

FINANCIAL TIMES
how to
spend it

ART | DIARY OF A SOMEBODY

Art adviser Lisa Schiff,
Day 1

The president of Schiff Fine Art fields a jam-packed day of meetings and show previews ahead of Frieze New York
MAY 2016



This morning I sleep through my alarm. Panicked, I hurry to get dressed before my son wakes up. I throw on an old Balenciaga top, new Balenciaga jeans with some knee-high Céline boots and an old Rick Owens leather jacket-meets-raincoat. I toss my phone, backup charger and magic pen into my bag. My hair is a disaster, so I throw it up in a bun and run.

I jump in the car with my driver of 10 years, Abraham. He is family. He takes care of me and his wife is my son's nanny. We are headed to Midtown. I have a meeting with Bettina Korek, who today is functioning as the president of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and is conducting a survey about the cultural landscape in the region. Bettina is a very close friend, so before we get started with the interview, we are happy to catch up, gossip and talk about boys.

Afterwards, I head to Bushwick. There is a show opening tonight at Clearing gallery and I know I won't make it later, so I squeeze in an early visit. I am happy to run into owner Olivier Babin. He gives me a tour of Zak Kitnick's show and Aaron Garber-Maikovska's video – both are very cool and I am happy I made the trek.

I rush back to the Upper East Side to one of my client's homes. Candy Barasch is hosting a VIP group for Frieze and we have invited Sanya Kantarovsky and Josh Kline to come, as their work is prominent in the current hang. Front and centre stands an imposing Teletubby by Kline from the last iteration of the New Museum Triennial.

It's a great turnout and I speak a bit about the collection and the hostess. An adviser is only as good as the clients he or she can work with. Candy is the dream because she is daring, trusting and committed. We have worked together for more than 10 years; she has followed me down some crazy paths and I am so lucky to be able to work with her.

Next, another great client is in the neighbourhood and wants to preview auctions, so we check out Sotheby's. I have been test driving an app called Magnus that functions like Shazam, only for art, and we enjoy instantly pulling up previous auction history for works we are considering.

I have now missed a Downtown meeting that I have had scheduled forever with an eco-friendly philanthropist from London. My new business partner Lauri Firstenberg, who founded non-profit LAXART, has just landed from LA, so she takes over for me with my business development guru, Isaac Joseph. They scheme up an interesting collaborative project that we will tackle post-Frieze.

Then senior advisers Andrea Lounibos and Maya McLaughlin arrive from the West Coast and we go over our Frieze strategy. Fairs are never fun for me. They stress me out because there are always so many moving parts, but I just try to take a lot of deep breaths.

Next we pick up the woman who was my very first client, Tristin Mannion, who is in from Boston. I would absolutely never have entered art advising if it hadn't been for this amazing friend, mother of five, powerhouse philanthropist and art collector. We head over to the New Museum and check out shows from Andra Ursuta, Nicole Eisenman and Goshka Macuga. We run into Artforum magazine's Linda Yablonsky, who says, "Three floors, three amazing women artists and so many dicks". I laugh out loud and carry on.

We run to the Whitney to catch Steve McQueen's show there, Open Plan. I recently listened to a discussion of the work between McQueen and Dr Cornel West – a former Harvard professor who my business partner Lauri had the good fortune to study with. I am still thinking about him. In the art world, it's very easy to get caught up in the bottom line and forget how art pushes us to think

beyond the superficial and makes visible the complex relations within which we have to exist. That's what happens with Kline's new work at 47 Canal and that's what happens with McQueen's work here.

We join the artist, representatives from his galleries, Whitney curator Donna De Salvo and director Adam Weinberg for dinner. My favourite person, Martine d'Anglejan-Chatillon of Thomas Dane Gallery, is there and she drags me into a fascinating conversation with Alex Poots from Culture Shed and formerly of the Manchester International Festival. People like him are why I have changed the direction of my company. Today a few articles came out describing my new venture with Lauri, *There-There*, which will help galleries and institutions to produce and fundraise for their dream projects. I am trying to look towards the future and Poots for sure is the poster child for the future in visual culture.

Day 2

A pre-Frieze VIP party and a Steve McQueen dinner at the Whitney for the president of Schiff Fine Art

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Day 3

Eye-catching works at the first day of Frieze New York have the president of Schiff Fine Art hard at work for her clients

No need for my alarm today. My son has a bad cough and can't sleep, so he climbs into bed with me at about 2am. At 3am, he decides that we have to go to his bed and yes, I have to squeeze onto the single mattress with him. At 4am, Sha, the night nanny, helps me escape and trades places with me.

Once up, I make a coffee and grab a coffee coconut water to help double up on caffeine. Today is the VIP opening of Frieze New York. I am always stressed on fair opening days. At 7am, I jump in the shower and then try to get dressed. Nothing is working. I finally decide on a white Tome blouse and the same Balenciaga jeans as yesterday. I grab some Lanvin booties and a new *There-There* tote bag that Lauri Firstenberg has insisted on making for our company launch. There is not enough room here to discuss the psychology of Lauri's tote bag obsession, but I gave in to it a long time ago...

This morning we have two clients hosting VIP breakfasts at the same time. Not sure how this happened, but we divide and conquer. Lauri and I go together to breakfast number one at the first client's house, which looks beautiful today. I feel pride at watching the guests check out the art. My favourite work here is a stunning bronze Sarah Lucas sculpture that is perched atop concrete bricks.

Lauri hangs back and I run over to breakfast number two, where a lot of the guests are commenting on another sculpture by Lucas – a smoking cherub comprised entirely of cigarettes that we placed on the edge of a grand piano.

It's time to head to the fair. We enter with the VIPs at 11am and hit it. I am with Candy Barasch and young Jack Siebert, an NYU student from LA who is cooler than cool. Our first stop is David Kordansky from LA, where I am taken with a ceramic Mai-Thu Perret sculpture of a woman holding a machine gun. I really want someone to buy this, but cannot twist any arms this morning. The next thing that catches my eye is a group of Nicole Eisenman sculptures at Anton Kern Gallery.

At Gavin Brown's booth, I am awestruck by a massive Alex Katz painting. It's amazing and I really want to place it. Katz is 88 years old and making some of the best paintings of his career. Of course, it is on reserve. I learn that this person has two works on hold and will decide between them shortly. The stylish and beautiful gallery director Lucy Chadwick pulls out her iPad; when I ask to see the other one that's on reserve, I like it even more. I put a back-up reserve on whichever work their client passes on and then sell one of their Rob Pruitt Suicide Paintings to a collector in Los Angeles who I have dragged out of bed for the call.

At about 1.30pm, I peel off and meet Frieze ops whiz Molly McIver to help a super-VIP client enter through a side door. Once the client arrives, with some friends, I spend a few hours with them. We like Goshka Macuga's work at Andrew Kreps Gallery and Isa Genzken's work at David Zwirner and at Daniel Buchholz. My client is really impressed with a David Wojnarowicz installation at PPOW, from 1983. He has a super-interesting eye and I learn a lot from him. I never would have stopped to look at this, and it might be the best thing at the fair. Finally they leave and I hang back to meet up with some other clients in the VIP lounge.

I sit down with friend and client Tristin Mannion from Boston and adviser Andrea Lounibos from Portland, who has worked for me for almost 10 years. I am happy because it's time for a glass of wine. I am starting to relax at last. We decide that we need to head out and have an early dinner together.

My driver Abraham takes us to Larry Gagosian's Japanese restaurant Kappo Masa. Tristin's friend Monique Nerrow from Boston and my business consultant Isaac Joseph join us. We sit at the sushi bar, drink sake and have an amazing

meal. I can barely keep my eyes open. I have missed my son's Facetime goodnight call and feel sad, but I get a gorgeous photo of him sleeping.

Lauri is staying with me, so when I get home we curl up on the couch in our jammies with the dogs and download our days. We are both exhausted and soon hit the pillows. There's another long day ahead tomorrow.

Day 4

A sprint around some galleries with an old friend and client is followed by a spirited talk at Frieze New York

People who don't drink coffee annoy me. This is what is going through my mind as I press the brew button on my Nespresso machine. I wake up early enough to catch up on emails. I go through printouts of them, making notes throughout, and have them taken to the office for my amazing assistant Paige Robinson to execute on my behalf. I almost never go to the office and so it's not easy keeping me on point, but she does a great job. All day long while I am out and about, she texts me so that I know what's going on and makes sure that I am returning key phone calls and keeping appointments.

Today, I am meeting Tristin Mannion – an Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston trustee and client – for a few morning stops until she heads to the airport. I've mentioned that Tristin and I go way back. She and her husband have five amazing children and for a long time I used to travel with them on family vacations. The last one that I was invited to was in Mustique, where a scavenger hunt turned into a strange tequila-filled day of reckless driving in golf carts. I will stop there, but needless to say, I haven't been invited to a family vacation since. But at least we have a lot to laugh about.

We go to Matthew Marks Gallery to view sculptures by Ron Nagle, an artist she recently began collecting. We first spend time looking at the Ken Price watercolour show downstairs, which is spectacular. And while we are waiting for director Jacqueline Tran to meet us, we both notice the coolest print from 1969 – a collaboration between Ed Ruscha and Price depicting a group of flies and frogs. I love it and now see the connections between these two southern California artists when revisiting the watercolours.

Jacqueline fetches us and we go upstairs. This gallery always feels a bit secretive. There are many private rooms and usually goodies hiding in all of them. I glimpse a Charles Ray installation in one and an Anne Truitt in another. Our room contains two of the yummiest Nagles I have yet to encounter. It's a great problem when you have to choose something and both examples are exceptional. We can't decide, and so call ICA curator Dan Byers to weigh in. Tristin works very closely with him, as well as chief curator Eva Respini, and I am fortunate to participate in their collaboration. Often collectors who are significant board members would choose not to work with an adviser, since they have access to the curators at their institution, but Tristin, who might be one of the single most generous human beings I know (although I wish she would invite me to Mustique again), loves working as a team and in the end marches to the beat of her own drum regardless of what any of us say.

Once finished, we trek over to the Lower East Side to see Josh Kline at 47 Canal. We run into the artist there and get a tour of the show and a discussion of his video regarding the idea of universal basic income. I always enjoy what Kline has to say, as he is a rigorous thinker.

Isaac Joseph, a consultant I work with and a friend of Tristin's, meets with us. I have to run back to the fair now and Tristin has to go to the airport, but Dan Byers wants her to check out the Sadie Benning show at Callicoon, so she and Isaac peel off to do that while I rush on to Randall's Island. I am speaking at Frieze with writer Melanie Gerlis and UK adviser Nicholas Campbell about collecting at different financial levels. We have a fun and spirited discussion; I adore the young, smart and handsome Nicholas and admire very much what he is doing – working with collectors who spend around \$15,000 and under.

Next stop is the Park Avenue Armory, where I do a quick spin of the Spring Masters fair with a client. We spy some turn-of-the-century design objects and I rely on our adviser Maya McLaughlin to help me value them, as she has more experience there than I do. I then hop over to the St Regis for three meetings: one with my new employee Marika Kielland, whose Norwegian father I have the pleasure of meeting for the first time; the second with my partner Lauri Firstenberg and a potential new client; and thirdly with a South African collector who owns a painting I am in the process of selling.

Then I am meant to go to Ugo Rondinone's studio, to Luxembourg & Dayan's opening and to a dinner for the opening of a show featuring the late French artist César, but my son is not feeling great and is asking for me, so I cancel the

rest of my evening and head home to snuggle. I fall asleep with him by accident and the night nanny has to come in and wake me up. Sadly, I had a phone meeting with my psychic that I slept through – yes I have one, and she’s really good! I email her to apologise and reschedule and then crawl into my own bed and pass out. Tomorrow is another long day.

Day 5

The president of Schiff Fine Art’s working weekend is filled with exciting sales as auction week begins

Friday morning kicks off well with a great meeting with gallerist Pilar Corrias and Frances Morris, the new director of Tate Modern, both in from London. My business partner Lauri Firstenberg joins us and we learn about an amazing project in the works that we will fundraise for. It’s the kind of project that is so fantastic that we’ll go to the mat to help make it happen.

Afterwards Lauri and I say our goodbyes, as we are headed in different directions and then she must go back to LA. I rush off to Brooklyn for a studio visit with artist Sanya Kantarovsky and a collector in town from LA. I think Sanya is this generation’s Peter Doig. He is incredibly smart – a true intellectual with a deep understanding of Russian history in particular. Every time I meet him, I am further convinced. We focus a bit on his animations and his plans for the future. He takes us to the coolest Mexican hole-in-the-wall for lunch – a tiny restaurant hidden at the back of an all-Mexican bodega in Gowanus. We are definitely the only gringos here.

We rush back to Manhattan and I meet another client at Mnuchin Gallery on the Upper East Side, where the stunning Sukanya Rajaratnam walks us through the David Hammons show. We are blown away and happy to see the exhibition, as we might bid on something coming up at auction. We then hit Gagolian Gallery and catch the Warhol Little Electric Chairs show at Venus Over Manhattan. From there, it’s home for me. I can’t keep my eyes open through a gallery dinner.

Saturday gets turned on its head as I realise that the auctions start Sunday night and I am not prepared. My intention of attending Dia’s spring benefit lunch in Beacon is thwarted and I spend the day revisiting the auction previews. Mostly I am focused on Christie’s Bound to Fail sale, organised by Loic Gouzer. There are a lot of works here that I love, and I get in touch with my clients to discuss opportunities and strategies.

Before the day is over, I drag a client who is in from out of town to see the Jordan Wolfson robot installation (Female Figure) 2014 at David Zwirner on 19th Street. It is the talk of the town and a must see, so I am very excited. We are blown away and slightly disturbed by it – I am still digesting it all and hope to do a studio visit the next time I am in LA. Then we get a tour of the Sigmar Polke show and stop in to say hello to David Zwirner himself.

I head home to a house full of people – my 22-year-old fashion-crazed niece Morgan and my chef Amelia are hanging out with my son. Jennifer Arceneaux, a development genius who I know from her days at MOCA LA and Sundance, stops by to catch up. By this time, my son has removed all of his clothing and is now “wagging his tail” and showing off his dance moves.

I was planning on having a quiet night at home again, but instead my oldest friend from childhood, Rachel Rosen, and I make a last-minute plan to go to dinner. We grew up in South Miami together and she also lives in New York. We cosy up to the bar at Locanda Verde, drink too much wine and laugh about the matching hot-pink satin jumpsuits we wore to her sister’s bat mitzvah, where we performed a song with our guitars – neither of us can remember what we sang, only what we were wearing.

Sunday, I spend as much quality time with my son as possible. We have a great morning chilling with cartoons, building train sets and finally baking a Mother’s Day cake.

The day is cut short because there are not one but two auctions this evening, and I have also committed to filming for the BBC’s documentary about Christie’s to mark its 250th anniversary. I get there early and we do the interview on film. I have enough time now to revisit the Christie’s sale. I am really excited about a few things, and make last-minute phone calls on the works that are rumoured to be soft.

The sale does fantastically well and I am excited because we were able to obtain some of the works that we hoped for. Afterwards, we have a celebratory dinner and finally the long fair week is over, though the auctions have only just kicked off. Again, another busy week beckons.