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ART

Gallery gathering

38 fine-art exhibitors from across U.S. head to Dallas Art Fair

By **GAILE ROBINSON**
Special Contributor

The trucks parked radiator-to-ramp along Akard Street in Dallas are usually disgorging racks of silks and spandex. Earlier this week, they were in their usual place, but what was coming off the trucks were acrylics, oils and bronzes. The inaugural Dallas Art Fair was moving into the Fashion Industry Gallery, a multistory building of wholesale apparel showrooms next to the Dallas Museum of Art.

The three-day fair of modern, postwar and contemporary art is scheduled to open at 11 a.m. Friday.

Despite the fall in art prices at re-



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Artists David Brown (right) and Bill Crowley assemble a sculpture.

cent auctions and seismic tremors in the economy, 38 galleries from across the nation are betting there is money to made selling fine art in Dallas.

There are regional art fairs, nation-

al art fairs and the megafair, Art Basel, which began in 1970 in Switzerland. It became such a huge international

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A fair deal for galleries

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event that Art Basel Miami Beach was launched in 2002. The location seemed to be magic. It attracted more than 250 galleries, the international art crowd, partygoers from many lands, and in a few short years the December gathering became so bloated with ancillary festivities that it began to spin off its axis.

The recipe of warm locale in winter, a fashionable setting and an unjaded public seemed ripe to Dallas entrepreneurs with affection for art.

John Sughrue, the Dallas-based developer of Museum Tower and Fashion Industry Gallery, and art dealer Christopher Byrne began talking three years ago about replicating Basel in Texas. They planned, they invited, they launched, and then the economy took a nosedive.

They are undaunted. Sughrue says bringing the galleries to the audience is a better retail tool than waiting in the gallery office for customers to arrive.

The gallery owners seem to agree. They signed contracts months ago, and none has pulled out of the fair. They are coming from New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Santa Fe, N.M., Austin, Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth.

The Thomas Segal Gallery in Baltimore signed on for two locations, one on each floor of the exhibition space. Segal says



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The display area at the Fashion Industry Gallery will show artworks rather than apparel for a three-day fair.

Plan your life

The Dallas Art Fair runs Friday through Sunday at Fashion Industry Gallery, 1807 Ross Ave. Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday. One-day pass, \$15 to \$20; three-day pass, \$30 to \$40. 214-220-1278. www.dallasartfair.com.

he packed more than 150 pieces priced from \$1,000 to just shy of \$1 million, bearing names such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly, Joseph Cornell and Roy Lichtenstein.

Dan Blagg, co-owner of Fort Worth's Artspace 111, has been to numerous art fairs and he, too, decided a trek to Dallas was better than sitting at home even if the weekend demanded

a five-digit commitment.

One thing a conclave of galleries offers is variety. Blagg says visitors can expect "sub-compact, some fuel-efficient vehicles and some luxury sedans. There'll also be some great stuff, some not so great stuff and some downright awful stuff. There will be everything, and that's the beauty. If you want to see a bunch of art, an art fair is the place to go."

Although the exhibition spaces are temporary, an art fair is not a souk. Haggling is considered bad form; it is OK to ask a lot of questions. Knowing there will be a number of first-time art fair attendees and experienced buyers, Byrne is adding events to enlighten both groups. There are two symposiums scheduled, and exhibiting artists will be giving tours.