

# ARTFORUM

## The Eyes Have It

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Artforum



THE JOULE HOTEL was the nexus of activity during the sixth edition of the Dallas Art Fair. Everyone from Heidi Klum to artists like Richard Phillips and Will Boone and dealers including James Fuentes and Max Levai spent the week in its sleek rooms. Across the street, a leviathan, thirty-foot-tall eyeball gazed directly at the building. Richard Phillips's new girlfriend—Liza Thorn, Saint Laurent muse and lead singer of STARRED—told me she couldn't sleep at night: "It's there watching me, all the time." The sculpture's maker, Chicago-based artist Tony Tasset, said he conceived it as a kind of conscience, or even God. "Texans like things big," he shrugged before the fair's final party on Saturday night. That circus-like fete, billed The Eye Ball, took place on a grassy knoll around the orb and featured waiters and bartenders with multiple eyes painted so deftly over their faces that it was difficult to tell which eye was real and which was false.

Dallas is a city of collectors, and many say its private collections are among the best you'll ever see. A number of these are in Highland Park, a private neighborhood designed by the same people responsible for Beverly Hills; many of the city's patrons live there, including the Roses, who are among a trinity of families that have bequeathed their collections to the Dallas Museum of Art, promising to make it one of the best museums in the nation.

Deedie Rose hosted an open house on the first day of the fair. (The two other families, the Rachofskys and the Hoffmans, were out of town, but happily the former's collection is public and the latter's groundskeeper was kind enough to show people around.) "You have to think of contemporary art like Shakespeare," Rose said as she led us through her impressive holding of Brazilian art. "When you know the language, it can change the way you see the world." The house—like most I saw in Dallas—seemed to have fewer walls than windows, some of which soared several stories high.

A gala for the Dallas Art Fair was held that night and was attended by women in sweeping, jewel-toned gowns and men in crisp shirts. Many of the dealers in town for the fair—Jonathan Viner, OHWOW's Mills and Al Moran, Jose Martos, Michael Nevin of The Journal—mentioned that they were here to place work with Dallas collectors. Paris dealer Frank Elbaz declared that because it was Dallas, he only brought art by Americans. Among some of the most elegant booths were those by Churner and Churner, CANADA, James Fuentes, Clearing, M+B, and The Green Gallery, the last of whom brought an enormous mobile-like sculpture by Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam.

The night before, the Power Station—a nonprofit space that has previously held shows by Matias Faldbakken, Oscar Tuazon, Jacob Kassay, and Virginia Overton—opened an exhibition of work by Fredrik Vaerslev. His cool abstractions were based on the colors of the Dallas Cowboys and aimed to be an affront to the viewer. "He creates antagonistic paintings," said the space's artistic director Rob Teeters as he stood before the fifteen-foot tall, two-foot wide banner-like paintings, the lower half of which were left entirely blank, so that you had to crane your neck to see the stripes of paint. "He denies the gesture and forces you to look. Fredrik is a painter with a capital P." Originally, Vaerslev had installed the paintings over the windows, but everything got too dark. We headed to the afterparty at an apartment rooftop, which functions as both offices and a place for artists to stay when visiting. There, in a conversation about George W. Bush's debut as a painter, Power Station founder Alden Pinnell laughed: "Those have to be hardest paintings to get in the world." He paused. "Dallas is a unique place. After Bush came back, there were billboards everywhere reading THANKS FOR KEEPING US SAFE GEORGE AND LAURA."

Across town at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, the ex-POTUS was represented by “The Art of Leadership: A President’s Personal Diplomacy,” featuring portraits of world leaders he worked with during his eight years in office. Among them were Vladimir Putin and Tony Blair; he painted most of these from pictures found on Google Image searches, and each painting was winged by photographs and vitrines filled with totemistic gifts bestowed by that leader to the President.

“They’re like Mexican ex-photo paintings,” Julian Schnabel told curator Piper Marshall on OHWOW’s radio channel Know Wave, which ran the length of the fair from an outpost at the Joule Hotel. “People in Mexico that get hit by a car or survive a bus accident make paintings and put them in the church and give them to God to thank him for keeping them alive.”

Earlier that day I had met Schnabel to talk about his show due to open that night. It was just past noon and he was standing in the middle of the cavernous space looking at his enormous paintings and wearing a shirt that read MISSING. “I called it the Disappointing Present,” he said of a work featuring a blown-up photograph of a beaming fisherman on a wharf. Other works included relics or images of a former time—a book of Milton, an antique mirror he gave his first wife, wallpaper from the eighteenth century. “The people in it seem so enthusiastic and proud of whatever is going on there.”

“Then why is it disappointing?”

“Because I am talking about this present.”

In the next gallery, portraits of Lindsay Lohan, Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus, and Justin Timberlake hung along the warehouse walls. It was Richard Phillips’s debut museum show. Titled “Negation of the Universe,” the exhibition opened with a painting of a woman’s vagina squirting out clear liquid. Pornography is Phillips’s operative device: His paintings’ hyperbolic realism evoke the world as seen through the lens of an HD camera.

“I had to go outside and find a patch of sun after walking through half of one room,” said one artist. Next to Phillips, Schnabel felt almost holy.

“You want children’s paintings? Then go to a children’s museum. My show is audacious, it’s uncompromising, it’s intrepid, it’s resistant, it’s completely courageous,” Phillips said at a dinner to honor Schnabel on the rooftop of the Joule Hotel.

“It’s a curator’s dream to have Julian Schnabel and Richard Phillips in the same museum,” said Dallas Contemporary director Peter Doroshenko. I sat next to advisor John Runyon, whom many consider responsible for the growing collector scene in Dallas. He gave Phillips his first solo show outside New York at his former gallery, which he shuttered in the early 2000s to build an advisory practice. “It’s not a city for galleries,” he told me. Artists, he suggested, feel like they can’t stay here. “I suppose it’s the missing link.”

Of course, he’s not the only one in the city forging connections between artists and institutions. “She’s the queen of Dallas, but don’t worry, she’s a good queen,” said artist Sam Roeck of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra’s Anna-Sophia van Zweden. Friday morning, she hosted a press conference at the I.M. Pei–designed Meyerson Symphony Center to announce the first annual SOLUNA, an international music and arts festival that will feature collaborations between the DSO and artists like Pipilotti Rist and Yael Bartana.

In this contemporary cathedral of a space—home to the largest Ellsworth Kelly in the world—a violin interrupted her speech. Then, from behind the curve of an expansive stairway, came a stream of musicians on dollies pushed by performers in coveralls colored to match the Kelly. Each musician sat on a chair with a music stand, their bodies bent into their instruments. The orchestra circled the press conference, herding the crowd into a tight clump: Ryan McNamara’s choreography, part of the DSO’s project, brought a physical dimension to the music, implicating the audience within the dance of the sound, merging all present into a coherent piece.

On Sunday, I found myself in another place of worship, also with an art collection—the Dallas Cowboy Stadium. It was raining that day, and there was a children’s cheerleading convention taking place, and so we made our wet way through gaggles of pint-size girls to stand before works by Jacqueline Humphries, Cory Arcangel, and Walead Beshty. Our tour guide was stadium and art ambassador Phil Whitfield—a big man with a big voice who believed art could and should be appreciated by everyone. (His critical insight into the practice of artists in the collection was stunning.) We wandered through the owners’ box, with floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out onto a sea of eighty thousand seats. “It’s about how to see,” he said. In the background, the cheerleaders leapt about to the National Anthem. “People come here from all walks of the world—it’s not just about museums anymore. I’ve dedicated my life to this, to helping people see.”