



[Buy Art Fair](#)

at Spinningfields, Manchester

Reviewed by [Emily Pitts](#) October 2011

Spinningfields hosted Manchester's Fourth [Buy Art Fair](#) - the North's answer to London's Affordable art fair - Original, Affordable, Unmissable, according to the literature. It runs alongside the [Manchester Contemporary](#), the North's vehicle for critically engaged art.

Following a visit to the fair last year, I decided to take the plunge and have a stand at the 2011 fair. As an exhibitor with the preview night and first day accomplished my approach to viewing the exhibition for this review was of the smash and grab variety, being the only person staffing my stand for the full three days. This paucity of time does however bring into sharp focus the work which stands out, bearing in mind the following two tenets:

- **Firstly** - Art is a highly personal affair - the process of selection for review is itself worthy of a full-page review.
- **Secondly** - The Buy Art Fair is a commercial operation.

Artists and galleries pay large sums of money to exhibit their work, and as there is no rigorous selection process, if you can afford a stand the chances are you will get a stand. So what you will find at the fair is a broad selection of artwork crossing genres, focussed predominantly on painting and limited edition printmaking, with a smattering of illustration, a dash of sculpture and traces of intellectually stimulating work. It allows the public the opportunity to see a range of artwork in one place in the North, which is a positive move for non-Londoners. It conversely excludes practitioners who are engaging in less lucrative, investigative creative enquiry. It is with these considerations that I have reviewed the event.

From my whistlestop tour of the whole exhibition, what follows is a sample to whet your whistle if you plan to visit the exhibition.



Visual: Moose Allain: Stand 054

My background in architecture and some faint reminiscence of the artworks of Friedensreich Hundertwasser led me to pick this artist, on a stand of his own, as the visual selection. What I really liked about the stand was that Karen, Moose's wife, was engaging and spent time talking about the work - just enough and not too much. If your budget is small cartoon books are £25 and prints start at £45, if you have a little more, then his larger scale paintings show his love of architecture, illustration and dreaming in bright and playful fashion.

Intellectual: Salvage Gallery: Stand 094

The first of two father-and-son combinations I came across today, this duo, Richard & Jack, were engaging and really keen to discuss their work - an interesting year-long performance they have undertaken as a pair, sending instructions between each other, interpreting them and exhibiting the result, the artefacts created. I will leave 'the result' up to you to hear about from Richard and Jack... Also exhibited is an abstract painting generated from hair imprints left on bus windows. The pair are clearly interested in examining more than just an object - in delving deeper, asking questions and generating more developed responses than is achieved by more commercial artists.

Gallery: Contemporary Six: Stand 016

Perhaps because his stand is next to mine or due to the easy and genial manner of the owner, Alex I feel that this stand has great appeal. Based in Manchester in the Royal Exchange arcade and having just celebrated its inaugural year, the gallery hosts a delightful selection of North West artists' work at really affordable prices without scrimping on quality. There is a distinct North West bent to the display, with simple elegant prints from Jean Hobson and unmistakable mixed-media works of Rob Wilson - somewhat of a treasure of the region's popular art scene.

Collector: I.E. Arts: Stand 014

The collection within this diminutive stand - only 2m x 2m belies the impressive collection within - works by Gordon Cheung, Fleur Patrick and Liam Spencer amongst others. What I like about the stand is the slight disorder and down to earth approach - it feels like Mark and Sharon, the collectors, want you delve inside and see their passion for the works. There is something in there for everyone, so don't pass it by with its less than perfect presentation; if you do you might miss something special and highly collectible.

Contemporary: Fifth Floor: Axis / Untitled Gallery

The whole of the fifth floor is given over to the Manchester Contemporary (and the cafe, if you need a drink!). It aims to challenge traditional notions of art and artists, presenting new ideas, ways of conceiving and practicing art, both from established and emerging artists.

Axis is a selective digital platform for artists. This year they have selected five artists across genres to represent the company, my favourite of which was the work of Eileen O'Rourke, primarily due to her delicate use of hair, embroidered into bedsheets, however I confess to having a slight ulterior motive as a hair-art exponent myself! The sculpture of collaborators Dutton and Swindells is appealing and tactile - entitled Monkey Nuts - a large shining monkey nut shaped ceramic sculpture enticing you to grab with both hands - at a very reasonable £250, which I think will be snapped up well before the end of the fair. The staff here were approachable, where others on the floor were positively arctic in their welcome. Worth a visit.

The Untitled Gallery: Lee Machell's performative work is equally as interesting, involving the lining up of matches alongside each other and charting the remains once lit and spent. I also particularly enjoyed the work by Monica Biagioli, based on reincarnations of Jung's archetypes pared down to single or few words and displayed in frames reminiscent of trophy or medal cases. The small space is nicely curated and there is a folder with more of the artists' works if you want to delve a little deeper and find out more - a nice touch.

All in all the Contemporary and Buy Art Fair cover a broad spectrum. There is something for all - just leave plenty of time to soak it all up and wear comfy shoes - over three enormous Buy Art Fair rooms on the first floor and two for the Contemporary on the fifth - there's far to go!

The Buy Art Fair was on Saturday 29th October and Sunday 30th October 11-5. Tickets were priced at £6/£5 on the door, with five free pairs available from the author, [Emily Pitts](#) by texting 'Free Tickets' with your name and email address to 07870 360 213.