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[Dallas Art Fair: High Expectations](#)

[Brad Ford Smith](#) | February 6, 2009 5:35 PM



Richard Prince's *Nurse in Love*, [McClain Gallery](#)

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The Dallas Art Fair is made up of art galleries and art dealers. This means that all the major visual art mediums – painting, sculpture, works on paper, prints and photography – will be on display. Plus, you will find artwork by the modern masters such as Henri Matisse, Ellsworth Kelly and Robert Mangold, as well as artwork by young artists who have yet to hit the pages of national art magazines. Then to top it off, each gallery booth is staffed with an art expert that is more than happy to tell you everything they know about the art and artists that they represent. It's like paying \$20 for an all-day symposium on contemporary art. That makes this event the best bang for your fine art viewing buck.

The highlight of the Dallas Art Fair is the printmaking. Represented throughout the various galleries is an outstanding collection of the top printmaking artists of the 20th Century: Rauschenberg, Diebenkorn, Picasso, Matisse, Alex Katz, Brice Marden, Vija Celmins, Kiki Smith, Sol Lewitt, Ellsworth Kelly, Cy Twombly, just to name a few. This is the best collection of contemporary prints to hit Texas since the 2005 Terry Winters exhibition at the [Contemporary Art Museum in Houston](#). If you are a collector of prints and/or artists who works with printmaking, the opportunity to see the editions produced by [Pace Prints](#) and [John Szoke Editions](#) is in itself worth the whole ticket price.

Prints and photos have been the hot selling items at all the art fairs this past year. This is because you can purchase a great piece of art by a major artist for a reasonable price. And these are not posters or some funky repro knockoff. These are etchings, lithographs and block prints all made by artists who are exploring these mediums as a valid part of their artistic growth. A prime example is the series of

prints by Donald Baechler entitled "[*Days of the Week*](#)". These colorful, innovative and humorous prints are priced at only \$750 each. That is an amazing price for an artist whose work has been selling regularly at Sotheby's and Christie's.

Each gallery has jewels to discover. One is in the Thomas Segal Gallery – Cy Twombly's series of lithos entitled "[*Natural History Part 1*](#)". On the wall are five prints that I have previously only seen as 4"X 3" reproductions. The subtlety of line, and the variation of tone give these prints a visual impact that no book or magazine can ever reproduce.

Seeing art face-to-face is the main reason to go to any art fair. It allows the artwork to speak directly to you, and that will change your mind. For example, there are numerous prints, paintings and drawings by Donald Sultan scattered through out the fair. He is one of those artists that I hate because of his lushness for lushness sake approach. But when I see his work in person, I am always surprised at how much I really like it. It's the same with Julian Opie, His multimedia construct entitled "[*Shahnoza Dancing in White Dress*](#)" wins the prize for making me look twice and laugh out loud.

I do wish that [**Flatbed Press**](#) had a booth to showcase its stable of Texas printmakers. But [**Arthouse**](#) filled in that gap by displaying its print editions made as membership premiums. It also has on display a large quantity of art made for the 5X7 annual fundraiser (only this time you can look on the back to see who made the piece) ...

I have deleted the rest of my endless art rantings because I think it's important to make this last statement:

The Dallas Art Fair opened with a lot of people holding very high expectations. They are all waiting to see if this Texas art fair will be a success, if this art fair will be the one that takes root and grows into a nationally recognized annual art event. With an impressive roster of more than 30 galleries from both Texas and across the nation, this art fair could possibly be the best showcase of contemporary art to hit Dallas in more than 10 years. But the big fear is that Texans will not turn out in sufficient numbers to make this art fair a success. If that happens – if the Dallas Art Fair fails simple because too few people show up – then it will be many, many years before anybody tries it here again. So in a sense, by going to the Dallas Art Fair you are casting a vote that tells everyone, "Yes, I do want to see more events like this in Dallas."