

SCENE & HERD

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- Linda Yablonsky around the 54th Venice Biennale
- Linda Yablonsky at Elmgreen & Dragset's "The One and the Many" in Rotterdam
- Kate Sutton on "Argumenta" and *Commercial Break* at the Venice Biennale
- David Velasco around the 54th Venice Biennale
- Doretta Lau at the fourth Art HK
- David Velasco at a gala for MoMA and Volkswagen



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Newest Headlines

- Andria Hickey Named Associate Curator of Public Art Fund
- Triple Canopy, Light Industry, and Public School Announce Opening of Center
- MoMA Announces Acquisition of Two Collections
- Art Institute of Chicago Acquires a Rauschenberg Combine
- Latin American and Caribbean Guggenheim Fellowships Announced
- M. F. Husain (1915–2011)
- Michael Lynch Named CEO of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority
- Michael Snow Wins Gershon Iskowitz Prize
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts Appoints New Head of Asian Art Department
- Getty Research Institute Acquires Harald Szeemann Archive

Vanity Fair

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Left: Artist and curator Xavier Veilhan with Karl Lagerfeld. Right: "La Force de l'Art" organizer Bernard Blistène.

"La Force de l'Art" is the somewhat pompous title of a mega-exhibition of new French art that opened at the Grand Palais on Tuesday after having weathered a weeks-long polemical storm in the media. Announced by Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin during the FIAC art fair last October, the show was designed to be "a great exhibit dedicated to contemporary French art, one that will give new visibility to French creators." The result amounts to a kind of Parisian Whitney Biennial, and has been tagged "Expo Villepin" by critics keen to denounce it as a media stunt aimed primarily at boosting the image of an unpopular government.

On a street closed to traffic for the evening of the opening we were greeted by police in riot gear. Possibly they were expecting to face protesters denouncing the idea of an "official art," as was the case during the "Expo Pompidou," held in the same venue in 1972. And don't even try to play it like Pierre Bismuth, an exhibiting artist who had forgotten his invitation and was forced to argue his way in. But the '70s are long gone, and nothing shocks anyone much anymore. Nevertheless, Tsuneko Taniuchi's performance, in which she sang a kind of deranged Marseillaise, did cause a small stir. She was asked to stop after a while and complained to me that she was a victim of censorship.



Left: Curator Hou Hanrou. Right: Curator Stéphanie Moïsdon.

Walking around beneath the giant, vaulted glass ceiling, my first impression was that the size of the interior made the works look like postage stamps. Then it hit me: I was in an art fair. Each curator (there are twelve in all) had built their booths independently, and some, like Bernard Marcadé's panoramic tower, are strikingly ambitious. Artists were asked the same question all night: At whose booth are you showing? And just as at the fairs, where some are represented by multiple galleries, here some are presented by many curators. Bertrand Lavier seemed to be everywhere, which speaks well of his status on the French museum circuit, since for the most part the organizers were required to select works belonging to national collections.

But the real problem here lay in a curatorial unevenness that permitted the display of rows and rows of horrible paintings suggestive of the most lackluster FIAC booths; when presented with more than fifteen exhibitions side by side, one can't help but make such comparisons. I couldn't locate Philippe Vergne's show "Entre les lignes," which was supposed to occupy different parts of the nave, finding instead only one of his exhibiting artists, Tino Sehgal, who seemed vexed that a museum cashier didn't want to participate in his performance. But why was Sehgal here anyway? He's not considered to be a French artist. Perhaps this show is more like the Whitney Biennial, with its broad definition of "American artist," than I had thought. Among the curators who sidestepped the pitfall of nationalism were Hou Hanrou and Eric Troncy, whose "superdéfense" features artists as diverse as Mark Handforth and Francesco Vezzoli.

PATRICK PAINTER

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Left: A "mediation officer" dressed in Daniel Buren. Right: Curator Olivier Zahm with Yves Saint Laurent designer Stefano Pilati.

Besides the excitement caused by a visit by the Prime Minister (the subject of a portrait by Yan Pei Ming), who was escorted by exhibition coordinators Bernard Blistène and Olivier Kaeppelin, the buzz focused on Olivier Zahm's booth. Hovering around here were a crew of '80s-era drag queens as well as André, the artistic director of the club Le Baron, who had created a vast, erection-sporting Mickey Mouse, and informed me that he had just opened a hotel. Zahm's show is called "Rose Poussière" and each room is branded with the logo of a fashion label such as Rick Owens, Martin Margiela, or Yves Saint Laurent. I spotted YSL's current designer, the charming Stefano Pilati, listening attentively to Zahm's explanation of Assayas's video installation. Here, too, I ran into Jan Mot from Brussels. We wondered if a dinner, or even just a drink, had been planned, but apparently the budget wouldn't allow for it, given the presence of more than 200 artists. This put Alain Séchas, on his way to the taping of a TV show, in a not-so-good mood: He wasn't going to be satisfied with a saw-cut slice of bread from Maja Bajevic's performance.

Asking a "mediation officer" to indicate the exit, I remarked to him that the pink and white stripes of his jacket reminded me of a Daniel Buren (the French artist is due to deliver a lecture at "L'école de Stéphanie," Stéphanie Moisdon's pedagogical curatorial effort, on the last day of the show). "I am a Buren," he said, "all the officers are."

— Nicolas Trembley



Left: Artist Bertrand Lavier. Right: Gallerist Jan Mot.



Left: Parisian head of culture, Christophe Girard. Right: Lola (aka designer Laurent Mercier.)





Left: Artist Maja Bajevic's performance. Right: Artist Alain Séchas.



Left: Artist and filmmaker Olivier Assays. Right: Critic and curator Bernard Marcadé.



Left: Artist Mathieu Mercier. Right: "Dada" curator Laurent Lebon.



Left: Artist Pascale-Marthine Tayou. Right: Artist Pierre Joseph.

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