



## What Remains Unspoken!

Robert Mapplethorpe:  
*Louise Bourgeois*, 1982  
Silver gelatine print (detail)  
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Foundation

From June to September, during the quieter summer months, there were reports on many channels, similar to those on the real estate market, about the decline in art sales. Losses of at least 15 or even 20 percent at major auction houses and outright failures at art fairs, leaving smaller galleries, which could barely afford to participate, perplexed and at a loss. In addition, there were some dramas in museums, especially at the *British Museum*, where many objects in the collection had never been cataloged, so that their gradual disappearance over many years remained unnoticed. **It is evident that negative trends, such as a downward turn portending further trouble, are being covered in traditional media, including well-known magazines, radio programs, and TV channels, in the same way that advancing thunderstorms and near-catastrophes are reported. Consumers of these accounts already view the art market as “shady” and have always considered million-dollar sales to be somewhat suspect.** Yet in fact, galleries are not closing; on the contrary, many players are investing or have recently invested. Furthermore, the ambition of art fair organizers was not dampened by the summer crisis; it grew. *Frieze* attempted to surpass the normally more successful *Art Basel* by acquiring the *Armory Show* in New York and *Expo Chicago*. In early September 2023, *Frieze* opened for the second time in Seoul. Warsaw announced the inauguration of its first art fair on September 8. Today, every major gallery has tens of thousands of followers on *Instagram*, and they don't seem inclined to acknowledge conceivable moments of crisis. **The digital subscribers of Artnet are provided with three to five new reports on the art market almost daily and learn through numerous interviews who is currently particularly successful. There are few losers.** One exception is Lisa Schiff, who over the years apparently defrauded the clients she served as an art advisor to the tune of millions of dollars. In other digital media as well, there are hyperactive reports on the latest sales, combined with claims of societal recognition. Rising above this almost ubiquitous art hysteria, Lucas Zwirner, who works as a publisher for his father's New York gallery, expressed his love for Michael Ende's literary character “Momo.” The famous story of the child who returns stolen time to people represents for him an essential aspect not only of the art world. There, nothing and no one is enough, except perhaps for a few minutes. Real moments of peace and quiet enjoyment are almost nonexistent. Museums make an honest effort, although in New York, the \$30 admission prices put inordinate stress on many visitors.

Today, the best museum exhibitions offering surprising assemblages of highly qualified groups of works are increasingly provided by the most financially successful galleries. This has been the case in Zurich since June 9 with “The God that Failed: Louise Bourgeois, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko” at *Hauser & Wirth*. The exhibition presents Bourgeois’s early sculptures in such density that ideas of reparation, which are almost dogmatically advocated in many museums today, speak for themselves through these works alone. Bourgeois had never been able to show her early works alongside the works of major white men in American post-war art during her lifetime. In hindsight, and not just in Zurich, she stands as a winner. **The concept of crisis, which we have been living with not only since the summer, has, loosely speaking, less and less to do with whether the glass is half full or half empty. Today, the glass is three-quarters full, almost overflowing. Supposedly there is a crisis, but in reality, what we have is intense competition and a strong redistribution caused by generational changes.** Voices from the periphery, far outside the glass, have become quiet. Understandably, the art world is now devoted to a search for a presumed center and a clarification of today’s (and certainly not yesterday’s) perspective. Take the entertainment genius Simon de Pury, for example. He is a prodigy, a tireless, always refined and quietly charming womanizer, a constant traveler who immediately sends photos from his new locations, which are almost without exception places of art, whether it’s Monaco, the *Kunstmuseum Basel*, or now Seoul. As the great American poet Robert Lax once put it in words that could apply to him: “A tiger is like a butterfly. Here today, gone tomorrow.” De Pury is still very active, whether as an auctioneer, seller, or communicator about art. His age is unknown. He was born in 1951 but remains eternally young. His biography, “The Auctioneer,” published in 2016, contained delicate aperçus, all written by himself, on nearly every page. In mid-August of this year, he chose to write about Larry Gagosian, the most famous art dealer for decades, and to elevate him into the role of Old Shatterhand, the inveterate frontiersman in the adventure novels of Karl May: “An extraordinary eye, exquisite taste, immense charm (when he chooses to use it), combined with a killer instinct for business and the fiercest competitive spirit of all time, allowed him to forge the undoubtedly sexiest brand in the art market.” **The field of today’s art history with its usually short-lived heroes and heroines has fundamentally changed due to social media, a wealth of digital information, and what Max Weber in his standard work “Economy and Society” called “constellations of conditions.”** Both actors and conditions in the art world thus require an almost constant scrutiny of events. Art history has become an “action science” in this regard. What remains unspoken is that the most important value is the quality of the works of art themselves; for it is almost only art that, like love, returns to us the time we all too easily waste with false ambition.

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