

Artists respond to Trump: “I’m a Muslim, I’m black”

New work by Awol Erizku and Eric Fischl; Hauser & Wirth represents Geta Brătescu

“The Art Market



Awol Erizku's 'S.A.N.D.A.S.' (2016) at Ben Brown London © Joshua White

APRIL 28, 2017 by: **Melanie Gerlis**

Artists have been responding in spades to the election of Donald Trump as US president. Last week, Ben Brown gallery opened and sold out a London show of new works by the Ethiopia-born American artist Awol Erizku, who recently shot to fame with his photograph of the pregnant Beyoncé. The artist's bold new works in *Make America Great Again* (until June 2) include familiar imagery — such as the black panther — to highlight issues of racial discrimination, as well as urban slang motifs — the number 12 to represent the police, for example (\$5,000-\$40,000). “I’m a Muslim, I’m black and I live in California, so a lot of my friends are Mexican. I made the works as [Trump] was rising to power,” Erizku says.

Also in London, Sophia Contemporary gallery is showing American artists who reflect the political backdrop. *Shifting Landscapes* (until June 23) includes Iva Gueorguieva's quietly chaotic “Corridor” (2017, £5,500). Gueorguieva lives in Los Angeles but says that Trump's election has proved “a moment to relive the traumas both of the collapse of communism in my native Bulgaria in 1988-89, and the election of [President George] Bush in 2000.”

Across the Atlantic, Skarstedt gallery in Chelsea, New York, opens a show this week of five paintings by Eric Fischl, made within days of Trump winning the election (May 2-June 24). The exhibition is built around “Late America” (2016), in which a young boy, draped in the American flag, looks over a naked man collapsed by a pool area that two immigrant workers are tending in the background (\$650,000-\$875,000).

The merry-go-round of auction specialists has come full circle now that Marc Porter, who left Christie's for Sotheby's at the end of 2015, has decided — after a year's gardening leave and three months of work — to go back to Christie's as its chairman of Americas. The move characterises 18 months of activity, catalysed by the founders of Art Agency, Partners — Amy Cappellazzo, Allan Schwartzman and Adam Chinn — moving their business to Sotheby's. Subsequent moves include Cheyenne Westphal leaving Sotheby's to be chairman of Phillips; Alex Rotter going from Sotheby's contemporary department to Christie's; and Brooke Lampley now on her way from Christie's to Sotheby's.

The longer-term effects are difficult to gauge, but specialists with something to prove can't be a bad thing. Offerings for New York's May sales are so far looking juicy. Cappellazzo and Chinn have been managing the guarantee-side of business, likely to have helped bring in a Basquiat for which Sotheby's has apparently promised \$65m; Rotter helped secure the \$100m-plus works from Emily and Jerry Spiegel's collection for Christie's; and Westphal was instrumental in getting Peter Doig's "Rosedale" (1991), offered with a third-party guarantee at Phillips for \$25m.



Eric Fischl's 'Daddy's Gone, Girl' (2016) is on show at Skarstedt gallery in New York © Gary Mamay

This week's clashing art events in Germany — Art Cologne (April 26-29) and Gallery Weekend Berlin (April 28-30) — helped organisers bring two of the country's art fairs together. Daniel Hug, director of the Cologne fair, and Maike Cruse, who directs both Gallery Weekend and the Art Berlin Contemporary (Abc) art fair, say they are near to finalising Abc's takeover by Koelnmesse, Art Cologne's owner.

Hug says that plans for the two fairs to join forces in September (under Cruse) are “95 per cent there” and is keen to emphasise that these were in motion before February’s news that MCH Group has invested in Art Düsseldorf, up the Rhine from Cologne. Cruse says the move is about making something commercially stronger in Berlin. Abc’s more experimental format is “a bit of a luxury when the market is not booming”, she says.

Cruse dismisses the long-held belief that Berliners don’t buy art. “Berlin may not have the Rhineland’s generations, but young people are now buying from local galleries,” she says.

At the tender age of 90, Romanian conceptual artist Geta Brătescu has been taken on by the international might of Hauser & Wirth, while her solo show continues to delight at London’s Camden Arts Centre (until June 18). Brătescu will also represent her country at this year’s Venice Biennale, which opens in a fortnight.

The decision to seek representation of Brătescu was driven by Manuela Wirth, co-founder of the gallery but generally more of a behind-the-scenes force than her husband Iwan. She says Brătescu “joins a family of strong women artists at the gallery”. These include Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse and Phyllida Barlow. Hauser & Wirth will work alongside Ivan Gallery, the artist’s representative in Bucharest, as well as Barbara Weiss gallery in Berlin.

Brussels’ art week, which ended on April 23, was a much more upbeat affair than last year, when events including the Art Brussels and Independent fairs opened just a few weeks after the city’s 2016 terrorist attacks. This year, two galleries chose the week to launch new spaces in the city. The increasingly influential Mendes Wood from Brazil selected Brussels as its first city outside of the Americas, opening a two-floor gallery midtown with a group exhibition (until June 17), including paintings made for the new gallery by Matthew Lutz-Kinoy. Partner Carolyn Drake says Brussels’ diversity and relatively low rents were attractive, together with its homegrown collectors and the fact that it is “two hours from everywhere” in Europe. New York’s Clearing Gallery, in Brussels since 2012, opened a larger space in a 19th-century warehouse with a show of Bruno Gironcoli (until July 15). It is further out of town but close to the Wiels Contemporary Art Center.

Photographs: Joshua White; Gary Mamay