, some dealers (including the biggest) are very, very sensitive about their position in the hierarchy and the slightest shift either way.

A fragment of Fra Angelico's 'Scènes de la Thébaine' (1430-35), on sale in Marseille next Saturday

The early Renaissance painter Fra Angelico (c1395-1455) appears extremely rarely at auction, but next Saturday in Marseille the auctioneer Damien Leclere is selling a small piece of a painting by the angelic painter and his workshop. It is the largest section of a painting entitled



“Scènes de la Thébaine” (1430-35) that in the 18th or 19th century was cut up into six pieces: one has disappeared, and the other four are all in museums. The work comes from a private French collection and has never been exhibited. Estimating such work is tricky; the only comparable sale was in Italy in 2003, when a small Fra Angelico work on panel made \$1.3m. This work is estimated at a modest €200,000-€400,000.

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This article has been subject to a correction*