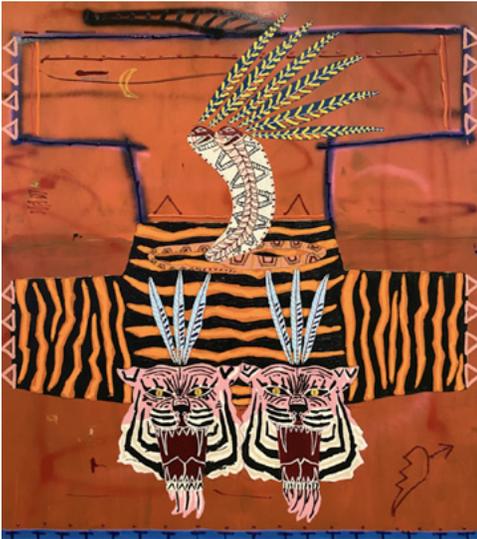


The Rise of Naive Art

How the market success of Robert Nava created space (and taste) for Jordy Kerwick



Left: Jordy Kerwick, *Le Tigre*, 2020, **Record Price:** \$277,200, **House:** Sotheby's New York, **Date:** March 11, 2022; **Right:** Robert Nava, *Frozen Bark*, 2021, **Record Price:** \$651,639, **House:** Sotheby's London, **Date:** March 2, 2022

IF TWO ARTISTS CAN BE CALLED a movement, then there's a new movement popular among collectors. Call it Naive Art. Combining the spray-painted immediacy of graffiti, or street art, with a child-like fascination with wild and imaginary animals (often with two heads) artists Robert Nava and Jordy Kerwick have come to similar styles from strikingly different directions.

Both artists are passing important but different career milestones. Nava just opened his first show with Pace Gallery at their Hanover Square outpost in London. This inaugurates his representation by a global gallery. At the same time, Kerwick's work is emerging on the auction market much as Nava's did two years ago.

In LiveArt's view, the Kerwick market is a direct outgrowth of Nava's market. As Nava's prices rose on the public and private markets, attention from a distinct group of collectors shifted to Kerwick. The migration was not coordinated or planned. This report will try to sketch out the connections we see between the two artists and how their markets have grown separately but in seemingly interrelated ways.

"Kerwick makes a kind of young, punky art with a hardcore aesthetic," says George O'Dell, LiveArt's Executive Vice President, "that plays into a path that other artist's markets have followed. There's a couple of other artists in this narrative like Robert Nava and Katherine Bernhardt that quickly speak to a whole group of collectors."

O'Dell takes the analysis one step further to point out that aesthetics are not the only connectors here. Much like the market for KAWS that first emerged in public markets four years ago, these artists spent a number of years appearing in group shows or being represented by small galleries. Around all three, KAWS, Nava and Kerwick, a distinct in-group of collectors developed often trading works among themselves. Then a few influential dealers built the market among the uninitiated.

Nava, Not Naive

The common theme between Kerwick and Nava is this idea of naive art. But one artist is naive in the sense that he is self-taught. The other is faux naive, having created a style that is informed by his formal training. Nava has a Yale MFA.

Indiana-born, Brooklyn-based artist Nava took nearly a decade after graduating Yale in 2011 to emerge as a sought-after artist. The fantasy animals first showed up at NADA Miami and at the Dallas Art Fair displayed at the booth of Los Angeles's Night Gallery, where he also had a 2019 solo exhibition. In early 2020, the Art Institute of Chicago acquired four works on paper by Nava. Whether the donations were a

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nava made three six-figure results in his first auction season. His debut lot was *The Tunnel*. It sold in 2019 for \$162,000 at Phillips in New York. That was quadruple the low estimate.
- In March 2022, Nava's *Frozen Bark*, 2021 sold for more than eight times its low estimate, achieving a price of \$651,639 at Sotheby's in London. Nava's top three prices at auction are all for works created within three (but as little as one) year after they were created.
- In just over five years, Kerwick has been included in 41 group and 18 solo shows, an incredible output for an artist who only started producing in earnest in 2016.
- Kerwick's first auction sale in May 2020 for *Sans Cigarette*, a still-life painting from 2019 made \$11,352. Just shy of two years later another still life painting, *Cool Cats*, would sell for \$114,387 setting off a flurry of lots culminating at a \$277,200 record for *Le Tigre*.

condition of a gallery sale or not, isn't clear. Somewhat paradoxically, these donations launched his work at auction.

Nava's market grew from a core audience of impassioned collectors to a broader base of prominent collectors like Miami's John Marquez and Peter Scantland of Columbus, Ohio.

A public market ensued. In the last six months, his auction prices have reached progressive new highs. Nava made three six-figure results in his first auction season. His debut lot was *The Tunnel*. It sold in 2019 for \$162,000 at Phillips in New York. That was quadruple the low estimate. In November of 2020, amidst Nava's slew of impressive first-season results, Pace Gallery announced it would represent the artist. Pace subsequently held two solo exhibitions of Nava's work in 2021, one in Palm Beach in January and the second in East Hampton in August. Also in 2021, Vito Schnabel Gallery announced its joint representation of Nava. Schnabel held a solo exhibition of Nava's work in New York that ran February through April.

Kerwick Picks Up A Paint Brush

There is a class of collectors who seek out artists whose markets lack structure, support and control (usually in the form of a substantial gallery.) Their goal is to acquire work early and sell into demand as the artist's reputation grows. In this view, as Nava began to be represented by Pace gallery, supply became increasingly constrained by the presence of a global gallery.

Kerwick became a viable alternative especially because he grew his audience through Instagram and then monetized it with direct sales and numerous gallery collaborations.

On the face of it, Kerwick is an unlikely success story. An Australian who lives in the heart of the heart of the French countryside with his academically-trained painter partner, he has no gallery guiding his rise, but his work is highly sought-after by collectors.

It's not just where the demand is coming from but who is buying and promoting his work. Sofia Richie, the daughter of Lionel Richie, showed

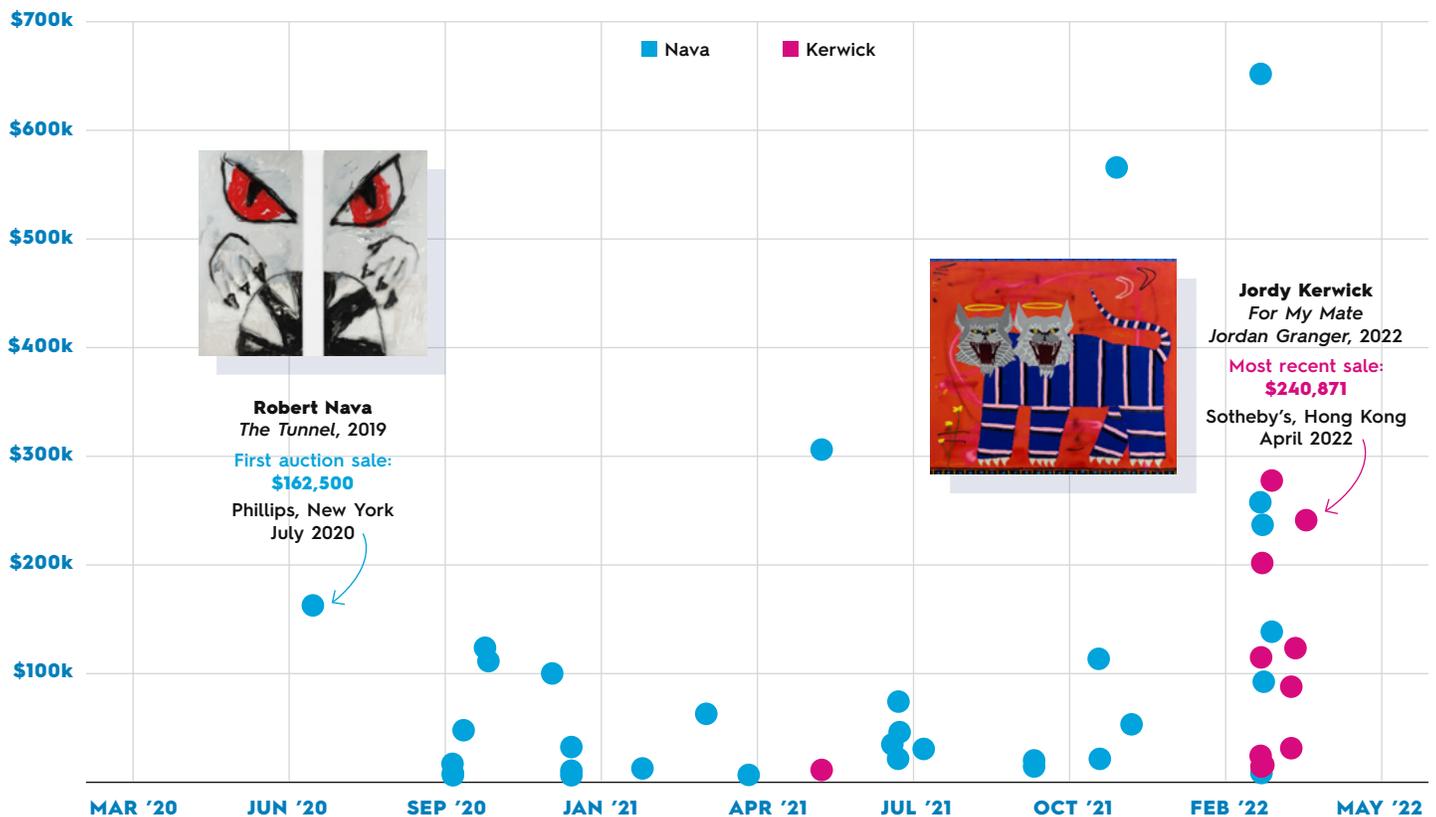
off Kerwick's work to her 7 million Instagram followers in November by taking a four-shot carousel of the Olsen twins' New York store for their fashion brand, The Row. It culminates in a large Kerwick work on display. Richie is no idle wannabe here. Richie has a Kerwick of her own. She and the Olsens are both advised by Vito Schnabel who has been pushing Kerwick.

It's not just the social-media famous and the famous famous who are buying either. Richard Prince—a canny collector himself who previously bought work by Genieve Figgis and helped turn her into a market darling—has also bought Kerwick's work. Kerwick's work is now in demand across the archipelago of art collectors on the West and East coasts of the US, in Europe and increasingly across Asia.

Although Jordy Kerwick says he's drawn all his life, he only began actually painting in the beginning of 2016. Before that, Kerwick was a bit of a guy's guy, making a living in music and married to the painter Rachel, who goes by Ces, McCully. Naive painters

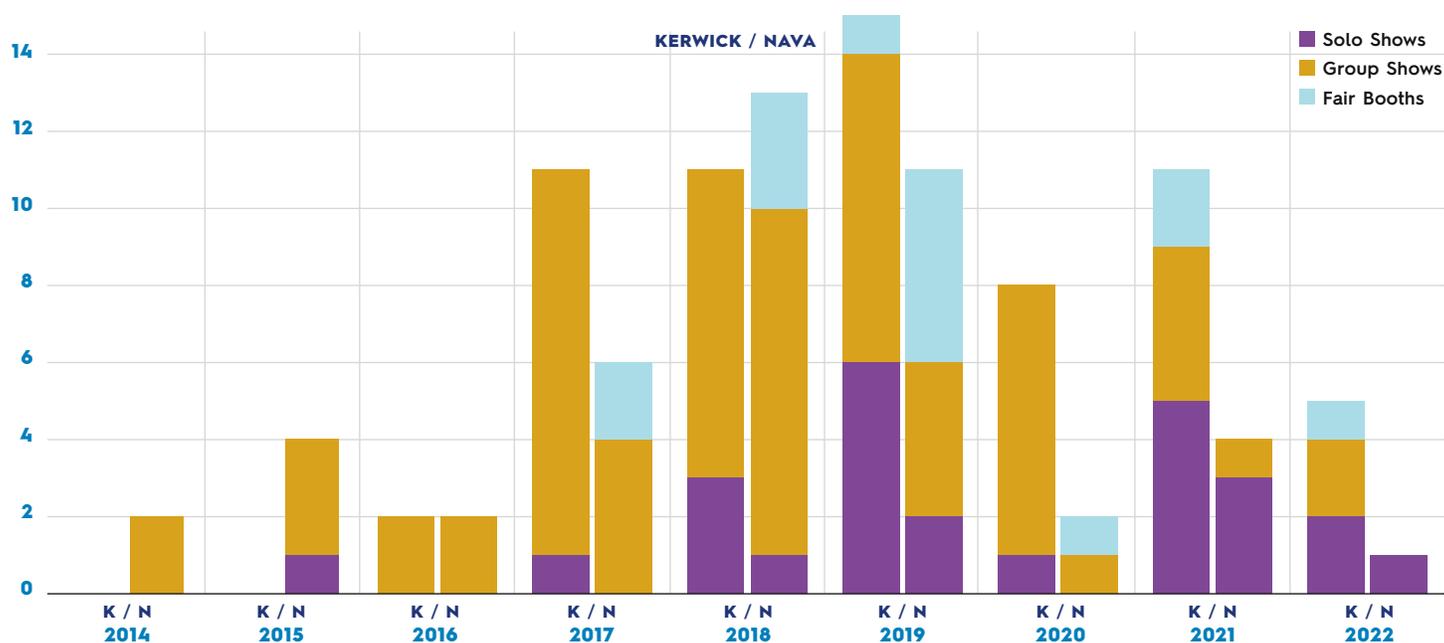
NAVA AND KERWICK SALES, 2020-2022

Nava had a flurry of sales in 2020, all below \$200,000. In May 2021, Kerwick came to auction just as Nava set a record at \$305,799 putting his paintings on a **blistering trajectory toward the current record of \$651,639** in 2022 thus making space for Kerwick to control the sub \$300,000 market.



KERWICK AND NAVA EXHIBITION HISTORY

Robert Nava's career spans much of the past decade graduating from Yale's MFA in 2011 but social media star **Jordy Kerwick** has navigated his work into almost double the number of group and solo shows.



usually have a distinctive, autograph kind of style. But Kerwick's work seems to have migrated in a relatively short amount of time from a flat still-life style reminiscent of Jonas Wood and now Hillary Pecis to a naive, graffiti-like style that seems beholden to Robert Nava to finally settling into distinctive fantasy animals often with two heads.

Five years isn't a long time in an artist's output. But Kerwick hasn't been holding back. Nor has his short career or substantial output held him back. Instagram put him in touch with a range of gallerists around the world that led to having his work included in group shows.

Instagram also seems to have been a venue for his own sales. He takes care to feature frequent views of his studio which gives everyone and anyone a sense of the works in progress there. Some collectors report that Kerwick was easy to approach and accommodating when they wanted to acquire multiple examples of his work directly from the studio. Depending on your point of view, Kerwick is either being democratic by making his work so widely available to see and to buy, or he's dangling the work in front of speculators.

Kerwick's market has been built somewhat on the experience of other market-oriented artists who produced a substantial volume of work and allowed speculators to freely participate. In Kerwick's case, his work is available from so many different sources—dozens of galleries seem to be offering the work or holding shows—because he's



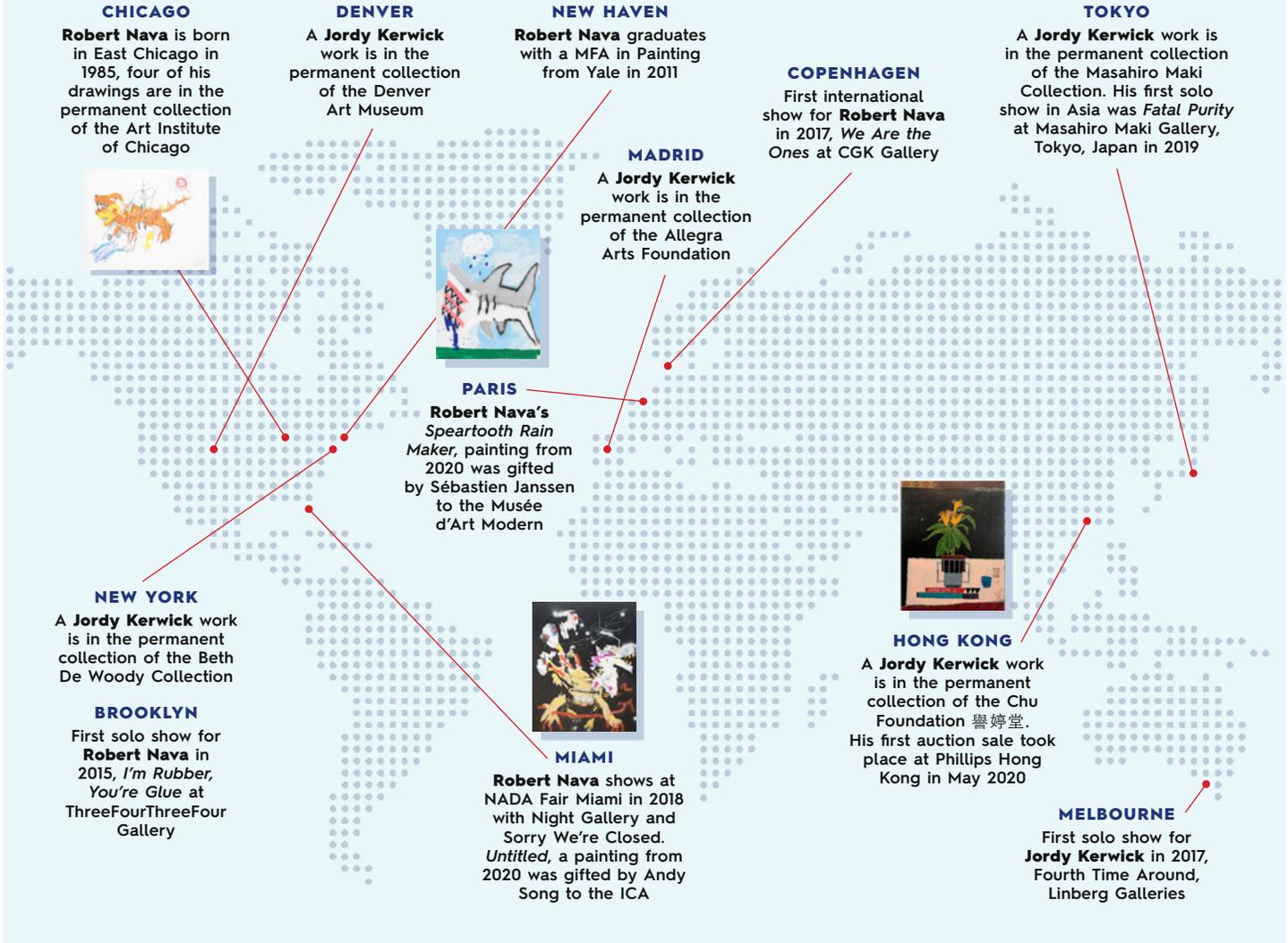
Jordy Kerwick in the home and on the Instagram account of collector Ronald Harrar

had no single gallery managing his market. Like any ambitious artist, he's been eager to spread work around and meet demand. This is not how galleries tend to operate where a great deal of effort goes into placing work with influential collectors and, perhaps, strong-arming a few to get work into museums.

This free-for-all approach hasn't held Kerwick's market back. All but one of Kerwick's auction sales have taken place in the opening months of 2022. The 17 works sold publicly have mostly made prices in the mid-five figures. A solid handful of works sold in March and April for prices ranging from \$114,000 to \$277,000. A handful more are coming this May.

Nava's market took 18 months to develop to the same level that it took Kerwick's market only four months to reach. For now, it seems that Kerwick's work satisfies the demand for speculators. They have unfettered access and a viable exit through auction with no gallery intervening. The remaining question is whether Kerwick's work remains in the lower price band beneath Nava's new public price level. Can his work rise further without a substantial global gallery taking charge? 🗨️

MAJOR EVENTS / MARKET MOMENTS



SALE DATA BY REGION

NORTH AMERICA		ASIA			EUROPE
New York Nava: 11 Sales Kerwick: 4 Sales	Chicago Nava: 2 Sales	Hong Kong Nava: 3 Sales Kerwick: 3 Sales	Seoul Kerwick: 4 Sales	Tokyo Nava: 1 Sale	London Nava: 16 Sales Kerwick: 7 Sales



ROBERT NAVA (American, b. 1985) Born in East Chicago, IN, Robert Nava graduated from Yale's MFA program in 2011 and quickly became known for his distinct approach to figuration inspired by ancient source and pop culture. Nava is jointly represented by Vito Schnabel Gallery and Pace Gallery. He has shown internationally in New York, London, Copenhagen.



JORDY KERWICK (Australian, b. 1982) Australian-born, France-based artist Jordy Kerwick, born in 1982, has found international success in the past year with solo exhibitions in London, Paris, Oakland, New York, and Sydney. Best-known for his impasto application and domestic subject matter.