

ARTSY



Installation view of David Lewis's booth at Independent, 2016. Photo by Adam Reich for Artsy.

It was easy to spot Independent's shiny new TriBeCa location by the queue of well-dressed collectors snaking around the block for Thursday's VIP preview—and by the window decals by rising star Mira Dancy, marking the exterior like a flag for New York's newest epicenter for art. Founded in 2010 by Elizabeth Dee and Darren Flook, the fair spent six years building a loyal base of galleries and collectors in Chelsea's Dia building, and in its seventh edition has watched them tread faithfully downtown, where over 40 galleries and nonprofits were spread across three floors of Spring Studios.

Five minutes into the preview, mega-collectors Michael and Susan Hort clustered before a pair of Dancy's paintings at Chapter NY—priced between \$14,000 and \$25,000 and sold in the first few hours—in which the artist's fuchsia-toned paintings of women's figures have invited darker hues, like blues and greens. Amongst works by Paul Heyer, the gallery also shows box sets based on theatrical productions by young L.A.-based artist Jesse Stecklow (priced at \$5,000), one of which had quickly sold.

The presentation is part of the fair's impressive inaugural showcase of new participants, Independent Firsts, which also includes Oslo's VI, VII gallery and its standout display of work by Than Hussein Clark. The highlight is F.T. Marinetti and Bruno Corra's futurist novel, *Island of the Kisses*. Clark arranged the novel's first-ever English translation, the hard-bound copy of which—filled with drawings by the artist—is balanced on a plinth, complete with custom-made snakeskin gloves. "He's incredibly well-received here," noted founder and director Esperanza Rosales of Clark's works, priced between \$3,000–\$11,000, that quickly caught the eye of collectors.

"That was such a nice space to show work," I overheard Michael Hort say in the elevator while making my way up to the main event; this was a sentiment that would be echoed throughout the fair, indiscriminate of a particular floor. The doors opened at floor six—arguably the fair's strongest level, confirmed by the number of collectors overtaking the room just minutes past opening.

"I'll take the green if I can't get the blue," an eager collector chimed at Paula Cooper Gallery's booth. Amongst new sculptures by Justin Matherly, the booth's walls are lined with transhistorical toolboxes (in blue, green, or red) by Los Angeles-based artist Liz Glynn. "She's looking at the evolution of tools through human action—pre-industrial revolution," said associate director Alexis Johnson, who explained that the boxes (with titles like *To Forge*, *To Pump*, and *To Pound*, all 2016) are filled with iterations of tools, from the rugged to the super sleek, formed from papier-mâché, scanned, and then 3D printed. "It's the next level of evolution, through technology," she said. Priced in the neighborhood of \$15,000, three were sold by mid-afternoon. "I love the environment of Independent, with one- or two-person presentations," added Johnson. "It's a good opportunity to give our younger artists another level of exposure."

Next door, London gallerist Maureen Paley was in high spirits, likely around the excitement of two early sales to private New York-based collectors: Peter Hujar's 1981 portrait of David Wojnarowicz and Paulo Nimer Pjota's 2015 painting *Baiacu*. The latter artist, who also shows with Mendes Wood, debuts with Maureen Paley at Independent ahead of his April exhibition in the gallery's London space. "It's our first time showing him publicly and we thought the fair was a great place to introduce him," said Paley. "You have this prelude before coming back for Frieze New York. You can do an introduction that sets the stage for what's to come later."

In a spacious far corner with floor-to-ceiling windows—an appropriate, sunny setting to drop L.A. gallery David Kordansky—director Kurt Mueller reported a sold-out booth by seminal L.A. sculptor Evan Holloway, corresponding with the artist's current exhibition at the gallery. "He's one of the most important artists to come out of the city in the last 20 years," noted Mueller. Highlights include playful cast-bronze twig sculptures (sold on the range of \$26,000–\$40,000), a sculpture spewing a trail of incense (*Three Columns*, 2016, sold for \$24,000), and *Plant with Lamp*, 2016 (sold for \$55,000), which were placed with predominantly American collectors, from coast to coast.

Looking out the window onto St. John's Park, Mueller said, "I personally loved the old building and its quirkiness. I thought some people liked Independent because it is ostensibly this DIY, scrappier location, and I wasn't sure if people were going to be put off by the sleekness of this space—but everyone is loving it. I think it's been a real success for the fair."

One of the sleekest booths by far—and among the most well-received—belongs to Elizabeth Dee. An installation of 24 paintings by Philippe Decrauzat, one of which is a window to the outdoors, is the crown jewel of the sixth floor, where red-and-green canvases (priced at \$8,000 apiece) line the walls of a raised white platform. According to the gallery's Nora Orallo, the artist's work focuses on optical effects and abstractions. From the center of the

booth, his shadow-play places the viewer in a zoetrope, creating the delightful illusion of a surrounding moving sequence.

On the fifth floor, excitement was much the same. “For us it’s the best we’ve had,” said Independent standby Javier Peres. “The venue is really beautiful, the light is good, and a really strong group of people have been through. We’ve really benefitted from that,” he continued. Ahead of the artist’s two major exhibitions this fall (a solo at the gallery’s Berlin space, and a solo with the Zabludowicz Collection in September) Peres presents a compelling group of new works by Donna Huanca, centered around the human body. A wall marked with paint smears evoking human movements—à la Yves Klein and priced at \$20,000—is the remnant of a performance during install day; paintings that line the walls (priced at \$12,500) depict painted and obscured body parts of performers; and colorful sculptures of torsos propped on wooden blocks (priced at \$8,500) were sculpted using the artist’s own body and colored with makeup and raw pigment. By the middle of the preview, nearly the entire booth had sold out.

Next door, a moving work by post-internet art collective DIS vies for attention. Following the opening of DIS’s first solo exhibition at London’s Project Native Informant, the gallery presents *Image Life*, 2016. (Priced “under \$10,000,” two of the five editions quickly sold with one on reserve by midday.) In the work, a father and daughter sport contour makeup (think: Kim Kardashian) in a framed portrait under glass as a glass-cleaning robot continually shines its surface. “It’s a metaphor for flattening, cleaning, smoothing the surface,” noted the gallery’s Stephan Tanbin Sastrawidjaja.

Sastrawidjaja said the metaphor is apt for Independent at large: “I love the flattening here where you have Anton Kern and a gallery that opened three years ago right next to each other. And I love the fact that my next-door neighbors are all amazing galleries run by women, like Bureau, Hannah Hoffman, and JTT. I don’t think you can find that anywhere other than a fair like Independent.

Up on the mezzanine, Independent’s creative advisor Matthew Higgs was manning a White Columns booth covered in red dots. “The work has done extremely well,” he noted of drawings and paintings by young Greek-American painter Gerasimos Floratos (sold on the range of \$1,000–\$9,000) and nearly sold-out ceramics by Bruce M. Sherman (priced between \$2,000–\$5,000)—both artists self-taught. (Floratos was seen perusing the fair, among many artist sightings including Marilyn Minter, Katherine Bernhardt, and Sofia Coppola.)

“We loved being in the Dia building, which was almost like a holy place for art in New York City,” said Higgs. “But Spring Studios gives us an opportunity to just keep rethinking what Independent is and what Independent might be.” In many ways, the new space fulfills Higgs, Dee, and Flook’s original ambition for the fair. “The goal of Independent was always to create something that’s as close as possible to the experience of seeing work in a gallery,” said Higgs. Initially that meant a “move away from trade fair aesthetics,” making a clear break from the pack. Now well established, the fair has rolled back the need for non-traditional booth shapes and scrappy vibes. That has placed the focus fully on the small, curated presentations of unmatched quality that are truly the element of Independent that set it apart on the art fair landscape.

—Molly Gottschalk