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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Frieze Los Angeles 2024 // Interview

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The music executive and his wife, Stacy, are fixtures of Los Angeles's art scene, collecting works by emerging artists and serving on boards of museums and non-profits

Benjamin Sutton

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John and Stacy Rubeli's collection includes works by Soo KIm, Kyle Kilty, and mother-daughter duo Karen Barbour and Daisy May Sheff
Trulee Hall; [instagram.com/truleehall](https://www.instagram.com/truleehall)

The Art Newspaper: What was the first work you ever bought?

John Rubeli: I moved to Los Angeles in 1990 and used college-graduation money to acquire a Raymond Pettibon drawing from 1986. It was just a few hundred dollars back then.

What was the most recent work you bought?

Collecting Soo Kim's work of photography by way of sculptural intervention has been a big focus. Soo is head of the photography department at Otis College of Art and Design and is in such a broad, meaningful conversation with the contemporary art community. We just acquired gesturally impactful paintings by Kyle Kilty, who was most recently featured in the Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A.* biennial. We also keep acquiring works by the West Coast artists Karen Barbour and her daughter Daisy May Sheff. The works are whimsical, sophisticated and refreshingly authentic.



Upon viewing Sharon Lockhart's *Untitled* photograph, I experienced what I can only describe as Stendhal syndrome

How quickly do you decide to buy a work of art?

We're usually viewing work within the context of ongoing dialogue with the artists, curators and dealers that we're close to. When considering acquisitions, the decision comes pretty quickly as we're already feeling a sense of support and advocacy, given the one degree of separation we have to the artist and their work. Moving forward is easiest when we know that the artist can truly benefit from the support that we're giving. Emerging artists have always been the primary focus for us, and we really stick by them.

The recording industry executive John Rubeli and his wife, Stacy, a former gallerist who now serves as an adviser to a small cadre of collectors, have been supporters of Los Angeles's artists, galleries, non-profits and institutions for decades. They have also served as tutors of sorts for other collectors, helping to build up the city's cohort of trend-setting contemporary art patrons.

John has served on the boards of many of Los Angeles's most revered art spaces, including the Hammer Museum, LAXART and Los Angeles Nomadic Division, while he and Stacy have been supporters of shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara and elsewhere. Their collection—including pieces by Tauba Auerbach, Tala Madani, Mary Heilmann, Haegue Yang, Elizabeth Neel, Catherine Opie and Lauren Halsey—is on prominent display throughout their home in Sherman Oaks.

What is the most unusual place you've installed a piece in your home?

We absolutely love the maniacal genius of the French sculptor Sylvie Auvray and have countless ceramics of hers in and out of the house. For years, I held onto a box of 63 large Sylvie tiles that, when pieced together, composed a psychotic, abstract cat. A few years ago, we re-did our time capsule of a primary bathroom, and Stacy suggested that we instal the tiles in the shower among those from Heath Ceramics. It's literally the closest relationship I've ever had with a work of art.

If you could have any work from any museum in the world, what would it be?

A room installation by Robert Gober.

What are you looking out for during Frieze Los Angeles this year?

Our good pal Trulee Hall has a solo exhibition at François Ghebaly. Trulee is a fantastical visionary whose media include painting, sculpture, photography, video, soundscape, claymation, computer-generated imagery and live action. Her work is immersive, transportive and warmly inclusive. We are also going to be on the lookout for emerging art and galleries from South Korea. As always, we'll seek out first-time galleries at the fair. I'm also a fan of books and ephemera, so thoughtful, meaningful takeaway pieces are always nice.

What do you regret not buying when you had the chance?

I was devastated not to have been able to acquire Sharon Lockhart's *Untitled* photograph of a girl resting on a glass table. It was featured in the 1997 Whitney Biennial and, upon viewing it, I experienced what I can only describe as Stendhal syndrome. Everything stopped, and every part of me was emotionally arrested. It was a striking, out-of-body experience. Another time I felt this syndrome was seeing [the band] My Bloody Valentine in 2008 at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, when I experienced an avalanche of noise cleave like a glacier through my whole being. As fate would have it, we were able to acquire Sharon's exquisite piece 16 years later.

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What's your least favourite thing about art fairs?

It feels like they are getting more and more commercial and much less experimental, less edgy. Also, there aren't very many solo presentations by artists. Some of my most impactful memories are from artist installations at fairs like Liz Glynn's secret bar at Frieze New York (2013); Urs Fischer's takeover in Gavin Brown's stand at Art Basel in Miami Beach (2006); Rodney McMillian in Susanne Vielmetter's stand at Art Basel in Miami Beach (2006); and Laura Owens in Art Basel in Miami Beach (2012).

What tip would you give to someone visiting Los Angeles during Frieze for the first time?

Don't try to do the city in one day. Pick neighbourhoods! For example, visiting Chinatown will take you to my favourite emerging and under-appreciated artist-run gallery, South Willard. For the past 15 years, Ryan Conder has been giving me a masterclass in ceramics. Also there, you can visit the wonderful Noon Projects gallery and grab coffee at Endorfffeine, noodles at Steep and shop for the best vintage clothes at James Veloria. I also suggest visiting Parker Gallery, Del Vaz Projects and either of the amazing Anat Ebgi spaces while exploring their respective neighbourhoods.

Where do you like to eat and drink near Santa Monica Airport?

Felix is absolutely one of the best meals in town, and it won't disappoint to visit Gjusta, Superba, Tacos Por Favor and Chulita. Venture over a bit further to Culver City and you'll find Hatchet Hall (with a discreet speakeasy), Destroyer and Margot. For those who are fans of the lowbrow nature of Mac's Club Deuce in Miami Beach, Backstage will ply you with cheap drinks, tater tots and karaoke.