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ART & DESIGN

What to See at New York's Art Fairs This Week

by Jason Farago and Martha Schwendener

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They've all come to town, the dealers and the collectors and the curators and the freeloaders: It's Armory Week in New York, a saturnalia of art and air kissing. So dive in! Art fairs are, at their core, commercial enterprises — and, as the market undergoes a violent course correction after years of helium-inflated prices, revenues from fairs constitute a growing fraction of galleries' yearly takes. But fairs, even for those of us who don't collect, have their uses. They condense the sprawling art world to just about manageable size, and bring to Manhattan dealers from locales as distant as Tokyo, Cape Town, São Paulo ... and Brooklyn. They're prime peoplewatching territory, too, and increasingly good places to snag a drink. A dozen art fairs take place this weekend, but we've decided to focus on four. The Armory Show, held on two cruise-ship piers jutting into the Hudson River, is the largest and loudest; uptown, at the Park Avenue Armory, is the statelier Art Show, mounted by an art dealers' professional association; and downtown are NADA and the Independent, trendier fairs with parallel but distinct approaches to young art. My colleagues and I spent the last few days traipsing through their aisles, gorging in their snack bars, scoping out the collectors' tote bags and wishing we'd worn more sensible shoes. What follows is an opinionated guide to New York's busiest art week: what to see, what to skip and how to master an overload of cultural stimulation.

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The Cool Spot: Independent New York

The Independent, a little younger than NADA, has matured the most while still maintaining an inscrutable hipness. It's lost some of its punk edge since moving from the old Dia building to a fashion-shoot location. Once for young galleries only, increasingly the fair has pulled established names who prefer the cooler-than-thou vibe (Paula Cooper, Gavin Brown). The fair has always tried to avoid the traditional booth layout, with designs by different architects. This was interesting and stylish, but also irritating because everything tended to blend together. The dealers are from New York, Europe and Central and South America. You tend to see a lot of interesting, sometimes great stuff that is not yet widely known in New York. What the dealers wear: Many, many people will be in black, which makes those who don't look, well, independent.

New York gallerists at the Independent have an excellent selection of objects by artists whose work is either familiar or has been seen here before. Jack Tilton is showing a group of collages by Derrick Adams that furthers some of the concerns around portraiture and identity in his recent, grandly scaled exhibition at Pioneer Works in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Nikki Maloof's paintings of a nocturnal interior with insects on the windows wraps around the walls in Jack Hanley's booth. Barbara Bloom's installation at David Lewis — a series of posters begun in the early 1980s that juxtaposes terrorism and tourism — serves as a warm-up for an exhibition of '80s art at the Hirshhorn next year, and Anna Betzeze presents sculptures in front of ruglike wall works at Jay Gorney. In addition to catching up on local news, a primary reason to visit any of the art fairs is to learn about new art and visit the booths of out-of-town gal-

eries, and the Independent delivers this year. Peres Projects is showing the work of Melike Kara, a German artist of Turkish descent who studied with Rosemarie Trockel in Düsseldorf. Ms. Kara's baby-blue and burgundy canvases with masklike figures are shown alongside her sculptures, which derive from marks and figures in the paintings. This is Ms. Kara's first showing in New York.

A near first for New York is the work of Michel Journiac, on view at the Paris gallery Christophe Gaillard. In the '70s, Mr. Journiac dressed up as movie stars – large black-and-white photographs here pay homage to Rita Hayworth – and impersonated his parents in a work called "Homage to Freud" (1972). Mr. Journiac, currently in a show about '70s and '80s French counterculture at the Maison Rouge in Paris, is pertinent for the moment and conversations around shifting gender identities.

The British artist David Shrigley is hardly unknown in New York, but his installation at Anton Kern reprises an unfinished musical project he created recently in Toulouse, France, in which he made instruments and treated the gallery as a rehearsal studio. Lee Ranaldo, from the band Sonic Youth, performed on Mr. Shrigley's instruments on Wednesday evening. You can see Mr. Shrigley's drawings on kick drum heads and his instruments scattered around as soundless sculptures in Kern's booth.

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*Through Sunday; Spring Studios, 50 Varick Street, TriBeCa;
independenthq.com*