

Galleries Cater to the Vacationing Art



A sculpture of a steel bucket by Subodh Gupta at a gallery in the English countryside.

COURTESY HAUSER & WIRTH / PHOTOGRAPH BY HÉLÈNE BINET

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ST. MORITZ, Switzerland — There's no sign above the door. The building looks much the same as all the others in this picture-postcard Alpine village. But once inside the 12th-century burgher's house here, you find yourself surrounded by millions of dollars worth of Chinese contemporary art.

"This was an opportunity for our artists to exhibit in the region," said Mollie Dent-Brocklehurst, the director of [Pace Gallery](#) in London, which in February opened a branch in the privately owned Chesa Büsin in the village of Zuoz, about 20 kilometers down the valley from St. Moritz.

Wealthy art collectors, like migratory birds, spend the year flying around the world. Wherever they land, and perch, dealers are sure to follow. The Swiss town of St. Moritz in the idyllic Engadin valley is one of the art market's longest-established vacation shopping venues. Made fashionable as a winter resort in the 1960s by "jet-set" collectors like the auto industry heirs Gunter Sachs and Gianni Agnelli, St. Moritz still attracts an international crowd of high-end skiers who use its private airport. Miuccia Prada, Norman Foster, Philip Niarchos and Augusto Perfetti are among the affluent art buyers who have houses in the area. They have attracted branches of big-name contemporary galleries like Pace, [Bruno Bischofberger](#), Karsten Greve and [Gmurzynska](#) that open for a few months during the winter and summer seasons.

Vacation galleries of the type that dot the streets of St. Moritz have a niche all of their own in the art market. They are, quite literally, shop windows that advertise the presence of dealers to wealthy visitors and locals. It's as much, if not more, about making contact and building long-term relationships with collectors, as selling the art that's hanging at that moment on the walls.



The British painter Billy Childish with his painting "Man With Golden Eagle."

COURTESY PAOLO CURTI / ANNAMARIA GAMBUZZI AND NEUGERRIEMSCHEIDER, BERLIN

"It's like being at an art fair all the time," said Marco Voena, a partner in the London dealership, Robilant + Voena, which opened a gallery in a Norman Foster-designed parade of luxury designer stores in St. Moritz in July. "It's a meeting place for collectors who actually live with important art." Robilant + Voena's exhibition of paintings by Jitish Kallat and Julian Schnabel from 2011 and 2007, priced from \$75,000 to \$250,000, was one of 30 events at the seventh annual St. Moritz Art Masters from Aug. 22 through Aug. 31.

This year's Art Masters, which the curator Reiner Opoku described as a "luxury summer event," had an Indian theme. St. Moritz's austere Protestant Church was the perfect setting for Subodh Gupta's 2008 installation "School," consisting of 45 brass stools with steel trays of "tiffin box" cups in front of them. Galerie Bruno Bischofberger held a show of works on paper and canvases by Francesco Clemente from the 2000s inspired by the Italian artist's travels to India, mostly from the dealer's collection. One of the few artists to be showing new work was the British painter Billy Childish, who had five canvases inspired by past masters, including the local late 19th-century painter Giovanni Segantini, in the French Church. These were being offered by the Neugerriemschneider gallery of Berlin for about 45,000 euros each, or \$60,000.

St. Moritz Art Masters, with its absence of hot young names and sometimes heavy-handed corporate sponsorship — Cartier, Mont Blanc and Mercedes-Benz — is primarily a promotional event to bolster the resort's quiet summer season, when most of the visitors are from Switzerland and Italy. But there was some retail action. Neugerriemschneider said it sold all of Mr. Childish's paintings and Bischofberger found a buyer for one of two available Clemente canvases, priced at 180,000 Swiss francs, about \$195,000.

Major-name vacation galleries aren't just a Swiss phenomenon. The Berlin dealership Kewenig Galerie has had a branch in Majorca since 2004, and the Greek island of Antiparos has been the venue this summer for a pop-up show of drawings and sculptures by the American artist Joe Bradley, presented by the Zurich dealer Eva Presenhuber.

And now the New York dealer Fergus McCaffrey is in on the act, opening the first permanent gallery on the Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy. Another favorite winter habitat of the ultra-rich, St. Barts is a little more on-trend with the contemporary art world. The American megadealer Larry Gagosian (who has held pop-up shows there) and the Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich own houses on the small island, as does the San Francisco collector Frances Bowes. Peter Brant and George Soros are also regular visitors.

"With people so relaxed and with time on their hands, it's the perfect place to begin relationships and conclude deals," Mr. McCaffrey said. His minimalist gallery in the island's main town, Gustavia, showing a mix of modern and contemporary works, is due to open in November for Thanksgiving and will stay open all year around. "It's the sort of place where you can have a three-hour lunch with someone who normally can't speak on the phone for 15 seconds."

Somerset in the west of England is a less obvious holiday destination, but similar principles lie behind Hauser & Wirth establishing an enclave of the international art world in the heart of the English countryside. Rather than set up a branch in Hong Kong, the Swiss-born dealer Iwan Wirth has created an extraordinary gallery, restaurant and arts complex at his working farm on the outskirts of Bruton, a hip little town about 100 miles from London. Hauser & Wirth opened in July with a site-specific show of sculptures by Phyllida Barlow. All her works are for sale, as is a 16-foot high outdoor sculpture of a steel bucket by Subodh Gupta, marked at €580,000.

"Being at this place grounds me," Mr. Wirth said. "There's a need for time to reflect, and being here gives me the chance to talk to people and give something back to the community."

That, then, seems to be the essence of this new wave of vacation galleries. It's not so much about the quick, hard sell, but more about building relationships over time. And these days, in our era of nonstop work, air travel and art fairs, time is the most valuable commodity of all.