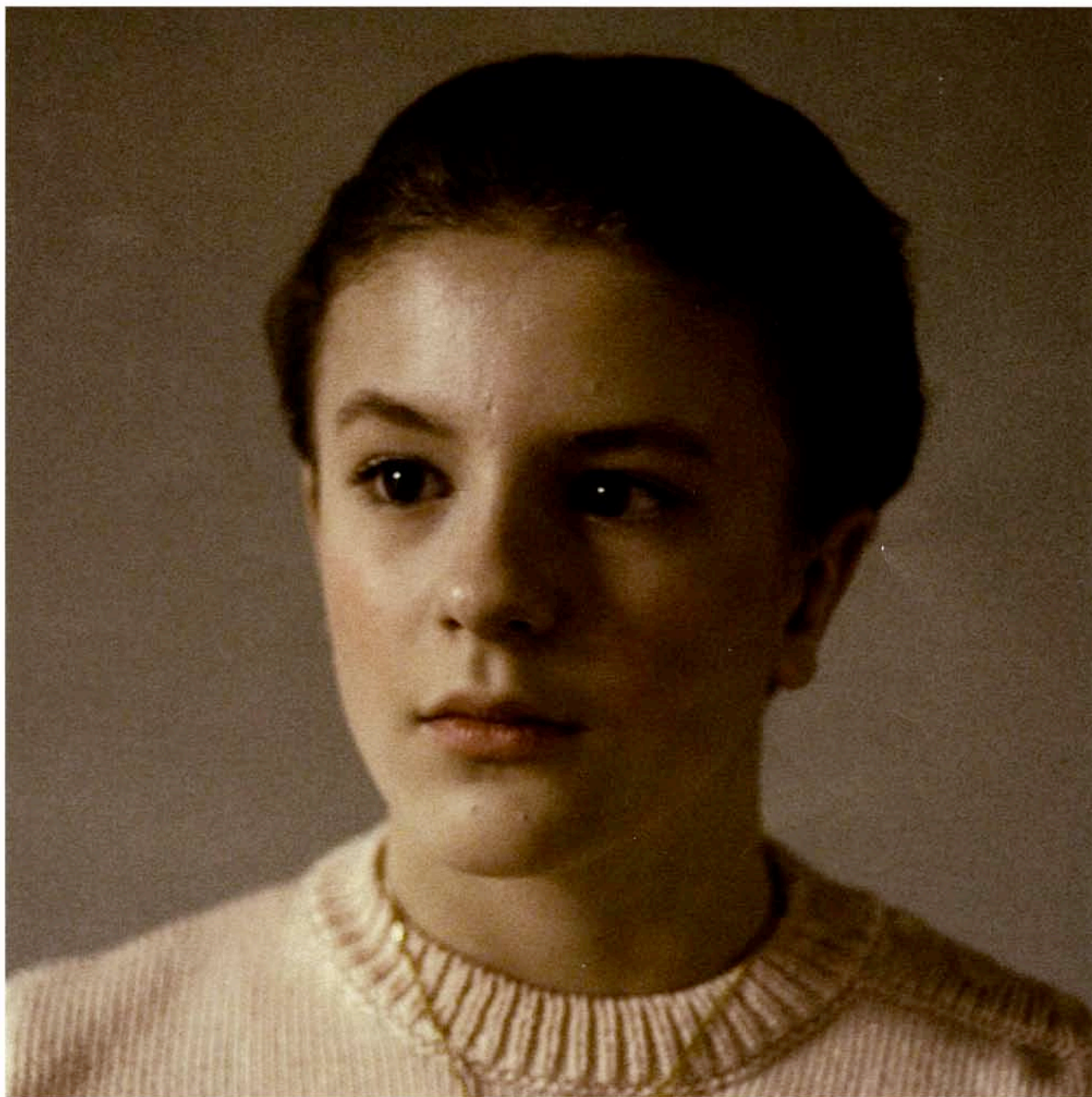


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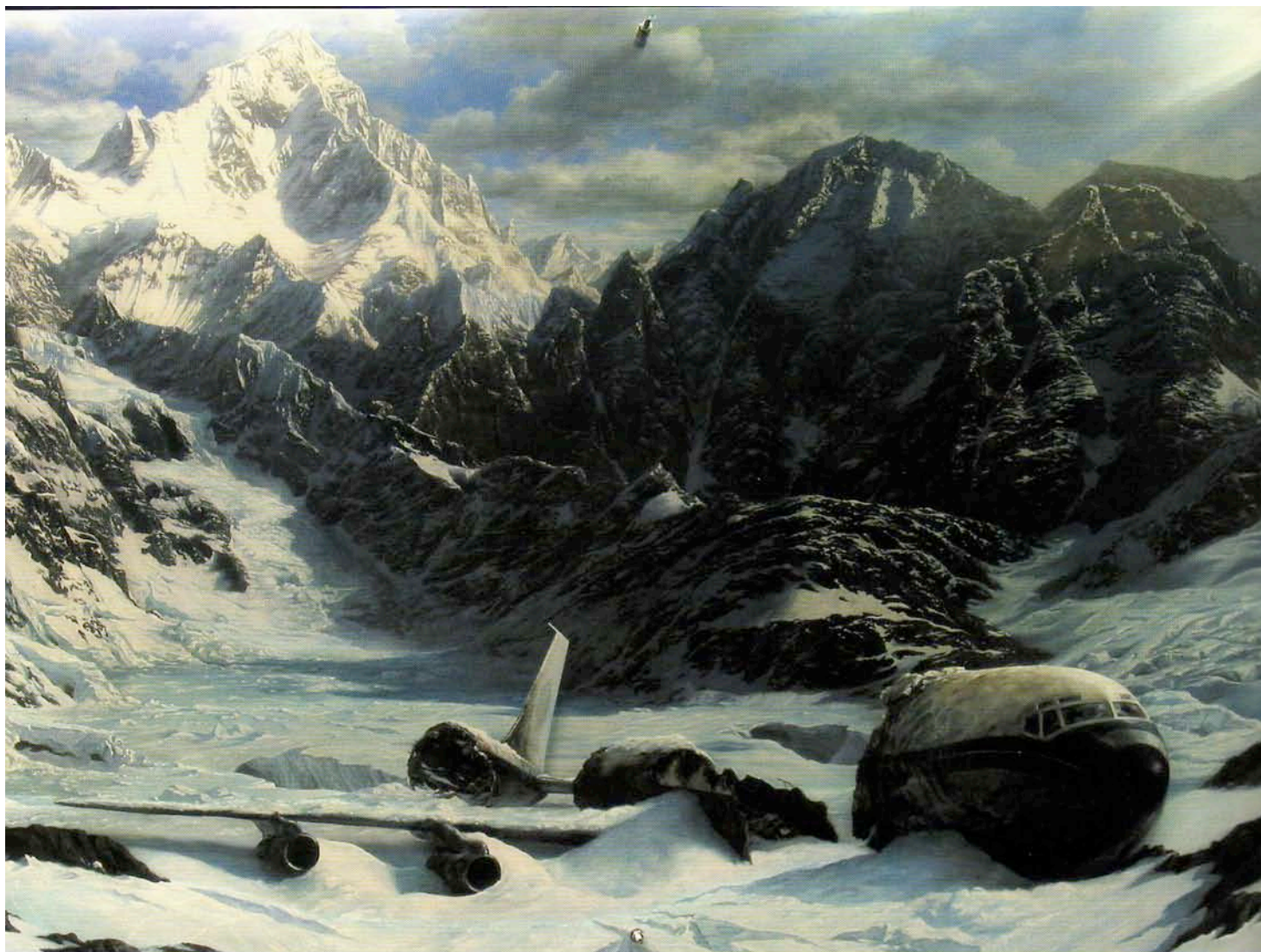
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EARLY RISERS

LONDON'S YOUNG COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Matt Price

IN RECENT YEARS LONDON has consistently had a healthy flow of young commercial galleries and the current crop is particularly vibrant. Fortescue Avenue/Jonathan Viner, Laura Bartlett, Dicksmith, Fred, Herald St, Hollybush Gardens, Hotel, Museum 52, Rifle-maker, David Risley, Rokeby and Store are among those at the forefront, bringing together professional acumen, entrepreneurial spirit and a real enthusiasm for the artists they represent. A balance of young and mid-career artists brings a sense of both excitement and maturity to many of these galleries, as does the range of art they show, ranging from the reliably commercially viable to the more outlandish. While these galleries are distinctive and individual, the relationships between them are

strong. "The scene is what it is partly because of that," comments Hotel's Darren Flook. So, who's behind these galleries?

BACKGROUNDS

While many studied fine art, art history or art theory, curatorial master's degrees such as those on offer at the Royal College of Art and Goldsmiths were undertaken by several gallerists, including Fortescue Avenue's Jonathan Viner, Hotel's Christabel Stewart, Store's Louise Hayward and Hollybush Gardens' Malin Stahl. Such courses reflect the growing professionalization of curating in the last fifteen years and the impact this is having on the new generation of gallerists. Viner also

spent time working as an artist's assistant for Mona Hatoum, and the success of the previous generation of artists, especially the YBAs, has offered paid training for several of today's other emerging gallerists, including Rokeby's Beth Greenacre, who was assistant for Gavin Turk, and Museum 52's Matthew Dipple, who was studio manager for Sam Taylor-Wood for three years. Several gallerists spent time after graduating working for prominent commercial galleries — both Jonathan Viner and Laura Bartlett, for example, worked at Gagosian. The combination of postgraduate study along with time spent working for established artists and galleries, has spawned a generation of young gallerists that are highly educated and professionally experienced.

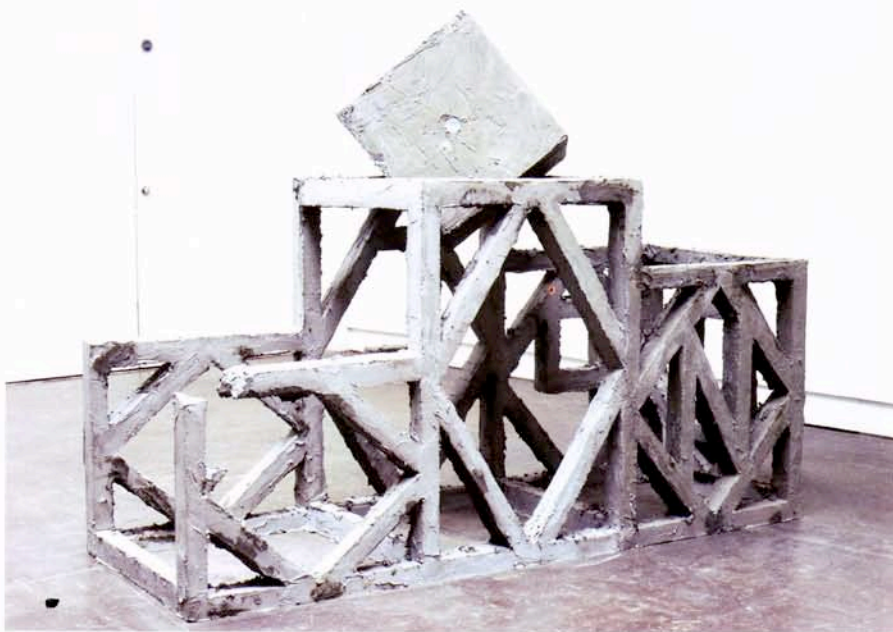
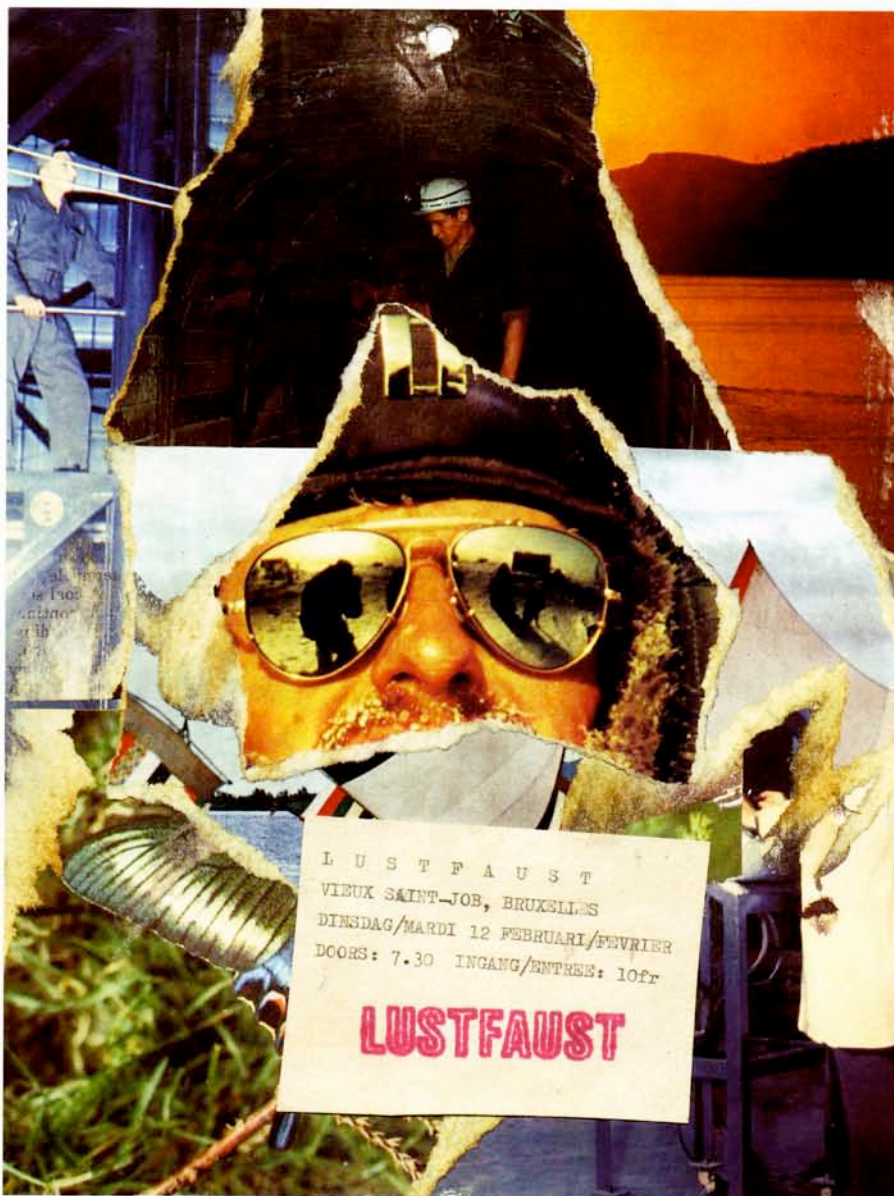
STARTING UP

While some had been in touch with artists whom they represent for a long time before opening, others set about putting together a roster of artists from scratch. "Finding artists is the most challenging part of the job," says Viner. Laura Bartlett spent time traveling to see works, finding Harrell Fletcher at the Whitney Museum and Sachiko Abe at P.S.1 in New York, neither of whom had previously shown in London. Degree shows are useful to some—several of Rifleman's artists were found in this way, such as Jamie Shovlin and Francesca Lowe, as were many of Rokeby's, such as Sam Dargan, Graham Hudson and Michael Samuels. "Degree shows are important for sourcing new talent," says Beth Greenacre. "They are also a way of keeping an eye on what trends are developing at that level." Hollybush Gardens, which opened in September 2005 and currently represents just five artists, plans to increase the number of artists as the gallery establishes itself. Museum 52, on the other hand, already has around twenty artists on its books. "They come from everywhere, from student shows, other galleries, via friends, assistants, studio visits," explains Matthew Dipple. Museum 52's partnerships with other galleries are particularly strong, showing Kysa Johnson and Nick Waplington, for example, who are both represented by Roebing Hall in New York. Word of mouth and social networks remain common ways in which to source new artists too.

Everyone has their own story about setting up. David Risley studied in Manchester before moving to London where he worked for the art bookshop Zwemmer. Use of an upstairs room soon resulted in shows for Richard Woods (represented by Modern Art Inc. at the time) and The Approach's Dan Coombs. He then began a program of shows by artists who were as yet unrepresented. He left Zwemmer and shared a space on Laburnum Street with The Drawing Room, doing alternate shows. Without financial backing, everything had to pay for itself: "If the first show hadn't sold, the gallery would have closed," says Risley. At the end of May 2005, he moved to Vyner Street in Bethnal Green, home to an impressive cluster of youngish galleries such as Modern Art Inc., Fred. One in the Other and the now departed Mobile Home.

With bastions such as Maureen Paley, Wilkinson and The Approach (which has just opened a second space, The Reliance, near Hoxton Square, also located above an eponymous pub), Bethnal Green is home to several other interesting young galleries,

From top: JAMIE SHOVLIN, Lustfaust poster, 2006. Ripped magazine on cardboard, 28 x 22 cm. Courtesy of Rifleman; MICK PETER, Nope, 2005. Cement, polystyrene and table tennis balls, 280 x 90 x 76 cm. Courtesy Fortescue Avenue/Jonathan Viner. Opposite: JONATHAN WATERIDGE, Mountain Landscape With Crashed Airliner, 2006. Oil on layered perspex, 185 x 268 x 18 cm. Courtesy David Risley Gallery.





including Herald St, Hollybush Gardens and Hotel. Darren Flook and Christabel Stewart began Hotel by using their own home as a gallery before securing the shop unit on the ground floor, the gallery's name referring to the fact that when artists from outside London came to make projects and shows, they would stay in the flat with them. While these galleries are the first for most people, some are on their second or third. Flook was previously with Entwistle, while Hollybush Gardens' Lisa Panting co-founded Milch with Fred Mann in 1996. Following this, Mann teamed up with Benjamin Rhodes to form Rhodes + Mann, before deciding to go it alone with Fred in 2005. This goes some way towards explaining how such a young gallery has such a strong stable of artists, with established artists such as Abetz/Drescher, Cathy De Monchaux and Jörg Lozek alongside younger or currently lesser-known artists.

But whether experienced or newcomers, setting up a new gallery is no mean feat, especially as everything from press releases to bookkeeping is often done by just one or two people. "Making the decision to open a gallery is one that will run your life, and basically you have to be prepared to live art," comments Lisa Panting; it's a sentiment echoed by Beth and Ed Greenacre: "six, sometimes seven days a week, twelve hours a day is how we operate."

SUPPORT

While some feel that they are increasingly in competition with larger, more established galleries as they move to sign up younger and younger artists, it is equally apparent that these more experienced galleries are also very supportive, offering advice and even sponsoring London's Zoo Art Fair (co-founded by David Risley and The Great Unsigned's Soraya Rodriguez). Museum 52's Matthew Dipple comments, "Jay Jopling has been very supportive, as I know he has to a few other young galleries." Commercial gallery support in London is often matched by public funding. "Arts Council England offers a lot of encouragement and resources," says Laura Bartlett. "They recognize that young galleries are mostly trying to do something interesting and aren't simply driven by quick commercial success." In addition to the Arts Council, private trusts and foundations seem equally keen to be involved with the emerging scene by funding particular projects and publications. "Only in London could an artist be given fifty square meters of open space next to a major public museum, as Graham Hudson has been able to do with his Henry Moore Fellowship," asserts Ed Greenacre.

SALES, COLLECTORS AND FAIRS

According to the gallerists, the markets are genuinely buoyant across the spectrum of mediums. "Of course," says Hotel's Darren Flook, "paintings are easier to sell than huge sculptures made out of butter and spit." But huge sculptures and installations are also

selling well in these galleries, evidenced by the recent sale by Rokeby to a major London collector of a large-scale installation by Raul Ortega Ayala. Laura Bartlett notes that video sales are up at the moment, as are those for drawing, a medium that is also well catered for by Museum 52, whose recent exhibition devoted to it (featuring Peter Macdonald, Kate Atkin, and Frank Selby) sold out. Indeed, all of Museum 52's shows have sold out since February, and the gallery is still selling works by Kay Harwood and Tom Gallant to a waiting list of clients following their sell-out shows last autumn. Their latest show of paintings by Ji Wenyu was on reserve two weeks before it opened and sold a week before. At Hotel, there are waiting lists for works by David Noonan, Steven Claydon, Carter, Carol Bove and Michael Bauer, following on from successful shows in 2005 and 2006.

One gets the impression that the sell-out show is becoming commonplace. The first two exhibitions this year at Rokeby were sell-outs, with Simon Keenleyside's landscapes of Essex selling to collectors in London, Hong Kong and the States at prices ranging from £900 to £7,000; Kathrine Ærtebjerg's solo exhibition — her first outside Denmark — also sold out at similar prices. At Rifleman, the recent Jaime Gili show was a sell out and led to a commission from the Architectural Association. At David Risley, Boo Ritson's show sold out, and works by Jonathan Wateridge for his first solo exhibition this October have also sold out. Particularly interesting is the fact that they sold before even having been made.

Who exactly buy works from these galleries? It's no surprise that Charles Saatchi keeps an eye on what's going on amongst them, acquiring a number of Jamie Shovlin's works from Rifleman as well as a Dwayne Moser painting from Laura Bartlett. Moser's painting of the site of Paris Hilton's car crash was bought by an anonymous buyer earlier this year. Some suspect this might have been Paris Hilton herself. While London-based collectors account for a significant proportion of sales, they come from further afield too. Jonathan Viner's client base is largely American. "Sometimes it's easier to get a collector from Manhattan to see the work at your gallery than one from West London," he comments.

Naturally, many collectors are somewhat wealthy. Museum 52 recently had a woman visit the gallery who was getting married and wanted to reserve work for her wedding list. She liked the work but was disappointed because she wanted her friends to spend more than what the paintings actually cost. Apart from established collectors and the occasional celebrity, young collectors are also playing their part. "It's exciting because you are both in at the beginning of something," says Flook, "but age doesn't matter. Collectors are usually experts in their fields and often have the best stories." At Museum 52, 25- to 35-year-old-collectors make up approximately 65% of their sales.

But if collectors are increasingly happy to get out their checkbooks at young commercial

galleries, so too are the museums. "We placed a fantastic work by Simon English in the Louisiana Museum [in Denmark] last year and have created substantial holdings of works by Susanne Kühn at the Frieder Burda Museum [in Germany]," says Fred Mann. Hollybush Gardens has recently seen *Magical World* by Johanna Billing enter both ARC's collection at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Van Abbemuseum of Eindhoven. "It's very satisfying to know that an artwork has gone somewhere that will conserve and show it to the public," comments Lisa Panting.

One factor contributing to the success of the young commercial galleries in London is the Frieze Art Fair. According to Fred Mann, it "has changed the way contemporary art collecting is looked at in the UK." "Anyone who remembers what art fairs were like here before Frieze came along will appreciate that what Matthew Slotover and Amanda Sharp have achieved with Frieze is incredible," says Darren Flook, whose gallery participated in Zoo the first year and since in Frieze. Zoo Art Fair is itself playing an exceptionally useful role, with Laura Bartlett, Fred, Dicksmith, a projects and i-cabin among the twenty-eight UK-based young galleries and arts organizations in last year's edition. Equally important on the international stage for the London galleries are Liste and Volta, NADA, Artissima and Artbrussels, among others. "They generate a significant amount of the gallery's annual revenue," says Viner.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Of the many shows taking place this autumn and winter, highlights include Cyprien Gaillard at Laura Bartlett, a solo show by Glasgow-based sculptor Mick Peter at Fortescue Avenue, and Mark Fairington at Fred (Fred will also be opening a branch of the gallery in Leipzig this autumn). Also worth noting are solo exhibitions by Michael Samuels and Sam Dargan at Rokeby, solo shows for Stephen Vitiello and Nick Waplington at Museum 52, Richard Kern at Hotel, Jonathan Wateridge at David Risley, and a group show inspired by the '60s Indica Gallery at Rifleman. ■

Matt Price is an editor and writer based in London, where he is publications manager at Serpentine Gallery.

Clockwise from top left: KAY HARWOOD, *Sweet Disorder*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 214 x 275 cm. Courtesy Museum 52; GRAHAM HUDSON, *The Residence*, 2006. Mixed media. Courtesy Rokeby; CYPRIEN GAILLARD, *Paysage aux Trois Tours*, 2005. Etching, 17 x 23 cm. Courtesy Laura Bartlett Gallery; JOHANNA BILLING, *Magical World*, 2005. Video, 6 mins. Courtesy Hollybush Gardens; BEDWYR WILLIAMS, *Blaenau Vista Social Club*, 2004. Mixed media. Courtesy STORE; SUSANNE KÜHN, *Baden (Swimming)*, 2004. Pigment, dispersion on canvas, 180 x 160 cm. Courtesy FRED [London] Ltd; View of the exhibition "Writing in Strobe" (foreground: François Curlet, *Moonwalk*, 2003) at Dicksmith Gallery. Courtesy Andrew Hunt. Photo: Peter White.