

DIARY

LIKE A VIRGIN

Andrew Berardini at Frieze Los Angeles

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View of Chris Burden's *Dreamer's Folly*, 2010, presented by Gagolian at Frieze Los Angeles, 2022. Photo: Casey Kelbaugh.

I FELT LIKE I was artfairing for the very first time. Was it always this distracting, so disorienting? The return of FOMO is particularly weird. Between the Super Bowl and the Oscars, Los Angeles had its first major art week since February 2020. Though centered around the Frieze Art Fair in Beverly Hills, the pageantry also included the Felix Art Fair at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood, Spring Break (an artist-directed fairish thing) in Culver City, and about a million parties and openings, dinners, launches, screenings, and talks.

For some, the week began at the beloved artist Kaari Upson's memorial, which I was too sad to bring myself to attend. Days later, legendary artist Dan Graham passed away. After the millions of fatalities during this pandemic (including 3,187 in the US the day the fair opened), it was hard not to think of all this fanfare as some kind of dance of death. The macabre madness that infects those that survive a plague. Or maybe not. It could be that the frenzied mechanisms of art and commerce haven't changed; I'm just no longer inured to them.

But amid this unfamiliar (or all too familiar) onslaught, there were moments of grace. Tuesday afternoon, wandering with friends through VIP hours for the museums downtown, I lost myself in Ragnar Kjartansson's *The Visitors*, 2012, on view at the Broad. The song, melancholic yet full of hope, played on nine screens, eight featuring solitary musicians spread through a decaying mansion, playing separately but together. As I walked out, the sunset creaming through downtown towers and over the cherry blossoms along Grand Ave, the feeling of Ragnar and company singing Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir's poem wisped through me and the video and the swiftly shifting twilight came together into a place, a moment.

The following afternoon, I braved the Frieze Art Fair’s VIP preview in Beverly Hills. The commercial art conclave’s last edition, held in 2019, was at Paramount Studios, with all the cinematic grandeur and false facades that accompany a historic movie lot. Somehow a white tent behind a hotel didn’t have the same poetry, but its high peak and the carpeted floors felt classy enough, like the wedding reception of an aging celebrity and a minor aristocrat. Perhaps the pomp of the arriviste is truly the spirit of Beverly Hills—or “Beverly Thrills,” as Miguel Abreu jokingly dubbed it from his booth in the fair. He directed me to see the Joan Semmel paintings at Alexander Gray (which I did: moving depictions of the artist’s body, aging with sensual honesty).



Artist and writer Ricky Amadour.