

Outsider Art Fair Returns to Paris Focusing on the Spiritual

In its fourth edition, the fair is bigger and featuring more curated projects.
Caroline Elbaor, October 21, 2016



Installation view of Paris' Outsider Art Fair 2016. Courtesy Jean Picon / Say Who.

The 2016 Outsider Art Fair (OAF) previewed in Paris yesterday with an impressive display by 40 international galleries, most of them focused on “mediumistic” (or spiritual) themes. As such, the fair overall is permeated by a sense of the intangible and sublime.

Housed in the majestic Hotel du Duc, the fair's layout strays from the traditional grids seen by bigger fairs such as Frieze and FIAC, guiding visitors instead through a maze-like atmosphere that spans two floors. This design lends itself to the mystic-like themes that seemed to dominate most booths.

Originally founded in New York City in 1994, the Outsider Art Fair stretched its reach to Europe in 2012—the same year that its ownership changed hands to Wide Open Arts, headed by CEO and dealer Andrew Edlin— adding a Paris iteration. Under Edlin's tenure, programming has expanded to include talks and curated sections.

“Our commitment to special curatorial projects is stronger than ever, with two dynamic exhibitions for OAF Paris 2016,” Edlin said in a statement.



Norbert H. Kox, *Revive* (2015). Courtesy Galerie Toxic.

The OAF-commissioned projects focus on the ethereal. The first, curated by Gérard Audinet, director of Paris' Maisons de Victor Hugo, centers around—again—”mediumistic” art drawn from the abcd collection.

The second is a presentation of sculptures by Austrian artist Franz Huemer, who began to make carvings after he “developed a method of placing himself into an ecstatic trance” that was rooted in his Roman-Catholic background.

In addition to this, *Beyond Art, the Art of the Afterlife*, the OAF talk taking place on Friday morning and organized by art historian and critic Emmanuel Daydé, explored the relationship between mediumistic art and mainstream contemporary art. “Spirit, are you there? What if the insaturation of a reasoned consumerism leads to the revival and blossoming of insanity?,” asked the official press release.

The theme continued in the works on view by the exhibitors. French artist Francis Marshall, whose work includes cabinets that reveal layers of eerie portraits, makes two appearances at the fair, shown by both Luxembourg’s Galerie Toxic and Galerie Jean Greset from Besançon, France. Another repeat is Angola-born, France-based artist Franck Lundangi, seen at Galerie Frédéric Moisan (Paris) and Marseille’s Galerie Polysémie.

Galerie Toxic also features American painter Norbert Knox, who lives as a semi-recluse in Wisconsin, and paints the apocalyptic visions he sees in an aim to point to the “false message” spread by modern Christianity, as described by his gallerist.



Helen Rae, *May 18 2016* (2016). Courtesy The Good Luck Gallery.

This year's iteration welcomes 15 new exhibitors, many of whom had already previously exhibited at the fair in New York and have added the City of Light to their agenda for its European exposure.

"It's a great fair that's highly-vetted, and we are excited to be part of something so established," said Paige Wery of The Good Luck Gallery, which hails from Los Angeles and is showing at the OAF Paris for the first time this year.

Seventy-two year old California-based artist Helen Rae, who has been working since 1989, is making her European debut with The Good Luck Gallery's presentation. The artist, who is deaf, creates her works on paper from First Street Gallery, a program for adults with developmental disabilities in Claremont, California.

Drawing inspiration from fashion ads, Rae's female figures appear to exist in a balance between two worlds of the artist's creation. The fragile nature of the floral elements are tested by the intensity in which Rae executes her drawings, whose subjects seem to be devolving into abstraction.



Installation view of Paris' Outsider Art Fair 2016. Courtesy Jean Picon / Say Who.

Tanner Hill Gallery, another OAF Paris-newcomer based out of Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Atlanta, Georgia in the US, also is showing an artist for whom the fair means his first European outing: Willie Young.

Young's delicate drawings, composed of graphite and chalk on paper, explore the subterranean: an acorn and its roots is intricately depicted, or the Bodock Tree of his native Texas is examined for its gnarly apple-like head that extends far underground.

Maroncelli 12 of Milan—yet another first-timer—exhibits Marie-Claire Guyot's *The Secret Opera*. Guyot, always the subject of her own works, creates “an imaginary universe where childhood, maternity, and religion are transformed, or transfigured, on canvas,” according to the gallery.

The fresh blood injected by the presence of new galleries in the 2016 Paris incarnation of OAF, combined with long-established exhibitors, helps bring new insight to the centuries-old subject of mysticism, and leaves an impression that will haunt attendees long after the fair shuts its doors.