

FORT GANSEVOORT

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Frieze Owner Ari Emanuel Buys Three Quilts at Los Angeles Fair, Beating VIPs in the Door

Before the preview began, New York gallery Fort Gansevoort notched its first in-person sales.

Katya Kazakina – February 27, 2026



Yvonne Wells's quilts at the Frieze Los Angeles art fair on February 26. Courtesy Fort Gansevoort

Owning an art fair has its benefits. For one thing, you can get in before anyone else and have your pick of the offerings.

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Billionaire **Ari Emanuel**, whose **Mari** company acquired the **Frieze** art fairs last year, became the first collector to enter its Los Angeles edition on Thursday. By the time VIPs rushed in at 10 a.m., he had already bought three artworks by 86-year-old Black quiltmaker **Yvonne Wells**.

Emanuel spotted them at the booth of New York gallery **Fort Gansevoort**, which mounted a solo presentation by Tuscaloosa, Alabama–based artist. The booth was located across from the entrance to the fair at the Santa Monica Airport.



Yvonne Wells, *Elvis II*, 1997. Courtesy Fort Gansevoort gallery.

It was a promising start to a buzzy opening of one of the top contemporary art fairs in the country, which showcases about 100 galleries from 22 countries. The sales were brisk, the vibe was positive, and the crowds were thick. Many local collectors came out, and celebrities like **Emma Watson** browsed the aisles. Early sales were led by **Ed Ruscha**'s 1988 painting *Heaven*, priced at \$3.75 million, at **Gagosian**.

"We had incredible placement," **Adam Shopkorn**, Fort Gansevoort's owner, said. "We are literally the first booth you see."

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The booth was eye-catching: Folk art meets Pop art. Charming portraits of legends like Michael Jackson, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and Mickey Mouse hung on the walls while the floor was covered with a rug featuring stars from the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

That morning, Shopkorn wasn't expecting collectors for another 15 minutes, but then Emanuel and his entourage walked by. The dealer introduced himself and said that he knew that Emanuel was a big fan of **Winfred Rembert**, whose estate the gallery represents.



Ari Emanuel and his wife Sarah Staudinger at the Frieze + STAUD Celebrate Frieze Los Angeles 2026 event held at the Chateau Marmont on February 25 in Los Angeles. Photo by River Callaway/WWD via Getty Images

“He said, ‘These are amazing,’” Shopkorn told me on Friday. “His wife came alongside him. Within three minutes he told me, ‘I am going to take Michael Jackson, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley.’ I said, ‘That’s amazing. Thank you so much.’”

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Prices for the works ranged from \$50,000 to \$60,000. Shopkorn said that Emanuel told him to finalize the details of the transaction with his art advisor, dealer **Jeffrey Deitch**, whose gallery is also exhibiting at Frieze L.A., which runs through Sunday.

Deitch stopped by his booth later in the day and walked out with a beautiful catalogue of Wells's work.

"Everything goes through Jeffrey," Shopkorn said. "He stood in front of the work and said he understands why Ari liked the work so much."



Yvonne Wells, *Marilyn Monroe*, 2001. Courtesy Fort Gansevoort.

Deitch, who has been advising Emanuel for 15 years and got him to join the board of the **Museum of Contemporary Art** in L.A. when he was its director, confirmed the acquisition on Friday. Emanuel focuses on historical and contemporary Black art, including works by self-taught artists like Rembert and **Thornton Dial**, the dealer said. More recently, Emanuel and his wife **Sarah Staudinger** have been acquiring works by female artists.

"It's consistent with what Ari has been doing," Deitch said of Wells's quilts. "This is the theme of the collection, in a way."