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Best Booths from Independent New York 2017

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Barbara Bloom, “Travel Posters (Open 24 Hours) (English Spoken) (Did You Hear The One) (Forbidden) (Planned Abandon) (Unlimited Miles) (No Journalists) (Travel Customs) (X-Ray Zone)(Not a Drop),” 1981. Archival digital prints, each: 30 x 24 inches, Edition of 10. Courtesy David Lewis.

Independent New York, in its 8th edition this year, is a slightly different animal than the rest of the art fairs that vie for attention during the annual Armory Week. For one, it’s the most curated event of the lot, fostering an experience that aims to be closer to a museum exhibition than the normal shopping mall vibe of other trade fairs. It’s also fresh from year, instituting a high rate of turnover—rotating roughly 30% of the exhibitor list for each edition. There are 52 galleries in total this year, 15 of which are exhibiting for the first time. Most importantly, though, the Independent has a reputation of being trendier and more progressive than others, the fair of choice for young, hip galleries. It’s exclusive. “It’s the cool kids,” Jerry Saltz, said recently.

And yet, while the quality of the exhibitions is perhaps better than other fairs, on the whole, the majority of booths fail to overcome their context: highly curated though they may be, they’re still part of a fair, a distinctly unnatural place for viewing art, where the grosser parts of the industry (the exchange of vast amounts of money for luxury commodities, most notably) are around constantly.

That said, if you do find yourself at the Independent, here are the booths not to miss:

1. David Lewis

Despite the Independent's reputation for ambitious curation, it's David Lewis's booth, with only one artist and one body of work, that stands out the most. Lewis's section features "Travel Posters" from the great Barbara Bloom, an artist loosely lumped into the Pictures Generation cluster, and known for exploring the conditions in which art is displayed and disseminated. The posters, created in 1981, appropriate the generic imagery, blocky design, and bright colors of travel agency literature, and are paired with politically charged phrases such as "English Spoken" and "No Journalists." Despite the fact that they're over 30 years old – and that travel agencies don't even exist anymore – Bloom's posters could not be more relevant today. "It's so strange to look at the Travel Posters in our present state of affairs," Bloom said in a press release for the gallery's Booth. "They were made in Europe in the early 1980s - the days of RAF, Baader-Meinhof... And intended to conflate and confuse the visual/linguistic rhetoric of Tourism with the visual/linguistic rhetoric of Terrorism."

2. Elizabeth Dee

3. Invisible Exports

4. Project Native Informant

5. Martos Gallery

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