

Artnews: 'Frieze Openings Begin, With Jeff Koons at Almine Rech, Ed Ruscha at Gagosian—and Monica Lewinsky!' by Nate Freeman, October 4, 2016



Installation view of the Jeff Koons show at Almine Rech in London.

The lines for the Jeff Koons show at Paris and Brussels-based dealer Almine Rech's new gallery here in London ran around the block, with an unruly mob at the front, vying to get in. Even if they couldn't see Koons from the end of the long line—and Jeff Koons was there—it was as if they could feel the presence of Koons and his blue gazing balls. They had to get in.

Once you get inside the gallery (which is elegant, but small), the show takes a few paintings from the “Gazing Ball” series (which appeared at Gagosian Gallery in New York last year) and places them in the shadow of two huge glistening metal ballerina works—Seated Ballerina (2010–2015) and Ballerinas (2010–2014)—each over seven feet tall, and sucking up the oxygen in the room in the best of ways. It’s not often that the presence of Koons is outmatched, but those who managed to make it inside truly seemed more interested in the sculptures than their creator.

Koons, for his part, was busy chatting with Diana Widmaier Picasso and a fellow relative of Pablo, Bernard Ruiz-Picasso (who happens to be Almine Rech’s husband) so after staring into the gazing balls for a while I walked across the street to Gagosian Gallery—a rare moment of extreme convenience during a week when one has to zigzag across the entire city. Gagosian was showing new work by Ed Ruscha at his Grosvenor Hill gallery and the show, “Extremes and In-betweens,” is another knock-out; people have been saying it’s the artist’s best in years.

Though it was a tad hard to look at this set of large text-based, dune-hued works with the scene unfurled before it: Anish Kapoor was there in front of the Ruschas taking selfies with Monica Lewinsky, who’s in London, as it happens. Probably best to get out of the United States during this election, right? (I didn’t get a chance to chat with Lewinsky, but I did overhear her telling New York dealer Ellie Rines that she goes to Ruscha’s studio all the time. Rines responded by telling her about the artist Betty Tompkins.) Johnny Pigozzi was wearing a Looney Tunes shirt.

Guests lingered in the gallery well after the 8 p.m. closing time, and then Ruscha made a brief appearance only to head back out again toward a car, to the dinner. I asked him how he conceived of the works, and the arrangement of the show.

“It’s a stupefyingly simple concept,” Ruscha told me. “That’s it. Stick with it and”—he clapped his hands—“prest-o change-o!”

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The scene at “Ed Ruscha: Extremes and In-betweens” at Gagosian Gallery in London.