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Scattered Sales Greet L.A.'s Newest Art Fair

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Photo by DeMonica Orozco
Tim Fleming

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LOS ANGELES—Despite its mammoth proportions and glittering facade that reflects sunlight as if made out of water, the **Pacific Design Center** (a.k.a. the "Blue Whale") in the middle of Los Angeles has long remained under the radar of Angelino art collectors. All that changed this year with the inaugural production of **Art Los Angeles Contemporary** (ALAC), a new cutting-edge expo that debuted over the weekend as a 50,000-square-foot melting pot for 55 blue-chip and emerging galleries from Los Angeles and around the globe. Organized by **Fair Grounds Associates'** Tim Fleming, director of the fair and a former director of **ART LA** and **photo Miami**, ALAC stood apart from last month's bigger **Los Angeles Art Show** as a juried event with a selection committee composed of taste-making L.A galleries **1301 PE**, David Kordansky Gallery, **Peres Projects**, and Susanne Vielmetter.

With the most affordable admission cost of any of the season's L.A. fairs at $16.00, ALAC attracted 9,000 attendees and collectors from the United States and abroad, as well as celebrities like Anthony Kiedis, Neil Patrick Harris, and Drew Barrymore. Hip galleries ranging from New York's Lisa Cooley and Gavin Brown's Enterprise to London's **Museum 52** and Guadalajara's **Charro Negro Galeria** occupied booths in a grid enclosed by gloor-to-ceiling glass partitions, giving collectors an appealing sensation of viewing the art through storefront windows.

Attendees strolling the fair could not miss John Miller's room of fiercely shining sculptures at Patrick Painter, where the imitation gold-leaf coating the works added a chintzy luster to the work's humble materials of plaster, cloth, and Styrofoam. Michael Briggs, the gallery's director, said interest in Miller's work in the booth signaled a "pickup in the higher end as well as the lower end" — appropriately enough for an artist whose work is both valuable and a critique of commercial value. "Obviously it's not like the boom times again in 2006 or 2007, but it's pretty steady," Briggs said. "There are serious collectors and they are still buying serious art." Over at **Honor Fraser**'s booth, which was showing work by the rising New York-based artist Robert Lazzarini, gallery director Michelle Pobar agreed. "$10-30,000 is a great price range right now," he said. "People are really responding to that range of work."

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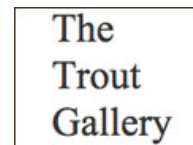
Closing sales were still being finalized this week and galleries remained tight-lipped about profits, but artists known to have sold at the fair include Miller; **Sage Vaughn** at Kim Light; Erin Shireff at **Lisa Cooley**; and Kerry Tribe, Pae White, and John Reynolds at **1301 PE** (which sold upwards of $100,000 worth of work, according to Fleming). New York's **I-20** gallery also sold two large "video engines" by artist Peter Sarkisian, each in the $100,000 range. New York-based artist Lisi Raskin also generated buzz with her collaged work inspired by nuclear missile sites at **The Company**'s booth. According to artist Annie Wharton, who founded the Los Angeles gallery with curator Anat Ebgi in 2008, collectors were drawn to the way Raskin's art engaged with "the notion of the handmade, taking paper and re-working into very elaborate pieces."

Director Tim Fleming believes the Pacific Design Center's proximity to neighboring galleries and the Culver City Art Walk helped make the inaugural fair a success by reinforcing the art's connection to the urban fabric of the city. "It's nice to have the confidence that people are coming in town for the event and that they could very easily get around to all the different events," he said. Some, however, complained that the labyrinthine floorplan of the design center site was less than practical. "It's an odd venue," Angles Gallery director Nowell Karten remarked at the fair. "I know that people are walking in that door on my right and walking around in a horse shoe and going out the other end and missing these rows here and have no idea what they missed."