



ART FORUM

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CENTRAL LONDON
BY ZEHRA JUMABHOY
LONDON
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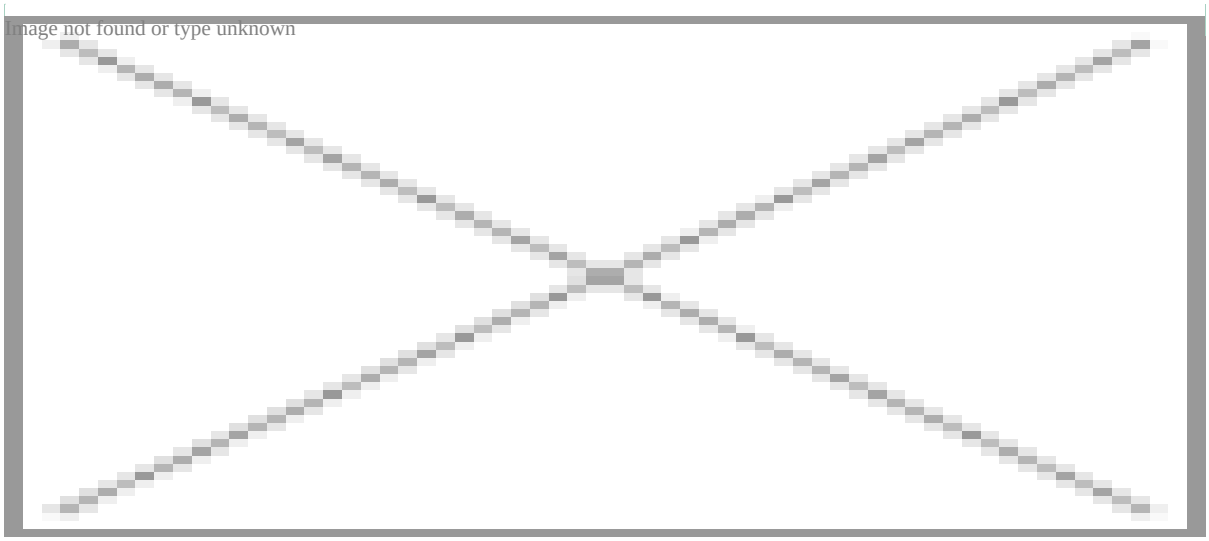
Left: SANDY ANGUS, cofounder of Art15. Right: CONOR MACKLIN of Grosvenor Gallery and NOUR ASLAM of Art15. (All photos: ZEHRA JUMABHOY)

I BLINKED. Sitting in front of me was a blond Yeti. Stepping closer, I noticed that his "hair" consisted of rubber bands. "Oh, you've met our monster!" said a girl at the booth. "He

has lots of admirers." Admiration wasn't quite the word I'd use, but no matter. *Hummelman*, as it turned out, was an artwork by Mette Sterre featured at the stand for University of Arts London—a student-run initiative that dominated the nonprofit section of Art15.

As *Hummelman* indicated, Art15 was an unusual fair. Now in its third year, the self-styled "Global Art Fair" gathered galleries from forty-two countries with the mission to put London on the "international" map. Art15—co-owned by Art HK founders TIM ETCHELLS and SANDY ANGUS—targets younger galleries with an Asian background. Driving this agenda is NOUR ASLAM, a specialist in South Asian art, who is in charge of gallery development. "We are very proud that visitors are responding so positively to a non-western centric approach," fair director KATE BRYAN told me.

Bryan's sentiment chimed with many on opening night last Wednesday. "Art15 has a great international vibe. I think it is a good indicator of the growing demand for Korean art in the West," opined Heashin Kwok of the London- and Seoul-based Hanmi Gallery. Purple-haired PEARL LAM of (duh) PEARL LAM Galleries revved up for some serious sales: "We have been exhibiting in the fair since its inception. It is exciting to see a truly multicultural offering of artists." Collector Mera Rubell chimed in, "This fair reflects the culture of London. It's so multicultural."



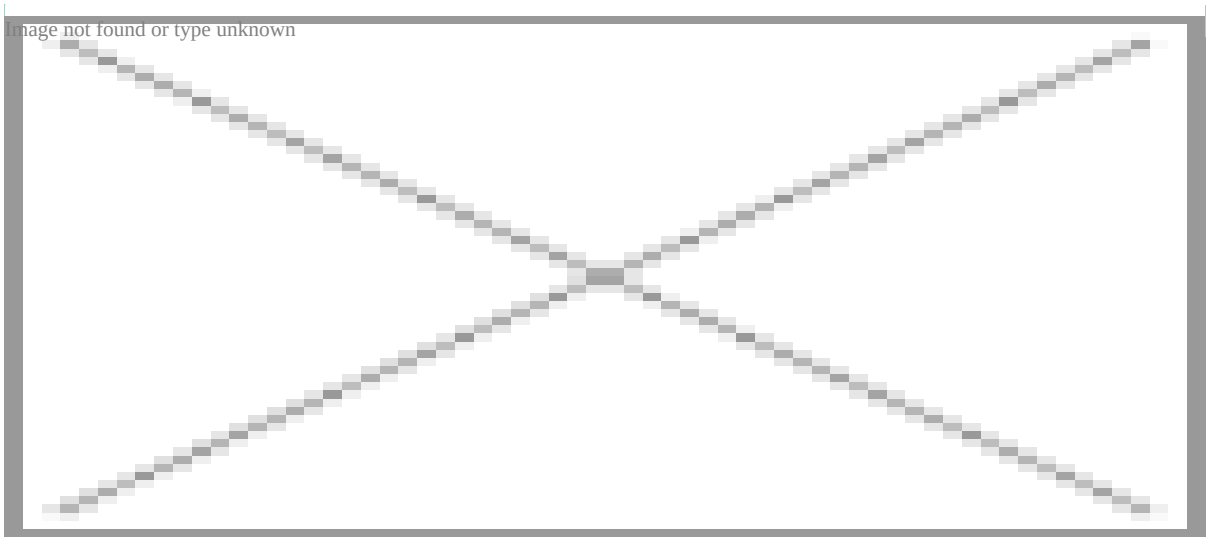
Left: AARON CEZAR, founding director of Delfina Foundation. Right: MORT CHATTERJEE of Chatterjee and Lal Gallery, Mumbai.

I heard a lot about "multicultural London" in those few days around the fair. Think of artist Mimsy (a pseudonym adopted for her protection) and her light-boxes depicting Sylvanian Family dolls on a picnic that is interrupted by the nastiness of ISIS. Mimsy was part of Freedom Audit, a nonprofit exhibition, ensconced in a room at the fair, curated by the Royal Academy's onetime director KATHLEEN SORIANO. The section included artists from eighteen countries who stood for "the freedom of expression" and denigrated intolerance. (Ironic, given Britain's current paranoia about immigration and EU-membership.)

At any rate, the preview was a colorful melting pot: Artist IDRIS KHAN—last spotted at his minimalist black-and-white exhibition at Victoria Miro in Mayfair—was standing under a golden statue. Television presenter MICHAEL URBAN clung to fashion designer ROUBI L'ROUBI. Wait! Was that NIRU RATNAM, director of Art14? Ratnam has left to start his own fair, called (duh) START. "What do you think of Art15, Niru?" I asked. "Stop stirring the pot!" whispered a passing dealer. Meanwhile, big-time collectors Budi Tek, Patrizia

Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, and the Rubells were at large. SANDY ANGUS looked pleased.

The curated sections offered more than a few treats. Spearheading London First, a grouping of twenty-five galleries, AARON CEZAR of Delfina Foundation said he wanted to "collapse worlds, collapse time." My favorite was the monochromatic booth of White Rainbow, London's trendy new Japanese gallery, where TAKAHIRO UEDA's three out-of-sync clocks clocked the vagaries of time. There were some good satellite events too—each following the star of a different Asia—including Grosvenor Gallery, which had an exhibition of paintings by Indian modernist MF Husain. I of course opted for my own beat: cocktails at the home of Pakistani collector TAIMUR HASSAN. Hot topics were the new biennials coming up in South Asia: Lahore and Karachi both jostling for the kudos of hosting one. News of onetime Christie's exec HUGO WEIHE's decision to join the Indian auction house Saffron Art made for sizzling speculation. In Hassan's house, though, no hint of competition was in evidence: Pakistani ANWAR SHEMZA's geometric paintings shared space with Goan FN Souza's Heads, while Delhi-based collector LEKHA PODDAR swapped stories with artist NAIZA KHAN, Mumbai dealers MORT CHATTERJEE and TARA LAL caught up with their London-based pal CONOR MACKLIN… and hurray: *more* champagne!



Left: NIRU RATNAM of START art fair. Right: Artist IDRIS KHAN.

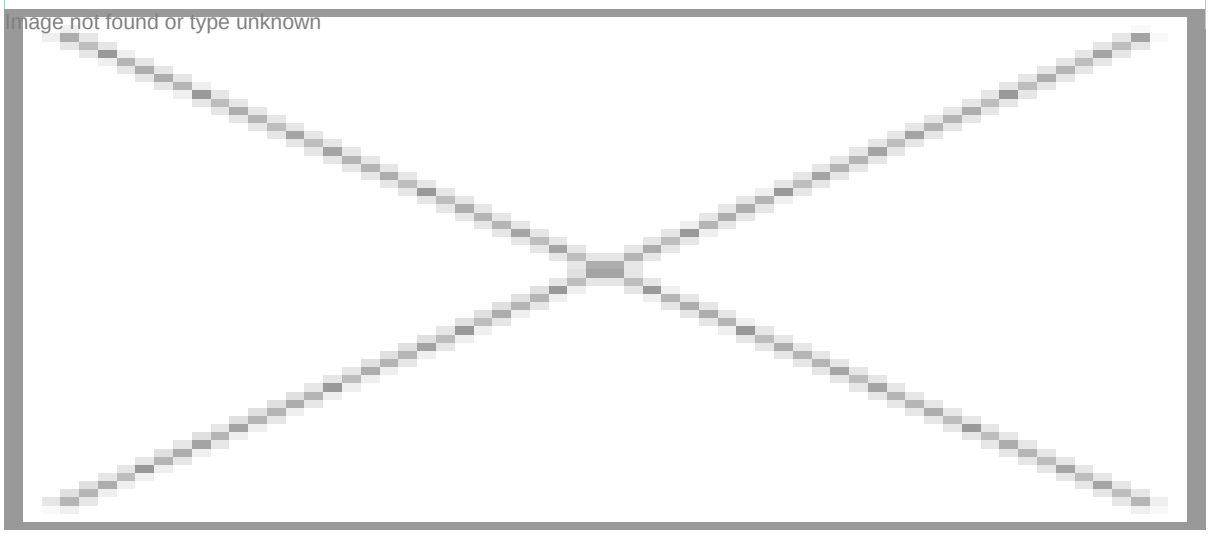
Back at the fair the next morning, MAJORIE MARTAY of Art W—a New York–based educational outfit that produces tours and exhibitions dedicated to the feminine—was conducting a VIP visit with women artists at Art15. We took in feathery sculptures by KATE MCCGWIRE, pearly button-paintings by RAN HWANG, and SANDRA SHASHOU's *Broken Translations of British Love*, comprising smashed fine bone china painted gold. "It's about vulnerability being precious," said Shashou sweetly. If Art Fair Art is invariably shiny, at least Art15's dazzle came from a different direction. "This is a little more contemporary than FIAC and it brings you a little further," said collector ANGELINE FOURNIER, prodding Hsu Wei-hui's peachy *Flower of Life* fashioned from facemasks. Catching sight of the blossom's reverse end in the mirror, I notice it resembles a skull. Oh, when prettiness putrefies.

BBC broadcaster Phillip Dodd was more preoccupied with business than beauty. As the founder of Made in China, he was in charge of talent-spotting "non-Western" galleries. Dodd argued that if Art Basel Hong Kong tends to consist of Chinese artists educated in the West, Art15 aims to showcase artists educated in Asia. Beijing's Space Station (to whose

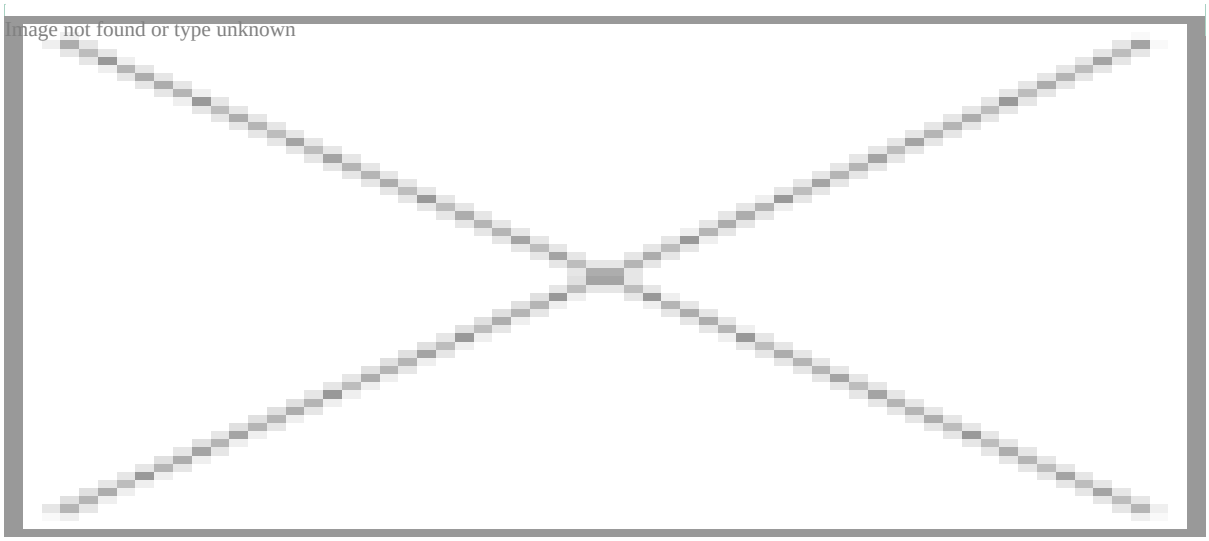
booth Dodd dispatched me), was exploring “body boundaries.” *Six and a Half Years*, by the collective Double Fly Klein Blue, was a phallic fantasy of a video featuring eight nude men jumping about in a pool of Klein-blue paint. “Now Chinese contemporary art is more open-minded—that’s why Phillip invited us here. Double Fly paints subjects to distort them. *And* there is a water gun,” green-haired dealer FENG YING pointed out.

There was excitement from some (“Yes we are selling!” exclaimed DAISY SHIOU of Taiwan’s Liang Gallery) and discontent from others who expected contact with new collectors. ALEXIS KOUZMINE-KARAVAÏEFF of ifa gallery in Brussels was grumpy: “I am disappointed!” But in his black-clad booth on Saturday morning, dealer JAL HAMAD of Madrid-based SABRINA AMRANI was all optimism. A diehard fair-enthusiast, this was Hamad’s second year in London. Was *he* selling? “You don’t say it’s over until it’s over. This fair is very contemporary—I hope you enjoyed it.” I did. Like the ginormous, chocolate-smothered strawberry I stuffed into my mouth at Khaas Art Gallery’s booth, it was bigger than expected with hints of sweetness. Next mutation please?

—ZEHRA JUMABHOY



Left: MICHAEL URBAN with designer Roubi l’ Roubi. Right: Suquin Ou of Mao Space, Shanghai.



Left: ALEXIS KOUZMINE-KARAVAÏEFF of ifa gallery, Brussels . Right: Artist Parekh Maity and Prajit Dutta of Aicon Gallery.

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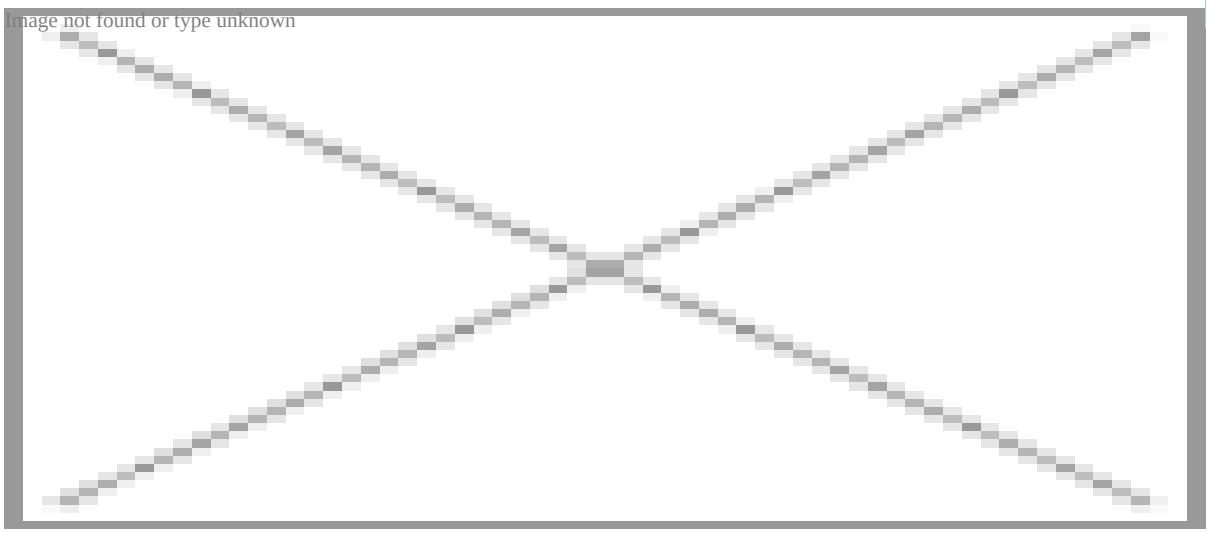

Left: Oana and Cosmin Nasui of Postmodern Museum, Romania. Right: Collector Henrietta Sheilds.

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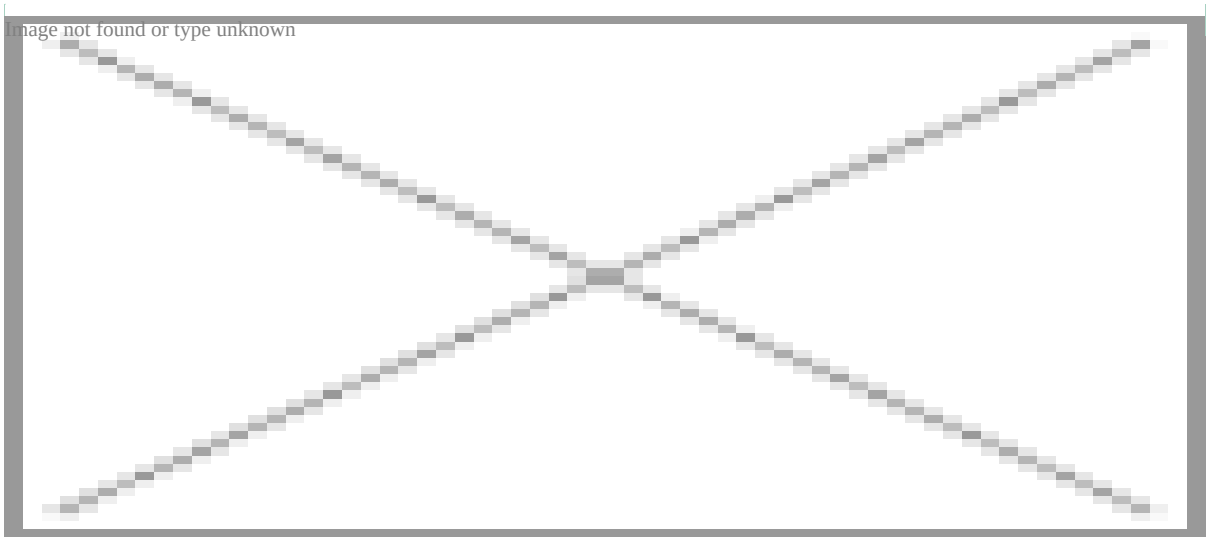

Left: Heashin Kwak and Yoojin Choi of Hanmi Gallery, Seoul and London. Right: Boris Vergote and Eve Ritchie from White Rainbow, London.

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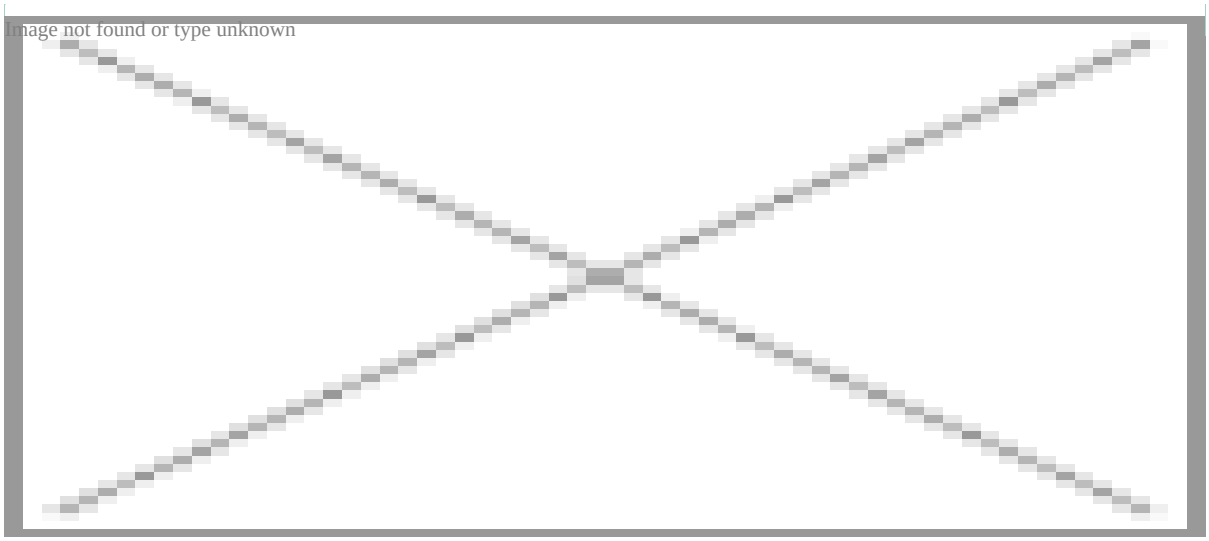

Left: Stefano Crosara of kanalisarte gallery, Italy. Right: Zishan Afzal Khan and Alia Bilgrami of Khaas Art gallery, Pakistan.