

VIP art club is only for those in the know

Jack Malvern Arts Correspondent

As art gallery membership schemes go, it is one of the most exclusive. For £1,900 a year discerning art fans will be granted special access to the most sought-after shows around the world.

The Cultivist, which launched in Britain last month, will offer "skip-the-line access" at more than 80 institutions, including ten British galleries and museums.

The club says that those who pay the annual membership fee will be entitled to bring three guests to any show they like at galleries including Tate Britain, Tate Modern, the Royal Academy and the National Gallery in the UK.

Also included are the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian in Washington DC, the Palazzo Grassi in Venice and the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

Members will also be able to request a guided tour of any of the institutions at 24 hours notice.

The service, founded by Marlies Verhoeven Reijtenbagh and Daisy Peat, who operated a similar scheme for Sotheby's, is limited to 1,000 clients — and not just anybody can join.

The application form contains questions such as "What's the last museum exhibition you saw?" and "Do you know anyone already in the club?" Ms Verhoeven Reijtenbagh said that the club was designed to cater for collectors rather than for people with a "commercial job in the art world", such as dealers.

Ms Verhoeven Reijtenbagh has organised a network of art history students studying for a doctorate, who will meet members to give them tours of any of the galleries at 24 hours' notice. Members will also have privileged access to 40 art fairs across the globe, including Frieze in London and Art Basel in Switzerland.

A spokeswoman said the club would "review each applicant's collecting history in order to grant proper access to the art fairs — a new collector may get a sneak peak with a private guide, while a seasoned collector would snag a VIP pass".

Ms Verhoeven Reijtenbagh told the Artnews website that she hoped that members would include artists, curators and "big name collectors".

She said that collectors had said to her: "You might think I have access to all these things around the world, and I do in New York or London, but when I travel to Italy they don't know who I am and I don't want to stand in the back of the line".

She also hopes to entice technology entrepreneurs from San Francisco and oil barons from Texas, she said. "People



Marlies Verhoeven Reijtenbagh and Daisy Peat, left, want to ensure special treatment for their members from galleries including the Tate Modern, above

Membership benefits

- "Skip-the-line" access to temporary exhibitions at more than 80 galleries in London, New York, Venice, Barcelona and other sites in Europe and America
- Entry is free for a member and three guests
- Private tours, at 24 hours' notice, with an art history doctoral student
- VIP access to 40 art fairs including Frieze London
- Events such as curator-led private views
- British institutions include Tate Britain, Tate Modern, the National Gallery and the British Museum
- Other institutions include the National Zoo and the Air and Space Museum in Washington DC

who are affluent and realise they need to do something with art, but it isn't accessible. They've tried to come to an art fair and been taken aback by the difficulty of a certain level of access. They have black [credit] cards, they have VIP access to all other areas of their lives, and then to come to the art world and not be noticed — it's a bit



difficult for them." The art world could be intimidating and a bit arrogant when it came to newcomers, she told *The Wall Street Journal*.

The Cultivist is supported by Sir Ronald Cohen, who backed David Cameron's "big society" initiative, and has received more than 800 applications. Founding members include the artists Rashid Johnson and Idris Khan, and the collectors Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo and Simon Frank.

Part of the membership fee will be paid to the galleries, some of which will offer private views hosted by curators. Members will also have access to an "art travel app" that recommends places to visit. Membership cards will feature a portrait of the holder by Miranda Donovan, an artist based in London.

The club is another scheme making it harder for the public to get tickets for oversubscribed events. The National Gallery announced its membership scheme last year with the promise that half of the tickets for its busiest exhibitions would be offered to members first.