

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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ARCO MADRID 2014

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## Amid Economic Struggles, Quality Stands Out at ARCOMadrid

by Ashton Cooper 19/02/14 3:05 PM EST



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A view of the Leila Heller booth at ARCOMadrid.  
(Photo by Ashton Cooper )

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MADRID — As [ARCOMadrid](#) opened to VIPs on Wednesday, the specter of Spain's struggling art market was present not only on the minds of gallerists, but also candidly spoken of in the fair's press materials. "ARCOMadrid 2014 expects to confirm the recovery of the art market," the title of the fair's main press release boldly declared. But is an art market recovery actually in the cards at the 33rd edition of Spain's primary fair?

Although plenty of collectors crowded halls seven and nine at the Feria de Madrid on opening day, all of the gallerists ARTINFO spoke with said they would remain skeptical until the doors closed on Sunday. "It is never easy to sell here at ARCO, but we are very motivated," said **Violeta Janeiro**, gallery manager at Madrid's Galeria Helga de Alvear. Nothing had sold yet when we talked to Janeiro, but the gallery was offering works at a wide range of prices. Two large-scale **Thomas Ruff** photographs, "JPEG IR01" and "JPEG IR02" (both 2005), were available from an edition of three for €105,000 (\$144,500) a piece, while **Jorge Galindo**'s "208 Ladbroke Gove Drawings (Sketches)" (2012) were being offered for a much more affordable €1,500 (\$2,060) each.

In September 2012, the VAT (value added tax) rate in Spain rose from eight percent to 21 percent, making it the highest cultural tax in Europe and a formidable problem for dealers. Recent news that the tax had been reduced to 10 percent buoyed expectations for the fair, but it turns out that the tax hasn't exactly been reduced as much as originally broadcasted.

"I don't think it's really lowered," said Janeiro. "We are still fined at 21 percent. The only ones that have the VAT lowered are the artists. They can apply at 10 percent. This is kind of the strategy of the government in order to spread some good news. In the very beginning we didn't understand it and we thought we were getting 10 percent. We are still very disappointed, but happy for the artists."



*Thomas Ruff's "JPEG IR01" and "JPEG IR02." Photo by the Ashtoon Cooper*



While it was still too early to report many sales in the opening hours of the fair, Hamburg-based gallery LEVY had already sold three works from a presentation of 20th-century Surrealist objects titled “Meret Oppenheim and Friends.” **Man Ray**’s “Résurrection des Mannequins” (1938/66), a series of 15 photographs from an edition of 30, went for €15,000 (\$20,640). “It sold already to a Spanish collection, which is strange because normally we are selling to mostly international clients, but it was Spain this time,” said **Thomas Levy**, the gallery’s founder. Levy acknowledged the country’s economic struggles, but said he was still committed to having a presence at ARCO. “We have to help the children even when they are ill,” he said.

But in spite of the economic challenges of selling in Spain, or perhaps because of them, many galleries took risks on the types of work they showed. A considerable amount of conceptual work, video pieces, and even performance art set ARCO’s presentations apart from art fairs as usual. This reporter was shocked (and relieved) to not see a single **Jeff Koons** on view anywhere.

“It’s about content, not only about investment,” said **Florian Ludde** of Berlin’s Esther Schipper Gallery. Schipper presented a themed booth of works all dealing with sound, including “Small Music Listening Station” by **Angela Bulloch**, where fair-goers were invited to change the record on a turntable; and an audio presentation of **Karin Sander**’s “...hitting the high notes” from 2006.



*Karin Sander's "...hitting the high notes." Photo by Ashton Cooper*

Galerie West from the Netherlands, which has been attending ARCO for six years, presented a single video work by American artist **Reynold Reynolds**. From existing storyboards, script notes, and a small amount of footage, Reynolds recreated a censored 1933 German vampire film called “Die Verlorenen.” “We have one piece in the whole booth — it’s a big risk,” said gallery owner and director **Marie-José Sondejker**. “We are dependent on the larger collectors and the museums.” Sondejker explained that the presence of museum professionals made the fair

“very attractive.” Indeed, ARCO fosters a reputation for bringing in museum professionals with its so-called “Professional Meetings” that will be attended by Sculpture Center curator **Ruba Katrib**, SITE Santa Fe director **Irene Hofmann**, and Serpentine Gallery co-director **Hans Ulrich Obrist**, among others this year.

Another thing that sets ARCO apart is its commitment to showing art by Latin American artists. Luciana Brito Galeria from São Paulo brought a series of large-scale photographs by São Paulo-based artist **Caio Reisewitz** and a video installation by **Hector Zamora**. Founder **Luciana Brito** said that despite Spain’s economic slump, ARCO has always been beneficial for the gallery and they have been every year since 1998. “ARCO is a very good spot for Latin American artists so we are here for many years,” she said. “We use it to sell for museums so it is really good for our artists.”

While it’s still too early to tell if this year’s edition of ARCO will be the comeback the fair is angling for, hopes were high, but not unchecked, among exhibitors.