

## A focus on Art Brut: Interview with Rebecca Hoffman, Director of the Outsider Art Fair



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Rebecca Hoffman, director of Outsider Art fair, is currently overseeing the launch of the fair's first Paris edition.

The dedicated Art Brut fair, which brought together around 10,000 people last year when it appeared in New York, hopes to extend the influence of, and thereby reassert the worth of, artists who form part of this frequently marginalised genre. The fair, which is currently taking place at Hôtel Le A, brings together a number of international galleries, and displays a strong sense of curatorial direction. Two lectures, held by Jean-Hubert Martin and the Head of Historical Collections of the Musée du Quai Branly complete the cultural programme.

### Can you tell me a bit about The Outsider Art Fair?

The Outsider Art Fair started in 1993 in New York, and was held in the Puck Building. I'm not sure if you're aware but the building has quite a history here in New York, and it was a perfect venue for the work to be displayed. The fair then moved to a mid-town location, which unfortunately kind of swallowed up the works. This led to the fair taking a somewhat downward turn, so in 2012, Andrew Edlin, the fair's proprietor, bought the fair under the auspices of an organisation called Wide Open Arts, which now runs the event. For the first edition with this company, we moved the fair to Chelsea, and it was a huge success. We saw the attendance increase from 3,000 to 10,000 people, and that was when we really began our engagement in the dialogue with contemporary art; our goal was really to break down the barriers between, shall we say, the inside and the outside. After the success of the New York fair, we decided that we really needed to move and expand, and we thought that for this, Paris made the most sense. The reason we thought this is because of the city's important artistic history; going all the way back to Dubuffet's exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo, at the Maison Rouge, at the collection ABCD, and for example the creation of the Chalet Society last year, we really feel that Parisian eyes have been accustomed to Outsider Art. We thought the city was the perfect springboard for our European engagement in the dialogue with contemporary art.

### The event focuses on self-taught artists; is this because you feel as though this is an under-represented genre? Why did you choose to do this?

Well, we feel that Outsider Art is an important area for art that has existed on the margins for a long period of time. There was such a visceral reaction to art that was created out of a need, or a non-academic engagement with the paintbrush and with the dialogue. We feel that a series of galleries focusing on this work have appeared in the right place at the right time, and we think that this is what the ethos of the fair has always been about.

### So how did you become involved in the Outsider Art Fair? What is your background?

I have worked in galleries my entire life. At Outsider Art we own both the gallery and the fair, and I have dabbled in the fair world on and off throughout my entire career. The opportunity to expand and grow the fair, and really engage in a dialogue that is so relevant in 2013 has been really interesting and inspiring for me, and it has also been fun to explore the movement of the fair to Europe, seeing how that has started to unfold.

**How does the atmosphere of the event change between New York and Paris? Are they very different fairs?**

Well, they are primarily different because the Paris fair is going to be held in a hotel, and obviously the New York fair is not in a hotel, it's in an exhibition space. The reason we put the Paris fair in a hotel are because, for our first edition in Paris, we decided that we needed to focus on making the event less of a complicated experience; we needed to test the waters, as opposed to going fully in. We had decided upon engaging in an art that has existed on the margins, but which we feel is no longer on the margins. Having this art displayed in a high-end hotel right off the Champs-Élysées, will, I think, allow people's eyes to reposition it for themselves.

**So you don't want it to be so "outsider" any more?**

Well we don't want to *not* be outsider, but we want it to be engaging. We don't want there to be these distinctions.

**How have you selected the galleries that you're working with?**

We have some galleries from New York, from the New York fair, and we have some new galleries that we think have very interesting programmes from Luxembourg, Germany, Britain, France, Japan; we really wanted to try and have a breadth and depth of work from galleries all over the world.

**So it doesn't matter where they're located. Was there an application process or did you invite them to take part in the fair?**

We invited them, and then we vetted them.

**What are you particularly excited about in this year's fair in Paris?**

I'm really excited about seeing the work from Hervé Pedriolle's gallery, which is contemporary, self-taught Indian art; a new direction for us. I'm very excited to see the galleries in Paris that have never participated in the New York fair, such as Christian Berst – I'm looking forward to seeing what he shows us. I think it will be exciting to see the art in the hotel space. We're also curating the, shall we say, highlights of the Outsider Art fair in the lobby downstairs, which I think will be wonderful. There will be shows from galleries including Gallery at HAI, New York, Henry Boxer Gallery, London, and Galerie Béatrice Soulié, Paris. In this way we'll really introduce the public to the big names as they walk into the hotel – in the event that they are not familiar with them.

**How does it work, hosting a fair in a hotel space? Is it in a traditional fair format in the sense that you have hired out a room to use for the exhibition?**

Each gallery has their own room, and they will hang the works in the room. There is also the curated exhibition on the ground floor and we will also have two talks; one on Friday morning and one on Saturday morning. If you look back over the history of Dubuffet and the salons of Art Brut in the middle of the twentieth century, they really existed in hotels, so we felt that this was a nice ode to that experience. Friday morning's talk is being held by Jean-Hubert Martin, who is currently curating a show that is being offered at the Maison Rouge, and I think the talk will be really exciting. The opportunity to really be able to intellectually engage with him and really get a handle on his curatorial viewpoint will, we hope, be very captivating for our audience. Then on Saturday we are welcoming the Director of Historical Collections at the Musée de Quai Branly, as well as an independent critic, who will be talking about the exhibition "Masters of Chaos", and the role of the shaman and artist.

**What is so rare about this is that it's an event for both critics and collectors; it really covers all audiences.**

Yes, that's our goal.

**How do you envisage the fair's future development?**

I can't yet say, but we hope to be able to continue expanding and growing.

**Do you hope to expand to other countries?**

Yes, certainly!