

Koons, Hirst woo collectors as art fairs face online challenge

With a lineup that includes the work of high-profile artists, the virtual VIP Art Fair may give Art Basel, Frieze and FIAC a run for their money

BY SCOTT REYBURN
BLOOMBERG

The Internet revolution has at long last reached international art fairs as a new event tests buyers' willingness to shop online for contemporary works.

Billionaire collectors and their agents spend weeks each year traveling the world to events such as Art Basel, Art Basel/Miami Beach, Frieze and FIAC. Now they are being urged to save time and money — purchasing from the comfort of their own homes at the virtual VIP Art Fair, announced this month.

"Just out of curiosity, VIP is going to attract a lot of visitors," Todd Levin, a New York-based art adviser and curator, said in an interview. "People have become confident about buying from J-PEGS, as long as they can be sure about the condition of a piece."

If VIP is a success, other online events may follow and traditional "live" fairs may have to enhance their Web presence, said dealers. While advisers such as Levin will continue to travel, the event will challenge the Internet's reputation for being mainly a selling platform for lower-value artworks. VIP will offer heftily priced pieces by artists such as Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, Damien Hirst and Andreas Gursky.

Collectors are increasingly willing to use the Internet to buy art at auction. Already, a quarter of bids at Christie's International auctions are made online, with such sales in the first half of this year increasing 63 percent from the

equivalent period last year.

Two New York-based couples — dealers James and Jane Cohan and Internet entrepreneurs Jonas and Alessandra Almgren — have spent more than two years devising the VIP fair. For a week, from Jan. 22 to Jan. 30, anyone will be able to use the Internet to browse works at more than 50 of the world's leading contemporary art galleries. International art-fair regulars Gagosian, White Cube, David Zwirner, Hauser & Wirth and Sadie Coles are among the event's 12 founding participants.

VIP tickets, costing US\$100 on the first two days and US\$20 thereafter, will give would-be buyers interactive contact with galleries through instant messaging, Skype or telephone. The fair's Web site will allow visitors to zoom in on the paintings, enjoy multiple views of sculptures and watch videos.

"It's a lot easier to go to an art fair when you can do it in an easy chair," Levin said. The lavish parties and dinners thrown by galleries when collectors fly into town wouldn't be missed. "If the social aspect is why you're participating at an art fair, you're not going for the right reason," he said.

Dealers are attracted to the VIP Art Fair, the first of its kind, by the opportunity of gaining new clients from emerging economies, said James Cohan, co-founder of the fair, who also has a gallery in Shanghai.

Buyers from China, which this month became the world's second-largest economy, have so far been a limited presence at Western dealer-led art events.

The fair also appeals to increasingly cost-conscious gallery owners who spend hundreds of thousands of US dollars each year on booths, travel, shipping, accommodation and entertaining.

"The overall cost is about a fifth of what dealers normally spend," Cohan said in an interview. Participants will be charged between US\$5,000 and US\$20,000 for a virtual "booth."

"It's a brilliant idea," said Anthony McNerney, managing director at the London and Hong Kong-based gallery, Ben Brown Fine Arts, which is not, as yet, participating in VIP. "It will take time to take off. At first, probably only things that people know will do well, such as editioned sculptures and photographs."

Ben Brown routinely sells works by photographers such as Candida Hofer purely on the strength of Internet inquiries and phone calls, McNerney said.

"It'll probably take a year or so before a Korean or Indonesian collector spends US\$1 million for a work at a virtual art fair, but there could be anomalies," McNerney said. "People tend to be quicker to make decisions when using the Internet. At art fairs, visitors look at things and have a think about it."

On the Net: vipartfair.com



The *Unbearable Lightness*, by Slovakian designer Tomas Libertiny, was put up for sale at the Design Miami/Basel fair in June.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Caravaggio comes home to sumptuously restored Genoan villa

After falling into disrepair, the 481-year-old building, owned by the wealthy Doria-Pamphilj family, has been restored to its former glory

BY GILDAS LE ROUX
AFP, GENOA, ITALY



Forgotten until 1997 and in progressive renovation, the sumptuous residence built for Andrea Doria in 1529 is currently hosting an exhibition titled *Caravaggio and Flight: Landscape Painting From the Doria Pamphilj Villas*.

PHOTOS: AFP

Renaissance master Caravaggio is the guest of honor as Italy's legendary Doria-Pamphilj family puts finishing touches on painstaking renovations to their sprawling villa in northern Genoa.

Caravaggio's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* — an exquisite painting bought by the family for a pittance in 1650 — has pride of place at the villa in Genoa overlooking the sea.

"Bringing this painting here to the villa while we are commemorating the 400th anniversary of the artist's death has put the spotlight on the villa, which many Genoans don't even know exists," said Laura Sciove, an art history graduate who leads tours of the mansion.

Allowed to fall into disrepair until 1997, the old Villa del Principe, begun in 1529 by Admiral Andrea Doria (1466-1560), has gradually regained its luster.

The villa still needs work, with a roof still pock-marked by wartime bombings and cracks still apparent in the facade.

Apartment blocks and roads steadily encroached on the grounds — including a motorway that now runs along the coast — and the garden at the foot of the main staircase was even transformed into an open-air movie theater.

"The villa was reopened to the public in 1997, and each year we carry out new work to return the building as well as the gardens to their original glory," Sciove said.

Its founder, Andrea Doria, deserves a museum devoted just to him. An admiral to the emperor Charles V who fought for what was then the Republic of Genoa, his prestigious lineage was bolstered further in 1671 with a marriage to Rome's Pamphilj family, whose descendants still own the villa.

A secretive figure, he was able to use his alliances to maneuver between King Francis I of France and Charles V, and he lived to the exceptionally old age of 96.

The summer residence he built has 15 rooms on two stories with a sumptuous balcony on the upper floor, dubbed the Heroes' Loggia because of its frescoes representing the Doria family's 12 warriors.

When the Doria-Pamphilj family decided to revive its unique heritage, it had the frescoes meticulously restored, while the cinema gave way to a formal Italian garden.

To celebrate the rebirth, they invited Caravaggio to the party, with the current exhibition titled *Caravaggio and Flight*:

Landscape Painting From the Doria Pamphilj Villas, which runs until Sept. 26.

Sciove said historians "assume" Caravaggio was invited to the villa in 1605, about a decade after he completed the painting at age 20.

The painting, which normally hangs at the Galleria Doria-Pamphilj in Rome, "was acquired in 1650 by the Doria-Pamphilj family along with another painting for the pittance of 90 ecus," Sciove said with a bemused smile.

The experience has something for all tastes: ebony and ivory furniture, enormous fireplaces in white Carrara marble and black Promontorio marble, precious tapestries, paintings by masters including Rubens, Titian, Bronzino, Sebastiano del Piombo and others.

One room in particular deserves special mention: the Hall of Giants, where Andre Doria and Charles V met to cement their alliance after Doria left the service of Francis I.

Stunning Flemish tapestries from Tourmai dating from 1460 grace the walls.

Depicting scenes from the life of Alexander the Great, the profusion of colors and the fineness of the details are a feast for the eyes.

On the Net: www.dopart.it/genova

EXHIBITIONS



Chen Chieh-jen, *Military Court and Prison* (2007-2008).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TEAM

Few names in Taiwan's art scene are as recognizable as Chen Chieh-jen's (陳界仁). **On the Empire's Borders (在帝國的邊界上)** is a comprehensive exhibition of Chen's work, particularly his video installation, since 1996. From his early guerilla performances and underground exhibitions before the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 to his exploration of Taiwan's modern history — particularly its transformation from a colonial to a consumerist society — Chen's easily accessible work covers the gamut of post-modern critical discourse. "Taiwanese society has lost the ability to think about the future from the context of the past," Chen said. This exhibit could serve as an antidote to the facile public discourse that distracts much of the country's popular media.

■ Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路三段181號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 9:30am to 5:30pm, closes at 8:30pm on Saturdays. Tel: (02) 2595-7656
■ Begins Saturday. Until Nov. 14



Huang Zhi-yang, *Zoon* (2008).

PHOTO COURTESY OF SAKSHI GALLERY

Employing philosopher Susanne Langer's notion that art is composed of abstracted and simplified symbols of human feeling, **Feeling and Form (情感與形式)** is an exhibition of painters working in figuration, abstraction and expressionism. The four exhibitors are Jiun Hsieh (謝鴻均), Huang Zhi-yang (黃致陽), Chen Chien-jung (陳建榮) and Tang Jo-hung (唐若洪).

■ Sakshi Gallery (夏可喜當代藝術), 33 Yitong St, Taipei City (台北市伊通街33號). Open Tuesdays to Saturdays from 1:30pm to 9:30pm, closes at 7:30pm on Sundays. Tel: (02) 2516-5386
■ Until Oct. 3

Living With Art (生活的藝術) brings together

eight Japanese and five Taiwanese artists spanning a range of ages and genres — though mainly painting and sculpture. Like the Sakshi show, *Living With Art* presents a broad range of genres — figurative, abstract and expressionist — as a response to new media art forms.

■ Yi&C Contemporary Art (易雅居當代空間), 22, Ln 252, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段252巷22號). Open Mondays to Fridays from 10am to 7pm and Saturdays and Sundays from 2pm to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2781-3131
■ Until Sept. 10

Co(op)llaboration (分化/合作) is a two-man exhibit by German artist Lars Koepsel and Australian artist Vernon Ah Kee. The installation, comprising video and photography, examines the proliferation of neo-Nazi symbols and codes across Germany and the world since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The artists are interested in how racism "codifies itself and how culture, nationalist and ethnic, informs racism and racist expression."

■ IT Park Gallery (伊通公園), 2F-3F, 41 Yitong St, Taipei City (台北市伊通街41號2-3樓). Open Tuesdays to Saturdays from 1pm to 10pm. Tel: (02) 2507-7243
■ Until Sept. 18

Most shows on traditional Chinese ink painting feature numerous scrolls with brief explanations. **The Sound of Many Birds, the Moving Nature of Each (百鳥百聲書一動一情性)** goes in the opposite direction by focusing on a single work, *Three Friends and a Hundred Birds* (三友百禽) by early Ming Dynasty artist Bian Wenjin (邊文進), and then using it to discuss landscape and bird painting in general. It's a novel approach to a notoriously esoteric art form. Viewers learn about the work's motifs, what they symbolize and how they fit into the framework of Chinese painting.

■ National Palace Museum (國立故宮博物院), 221, Zhishan Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市至善路二段221號). Open daily from 9am to 5pm. Tel: (02) 2881-2021. Admission: NT\$160
■ Until Sept. 25

Call for submissions

Singapore-based Oakwood Asia Pacific is holding a photography competition called **Trust Is ...** to celebrate the company's 50th anniversary. Amateur photographers from across Asia are invited to capture their idea of trust in pictures. The 12 finalists will get the opportunity to showcase their entries, which will be produced as a set of postcards, in a traveling exhibition. The winner, who will be selected by a panel of experts and a public voting process, will walk away with a grand prize worth more than NT\$353,000, including a Canon EOS 5D Mark II.

■ This competition is only open to amateur photographers who live in Asia. For complete details, go to www.oakwoodasiapacific.com/50anniversary/competition.php.
■ Competition runs from Sept. 1 to Nov. 15