

# BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

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Caption: An untitled 1952 painting by Franz Kline, offered by John Berggruen Gallery of San Francisco, is a highlight of the works on view at the San Francisco International Art Fair this weekend at Fort Mason.

## MASS APPEAL: ART COMES AT VISITORS FROM ALL DIRECTIONS AT THE S.F. INTERNATIONAL ART FAIR

People openly confess to museum fatigue these days -- the tiring overstimulation of taking in more art than humanly possible.

But we never hear about art fair fatigue: the inevitable byproduct of an event like the fifth annual San Francisco International Art Fair, which fills the Herbst and Festival pavilions at Fort Mason through Monday.

Museum curators work to mitigate spectator overload when they display art. Recall the beautiful phrasing of the Gerhard Richter show just ended at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

But no one keeps things in bounds at an art fair.

Exhibitors pay heavily to rent floor space and transport goods, and they understandably tend to pack their movable walls and pedestals with as much art as feasible.

Roughly 100 galleries representing 2,000 artists make up the 2003 fair. The event offers very different things to different visitors.

The moneyed collector can mop up at this year's fair. A sputtering economy creates haggle room, and even galleries of little distinction bring the best material they have.

One person's bargain being another's intolerable extravagance, prices at the fair are said to range from \$100 to \$4 million, the bulge probably being in the high four- to low five-figure area.

To the broad public with no collecting budget, the fair offers a panoramic snapshot of the contemporary art market. Freedom from acquisitiveness may be the real key to enjoying such a spectacle.

The well-informed visitor will be looking for interesting discoveries, unfamiliar artists and outstanding individual works. More than scarcity accounts for the difficulty in finding them. Just as an art fair guarantees sensory overload, it also makes a shambles of even the educated viewer's sense of artistic context.

The discouraging, if not surprising, news of this year's fair is the low number of galleries from abroad. Berlin, London, New York and even Los Angeles are very sparsely represented. Their scarcity makes local participants look better than they might otherwise. But most of the Bay Area dealers' booths could be transplanted to a contemporary art fair anywhere in the world and hold their own.

Braunstein-Quay's booth looks stronger here than on an average business day, leading with arresting paintings by Mary Snowden, Nell Sinton and John Altoon.

Anthony Meier delivers a whole wall full of paint-defaced photographs by Gerhard Richter, a wonderful addendum to the retrospective.

Haines arrays on one wall the images Andy Goldsworthy sent the gallery, one or two a day, over a month of working on his land at home in Scotland.