

Condo 2018

Chloe Stead reviews the preview weekend of the third London edition of the now famous collaborative exhibition Condo and spoke to the participants about their motivations.

Working my way around London's third edition of [Condo](#) last weekend, I asked all the gallerists I spoke to the same two-part question: why are you taking part and what do you hope to gain from the experience? The best reply by far was from Zurich-based Gregor Staiger who answered with three words: "Money, fame and desperation." He may have only been half joking; 2017 saw the [closure](#) of four significant galleries (Ibid Gallery, Limoncello, Vilma Gold and Wilkinson Gallery) in London alone, while there were similar losses in both Berlin and New York. With the majority of sales now taking place at art fairs, brick and mortar spaces, especially in cities with expensive real estate such as London, appear to be increasingly untenable.

Since its inception in 2016, Condo, founded by Vanessa Carlos (of [Carlos/Ishikawa](#) in London), has been posited as a possible solution to this problem. The format is simple: this year 17 'host' galleries shared their London spaces with 27 international galleries, with no fee for participating beyond splitting exhibition costs. While many enthusiastic arts journalists have spoken of the 'innovative' nature of Condo, in reality the initiative's success relies on making explicit an already existing community and utilising a dead month in the art calendar. One contributing dealer reminded me that not only is there a long tradition of self-organised, international space swaps, but that galleries also often collaborate internationally to structure prices and secure institutional exhibitions for their shared artists.



For gallerist [Rob Tufnell](#), Condo is an opportunity for “maintaining and cementing relationships... formalising something that happens already”. Accordingly, he shared his Lambeth space with his old friends from the Viennese gallery [Croy Nielsen](#). Together, they showed three artists from their respective programs alongside Elke Krystufek, whose portraits of Egon Schiele, Wagner and Jesus worked terrifically opposite Marlie Mul’s series of nude self-portraits, which are painted onto half a canvas – with many figures sporting extra sets of breasts – and then folded to create a mirrored print of the original. Ruth Ewan’s ongoing project, *A Jukebox of People Trying to Change the World* (2003-), offered a fitting soundtrack to this show of female artists reckoning with their place in a male-dominated

art world – from classic sing-along anthems to tracks by the uber cool, all-female, post-punk band Savages.

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London spaces with more square meters to fill tended to work with a combination of galleries with which they had prior relationships as well as those suggested by Carlos. [Maureen Paley](#), for instance, split her two-storey building equally between Brussel's [dépendance](#), with whom she shares several artists, and Mexican newcomers [joségarcía.mx](#). The former showed a series of frantic abstractions by Maria Eichwald and the latter ceramic vases and wall paintings by Eduardo Sarabia. The vases, *Untitled (Jitomate)* and *Untitled (Banana)* (both 2017), were surprisingly some of the only explicitly political works I saw during Condo, featuring drawings that came out of conversations the artist had with residents on the Mexico/US border. They were displayed amongst boxes hand-painted to look like food crates for their namesakes, perfect for (theoretically) smuggling the artworks between countries.



[Greengrassi](#) and [Corvi-Mora](#) (who alternate between two spaces in the same building) also worked with galleries both previously known and unknown to them, including New York's [Lomex](#), and seemed genuinely delighted with the resulting group show. "This is why we do what we do," Tommaso Corvi-Mora, the director of Corvi-Mora, told me. "It's not to show in a booth at a conference center." Like a number of people I spoke to, Corvi-Mora has purposefully cut down his participation in art fairs over the past few years and praised Condo for promoting a "slower, more considered way of looking at art". In Greengrassi/Corvi-Mora's downstairs space, the willfully kitsch paintings of twenty-four-year-old American artist Kye Christensen-Knowles, which take their lead from nineteenth century heroic painting, rubbed shoulders with brooding ink drawings by Japanese avant-garde artist Tatsuo Ikeda, similarly foreboding Aquaprints from Guatemalan-born Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa and ceramics suggestive of male body parts by fellow American John Lindell, who was involved in the AIDS activist/artist collective Gran Fury in the late 1990s. This is the allure of a collaborative model like Condo: Lomex, a small but ambitious gallery

based out of Eva Hesse's old studio on the Bowery, can be transplanted to a setting with a history almost as old as some of their artists.



Another gallery that probably couldn't believe their luck was Glasgow's

[Koppe Astner](#), which was given a gallery-within-a-gallery – complete with an office – at [Sadie Coles](#) HQ’s prestigious Mayfair location. They more than rose to the occasion, though, with a joint exhibition by Josh Faught and Kris Lemsalu, both of whom use a combination of handmade and found objects and textiles. I was particularly taken by Lemsalu’s sculpture *Mysteriously conceived and deeply felt* (2018), a figure comprising multiple casts of the artist’s mother’s feet and two pairs of oversized lips swaddled in patterned fabric, which brought to mind not only the Madonna, but also the many-limbed Hindu goddesses Kali Ma, who is fittingly nicknamed ‘Mother of the Universe’.

For Koppe Astner’s co-founder Emma Astner, Condo offers “an opportunity to expand our audience” with a “feasible [financial] risk”, a sentiment that was repeated throughout the weekend. None of the people I spoke to thought that models like Condo would (or could) ultimately replace art fairs, but they were hopeful when it came to sales and visibly less stressed than they would be at, say, Frieze or Art Basel, because they had nothing to lose and everything to gain by participating.



Nearing the end of the opening hours on Sunday, I visited [Union Pacific](#) and received a quick tour of the exhibition from co-founder Nigel Dunkley, who hosted [ChertLüdde](#) (Berlin), [Misako & Rosen](#) (Tokyo) and [Gregor Staiger Galerie](#) (Zurich). When I stopped in front of Koak's *The Gift* (2017) a strikingly idiosyncratic graphite and casein drawing of an impossibly proportioned female nude, he told me that he had discovered Koak on [Instagram](#) and this was the first time showing her at the gallery. Presenting the work of a largely unknown artist might be a risky move for an art fair, but was a possibility at Condo, which gives galleries the welcome opportunity to deviate from the expectations associated with their usual program. Dunkley's nontraditional discovery of a promising new artist also reminded me that galleries are constantly adapting, not only to survive, but out of curiosity and sometimes for the sheer joy of it.

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[Various locations](#)

13.1. – 10.2.2018

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– *For more background information on Condo, get your copy of the latest [issue](#) of Spike featuring a round table on "[The Death and Life of the Art Gallery](#)" including Vanessa Carlos –*













