

# Fiac fair puts France back on the modern art map

By Brent Gregston  
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Sleeping hermaphrodite,  
Barry X Ball  
Emmanuel Nguyen  
Ngoc/Fiac

France may no longer be the centre of the art world, as it was in the early 20th century, but it is becoming ever more important as an art market - the annual International Fair of Contemporary Art (Fiac) has done a lot to help the process.

This year's Fiac<sup>[1]</sup>, which took place in the Grand Palais, the Cour Carrée du Louvre<sup>[2]</sup>, and the Tuileries Gardens, firmly established the fair as one the world's most important contemporary art fairs.

The rise of Fiac coincides with a new French predilection for contemporary art in places like the Palace of Versailles and the Louvre museum. American artist Cy Twombly painted a ceiling in the Louvre this year and Versailles has caused controversy<sup>[3]</sup> with installations by Jeff Koons<sup>[4]</sup> and Takashi Murakami<sup>[5]</sup>.

The rich and famous shop at Fiac - billionaires like François Pinault and lesser-known but equally rich collectors, many from the Middle East and Asia. So do museum and private foundations competing for the best-known works.

Dealers say the fair marries old money to a new internationalism. The fair had 123 foreign galleries and represented more than 3,000 artists this year. It ended last week after four days of strong sales and a wave of 86,000 visitors.

Sales would have been even better had much of France not been on strike.

Some artists created work specifically for Fiac. American artist Barry X Ball sculpted a new *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, modelled on one of the Louvre's most famous works - the 2nd-century AD marble statue discovered in Rome in 1608 for which Gian Lorenzo Bernini sculpted a marble couch in 1619.

Ball's hermaphrodite is black, made from a two-and-a-half-ton block of marble.

"I wanted to heighten the sensuality," Ball says, "and bring it back to this tender love story where the two lovers are united in a single body."

The sculpture sold for 450,000 euros.

Several galleries gambled everything on a single artist. The London gallery Victoria Miro<sup>[6]</sup> turned over all their space to works by Yayoi Kusama.

Director Glenn Scott Wright describes Kusama, who is 81, as "the most important Japanese artist of the postwar period".

He sold most of the works that Kusama created for Fiac, including two dotted aluminium pumpkins entitled *Reach up to the Universe*. They went for 360,000 euros apiece.

Algerian artist Adel Abdessemed also had a solo show. His *Taxidermia* - which one couple of speculators professed to being "distressed" by - consists of a massive block of dead animals. It sold for 202,000 euros.