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British Art Carnival Wakes a Big Apple Isle

BY JENNIFER MALONEY

A CHEER WENT UP as rubbery goo encased the face of art collector Ellen Stern.

"You OK, Ellen?" artist John Ahearn asked, laying strips of plaster-soaked gauze over the goo—the same material used to make dental impressions—to form a mold from her forehead to her collarbone. Breathing slowly through straws tucked in her nostrils, she gave a thumbs-up. Observers snapped photos, and Mr. Ahearn continued with his painted plaster face cast (price: \$3,000).

The Frieze Art Fair had arrived in New York, and brought with it a touch of the London fair's signature spectacle. Planted on an island just east of Manhattan, the fair offers a carnival trailer where visitors can toss rings to win art, an outdoor children's-art project set to the score of Mendelssohn's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and—amid very serious art for sale—a smattering of interactive, chuckle-inducing works. Fairgoers cracked walnuts, for example, between the legs of a Barbie-like mannequin.

New Yorkers contributed to the spectacle. The actor Mark Ruffalo, with his friend the art dealer Gavin Brown, cooked sausages and handed them out free, while making their pitch. "I'm here to feed the 1%," said Mr. Ruffalo, who lives in upstate New York and is active in drilling protests. "Have a sausage and stop hydrofracking."

Frieze's original London iteration began in 2003 and has become a major date on Europe's art-fair calendar. Fairgoers at a preview Thursday said the four-day U.S. offshoot, which ends Monday, was a stop worth adding to art's busy spring season, despite the challenge for locals and visitors alike: how the heck to get there.

"Our cabdriver didn't do too well," said Don Rubell, a prominent Miami col-

lector. But the venue, he said, was "fabulous. It's definitely the best ambience that I've ever seen." (The fair is providing free ferry service from midtown for passengers with fair tickets.)

In the 19th century, Randall's Island held the city's outcasts: orphans, paupers, the developmentally challenged. Now, it houses a complex of athletic fields—and not much else.

Sales were strong Thursday, art dealers said. Hauser & Wirth sold a blue silicone statue by Paul McCarthy—"White Snow Dwarf, Sleepy #4"—for \$950,000 and a bronze dwarf not displayed at the fair for more than \$2 million, according to the gallery's London director, Neil Wenman.

David Zwirner sold a blue John McCracken sculpture for \$750,000 and two aluminum and plexiglass boxes by Donald Judd for \$500,000 and \$475,000, respectively, the gallery said.

"Aurora 1," a graphite panel by Teresita Fernández, went for around \$200,000 at Lehmann Maupin, Rachel Lehmann said.

The fair's 180 gallery booths occupy a long, serpentine tent hugging the edge of the island, with windows on the East River and Manhattan. With no restaurants in walking distance, Frieze offers dining areas catered by well-known New York eateries. In Thursday's chilly and overcast weather, only one child arrived to participate in Tim Rollins's "Midsummer Night's Dream" workshop, though the artist said he expected a full complement on Saturday. Streaming off the ferry, people did stop to toss rings at artist Joel Kyack's carnival trailer.

Meanwhile, at Andrew Kreps Gallery, all three editions of Darren Bader's "French Horn With Guacamole" sold out. Fairgoers posed for photos as they dipped tortilla chips into the bell of the horn. Filiep Libeert, a collector from Belgium, picked one up for \$10,000.

"Isn't it brilliant?" he said. "The madness of the piece...the generosity, the craziness of the whole thing. It's beautiful."