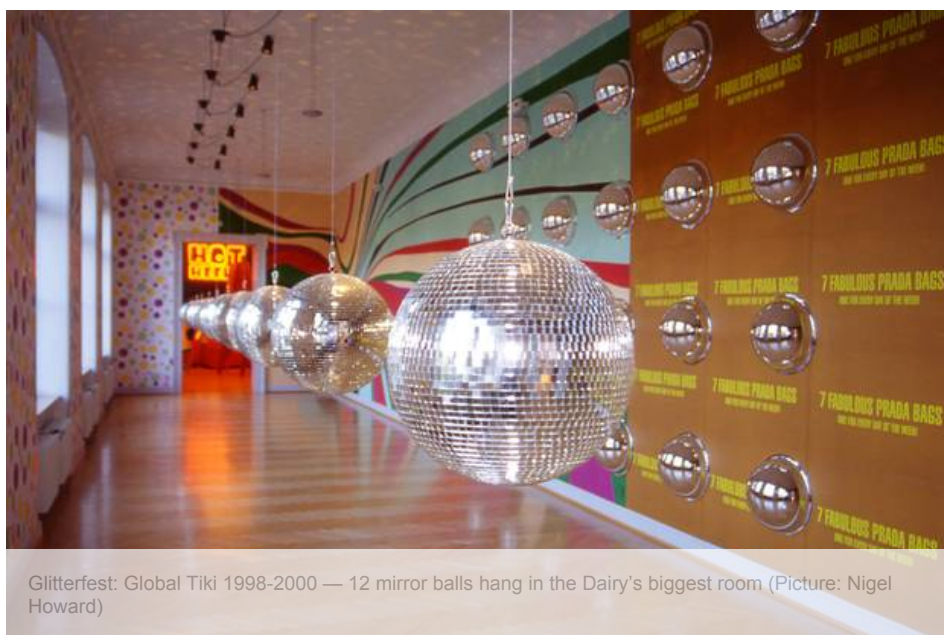


## John Armleder: Quicksand, Dairy Art Centre - exhibition review

The first exhibition at Frank Cohen's new Bloomsbury gallery, the Dairy Art Centre, is a solo show from Swiss artist John Armleder which shows off the building's various spaces well



Glitterfest: Global Tiki 1998-2000 — 12 mirror balls hang in the Dairy's biggest room (Picture: Nigel Howard)

It has become obligatory to refer to Frank Cohen as "the Saatchi of the North" because this similarly ambitious and public-spirited art collector hails from Manchester — he, of course, dismisses the comparison.

In recent years, he has displayed his collection in Wolverhampton, but now, having teamed up with his longtime art adviser and fellow collector Nicolai Frahm, he's opening the Dairy Art Centre, a huge gallery in a former milk depot near Russell Square. Rather than the kind of

vast, sprawling attempts at defining the zeitgeist that we regularly see at the Saatchi Gallery, the duo are opening with a solo show by John Armleder, a Swiss artist best known for his links to the Eighties American movement Neo-Geo, which spawned Jeff Koons.

Armleder tends to incorporate every centimetre of gallery space into his installations, so he's a smart choice to show off a new building. And the Dairy is well worth showing off about. The spaces, all on one floor, are varied in scale and feel, from a vast opening space with raw corrugated iron roof, steel beams and abundant natural light pouring in from the rooftop windows, to another large room with thick white concrete beams and huge windows along the side wall and several more intimate spaces.

The show reflects Armleder's varied activity. Paintings from Cohen and Frahm's collections are hung on murals commissioned for the gallery. Twelve huge mirror balls hang from the ceiling in the biggest room, close to the swirling psychedelia of a new wall painting which runs the length of the gallery. Examples of Armleder's "furniture sculptures" are dotted throughout, like the multicoloured bar stools at the reception desk, and sculptures using fluorescent lights.

In creating these knowing collisions between high art and everyday objects, Armleder's work flirts with decoration — the glitter thrown onto his poured and puddled abstract paintings is a typical gesture.

It certainly makes for a visually ebullient beginning to the Dairy's life, and the centre's galleries are an elegant addition to the wealth of art spaces across the capital. But Armleder's work, for all that surface exuberance, leaves me rather cold.

*Until August 17 (020 7713 8900, [dairyartcentre.org.uk](http://dairyartcentre.org.uk))*