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The design fair that carved a niche
Three years after the first Collective fair in New York, dealers and buyers
talk about how the design market has evolved

By Gareth Harris



Fernando and Humberto Campana's Bolotas Sofa at Friedman Benda

When it launched in 2013, Collective Design aimed to shake up New York's flagging design market. "The idea New York can absorb a design fair is a no-brainer," commented Evan Snyderman, co-founder of the Tribeca-based gallery R & Company, citing the city's vast and hungry client base. Here's what the main players had to say three years on.

The fair organiser

Collective was the initiative of architect and interior designer Steven Learner. The fair drew more than 5,000 visitors to Pier 57 in its first year — Chelsea Clinton and Roman Abramovich among

them. The inaugural edition had 23 dealers, 14 from Manhattan. This year, there will be 32 exhibitors, 21 from the New York area, alongside galleries from Oslo, Mexico City and Madrid.

“Prior to the launch of Collective Design, New York simply had antique shows, all presented uptown,” Learner says. For the design community, DesignMiami/, which launched in Florida in 2005 and in Basel a year later, has been a key reference point. That fair is still a premier league event, but the consensus among New York’s collectors is that Collective is quietly carving a niche. “Before, the only option designers and architects had was to either take clients to international fairs, or be satisfied with images,” says local interior designer Suchi Reddy of ReddyMade architecture and design.

Learner created two organisations — The Collective and the Design Council — that feed into his fair, rooting it in the powerful local lobby of dealers and collectors. The Collective is a think-tank-style body of 12 heavyweight gallerists, designers and professionals, including Snyderman and the collector Beth Rudin DeWoody. They provide input on the gallery list, collecting trends and design processes.

The Council, meanwhile, is formed of 38 high-profile international members who lend their names and support. They include Reed Krakoff, founder of the luxury clothing and accessories brand, the interior designer Robert Stilin and Oscar-winning actress Julianne Moore. “These are all voices in the larger creative community, many of them design collectors,” Learner says.



‘Organic Forms’ by Turi Heisselberg Pedersen at J Lohmann Gallery

Learner talks of a “broad spectrum of work and voices” at the fair. One section is overseen by the

hip New York curatorial consultancy Sight Unseen, bringing together furniture and lighting by five US design studios, including Brooklyn-based collective Fort Makers.

“Collective Design is an intimate fair, eschewing the feeding frenzy of most fairs,” says Learner. “Most design collectors, unlike art collectors, are guided by their advisers rather than making spontaneous or emotional purchases. In the case of design objects, these advisers are architects and interior designers, our core audience.” He says that growth in New York’s high-end real estate development is boosting its “self-sustaining design ecosystem”.

“The rise of a dynamic contemporary art market has fuelled thinking that contemporary design, at the moment still wildly undervalued, is the next great asset class,” he adds.

Mid-century modern design has been a market mainstay in recent years. The online think-tank DeTnk collates results from five auction houses for its annual design report. Its 2015 assessment, covering 2014, shows that post-2000 pieces had an average price of £10,126 per lot, the lowest of any period.



Barbara Nanning’s ‘Verre eglomise Form’, J Lohmann Gallery

The dealers

Marc Benda, co-founder of Friedman Benda gallery in New York, is participating in Collective Design for the second time. “The market has been robust, discerning and growing, driven by both the collectors and the decorators and architects,” he says.

He explains that the public auction market is the main driver for the mid-century market, as supply dwindles and scholarship in the field has increased. Phillips’ design masters sale in New York in December illustrated the dominance of 20th-century giants: the top lot, Carlo Mollino’s unique

ceiling light from around 1944, sold for \$293,000, while Jean Royère's 1950s Ours Polaire armchair went for \$269,000.

But Benda says that, "The main primary galleries are still much stronger presences in the contemporary design market than the auction houses." His gallery will show works by seven designers at Collective Design, including London-based Paul Cockledge, Andile Dyalvane of South Africa, the Dutch veteran designer Marcel Wanders and Tokyo-based group nendo, which has designed a new series of Trace cabinets and lighting to be installed along an 85-foot wall at the fair entrance. Works on the stand range from \$5,000-\$100,000.

Some dealers are scaling down their fair commitments, but Benda says they are crucial for "establishing a sustained presence in the global market".

He and Snyderman agree that social media also provides an essential marketing and curatorial platform. Friedman Benda documents its programme on Instagram, and Snyderman says sales are generated by social media.



Robert Lugo's 'Big Pun and I' at Wexler Gallery

The buyers

Adam Lindemann, a design collector who runs Venus gallery in New York and Los Angeles, observes that, after the crash of 2009, only mid-century French design and certain Art Deco items have continued to appreciate. “The rest of the market is all over the place, in my opinion. You had better buy what you like because it’s not an investment unless you have the best of what people want.”

Interior designers can provide insights into the market. “We have seen an increasing interest in high design objects made with new technologies, such as 3D printing,” says Reddy.

Interior designer Robert Stilin emphasises that Collective Design is the first high-end design fair to coincide with Frieze New York. For Reddy, the fair is filling a void. “New York holds its own in the art market. It is time that it does so in the design market as well.”

Upcoming art fairs New York

Frieze New York

May 5-8

Randall’s Island Park

[For the fair’s fifth edition](#), 300 international galleries gather on the lawns of Randall’s Island Park overlooking Manhattan. Of the three sections, Spotlight is designed to showcase solo artist presentations made after 1960, such as the work of pioneering American artists Alan Shields and Joe Goode, at Van Doren Waxter and Franklin Parrasch Gallery respectively. Frame features galleries established within the past eight years, while Focus debuts work not seen before in an art fair context. Frieze Projects returns this year with nine site-specific commissions, including Alex Da Corte’s giant inflatable balloon, [David Horvitz’s roving pickpocket](#) and a special tribute to [Maurizio Cattelan](#). Audio installations will be placed in booths around the fair as part of the Frieze Sounds programme. A highlight is Liz Magic Laser’s “Nothing Special”, which uses the voice of a Donald Trump impersonator to stage a philosophical dialogue between the presidential hopeful and an investigative reporter, delving into Trump’s imagined internal struggles with self-esteem, women and social mores. frieze.com/fairs/frieze-new-york

NADA New York

May 5-8

Pier 36 at Basketball City

Described by art adviser Candace Worth as the “younger, scrappier fair that focuses on emerging talent at lower price points”, the New Art Dealers Alliance brings together over 100 exhibitors from the US, Latin America and beyond. Among these is Tel Aviv gallery Tempo Rubato, and Proyecto Ultravioleta from Guatemala City.

newartdealers.org/Fairs/2016/NewYork

Flux Art Fair

May 3-31

Marcus Garvey Park, Harlem

Just across the river from Randall's Island Park is Harlem's contemporary art fair, which this year explores the theme of "changing landscapes". Flux will spill out into the surrounding streets and parks, with public installations by Tammy Nguyen and Michael Kelly Williams on Lenox Avenue and Fifth Avenue, encouraging visitors to experience the neighbourhood in a different way. Flux adviser and Rush Arts Foundation founder Danny Simmons calls it "the most deliberately diverse fair I know". Half of the 40 artists on display will be women. fluxfair.nyc



Tammy Nguyen's 'This City of Jazz' (2016), at Flux Art Fair

Collective Design Fair

May 4-8

Skylight Clarkson Square, 550 Washington Street

Focusing on exploration and discovery, this design fair will exhibit pieces by emerging artists from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in a collection titled "Fine Design for the End of the World", which reflects the need for changing practices in the face of rampant consumption and environmental degradation. Five independent American design studios will also display furniture and lighting, and the Japanese design firm Nendo will be the subject of a special exhibition. collectivedesignfair.com

1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair

May 6-8

Pioneer Works, Brooklyn

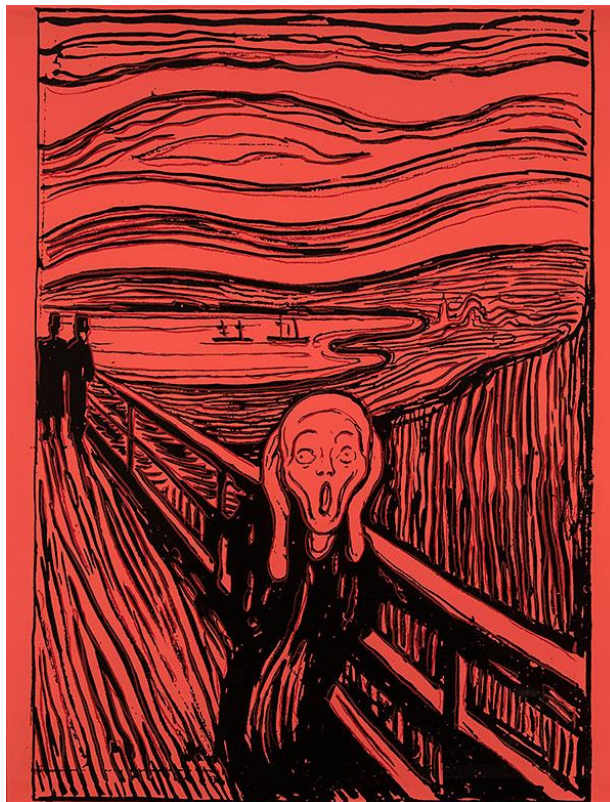
After the success of 1:54's inaugural "pop-up" edition last year, [the fair returns to Brooklyn](#) with 60 artists and 17 participating galleries from across the African continent and beyond. Highlights include a cultural exchange with the Dakar Biennale, Stephen Burks's Man Made furniture collection and new paintings by Zimbabwean artist Misheck Masamvu. [1-54.com/new-york](#)

Spring Masters New York

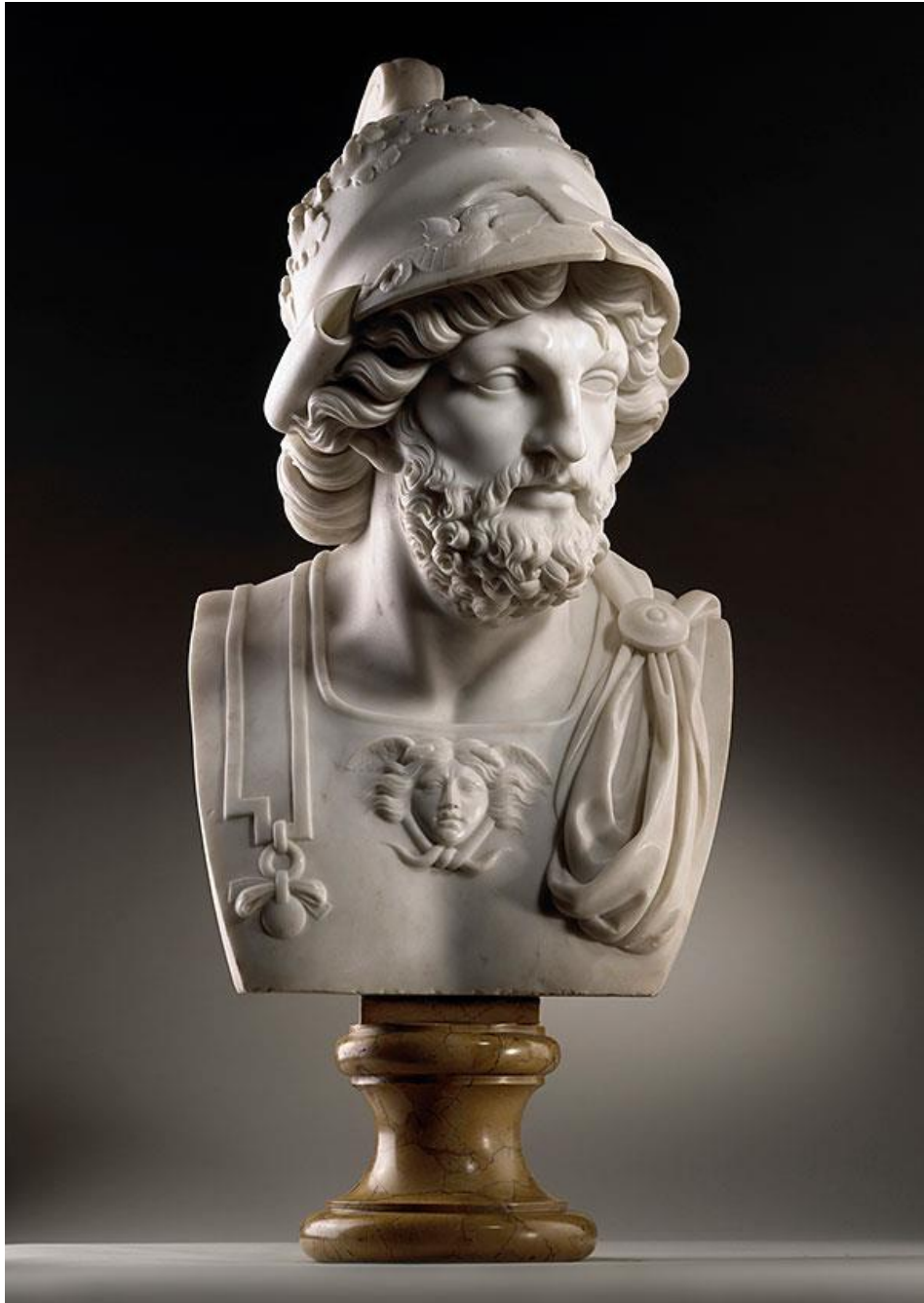
May 6-9

643 Park Avenue

This year's art and design fair at Park Avenue Armory encompasses pieces from antiquity to the 21st century. Funerary masks at Cahn International can be seen alongside Andy Warhol's "The Scream (After Munch)" exhibited by Waterhouse & Dodd. One of the fair's newest exhibitors is Yufuku Gallery, which will present ceramic, glass and metal works by acclaimed Japanese artists, including Ken Mihara's "Kei". [springmasters.nyc](#)



Andy Warhol's 'The Scream (After Munch)' (1983) is at Waterhouse & Dodd, Spring Masters New York



Bust of Menelaos, Italian 18th century, Tomasso Brothers Fine Art at Spring Masters New York