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Review: Independent Fair Is More Conventional, but Still Eye-Catching

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER MARCH 4, 2016



An installation by Jared Madere at the Independent art fair. Credit Nicole Craine for The New York Times

The Independent art fair, which runs through Sunday, began as a more provocative alternative to the bigger art fairs. Now in its seventh year, it isn't quite so independent anymore. There are two iterations in New York – one in November and the one now in TriBeCa – as well as one in Brussels, which opens next month.

There are overlaps between 45 galleries exhibiting here and the other, larger fairs; there are also a number of fairs considerably more indie in scope and ambition, including Spring/Break, at Skylight at Moynihan Station. But the Independent has moved from Chelsea to downtown; the light pouring through the windows and open plan of the fair, along with work ranging from the self-taught to the ephemeral, make the fair a welcome respite from the windowless casino-warren in other exhibition spaces.

David Lewis

One of the most curious – and fragrant – works in the fair is an installation by Jared Madere, whose first solo exhibition in the United States last year was at the Whitney Museum of American Art, no less. The work here, sprinkled and poured on the floor, includes salt, flowers, syrup, tinsel garlands – and antifreeze. Mr. Madere starts with a design on paper he calls a glyph – the current one is basically a drawing made with nail polish, glitter and burn marks – and recreates them in three-dimensional form.

The Box

The greatest back story at the fair involves three generations of women. The Box, a Los Angeles gallery, is showing work by Eugenia P. Butler and her daughter, Corazón del Sol. Ms. Butler's mother, also named Eugenia Butler, was a Conceptual art pioneer who owned a gallery in Los Angeles in the late 1960s and early '70s that exhibited artists like Dieter Roth, Joseph Kosuth and James Lee Byars – as well as her eldest daughter. Also on view are rough-hewn furniture inspired by artists like Picabia and Matisse. Ms. del Sol also created sculpture and a video game about the family's history.

Parra & Romero

Another mixed presentation of old and new art is at the Spanish gallery Parra & Romero, which is showcasing a project by the German-Mexican artist Stefan Brügemann. Mr. Brügemann's panels and canvases borrow the text and monochrome format of Richard Prince's joke paintings as well as Mr. Kosuth's use of dictionary definitions. But in keeping with the conceptual nature of the installation, there is also a mirrored work here by Robert Barry, made "telepathically" in 1969, which hints at the forward- and backward-looking nature of most art.

David Kordansky

David Kordansky, another Los Angeles gallerist, is showing new work by Evan Holloway, a sculptor who came up through that city's art school system. (Charles Ray, maker of beloved sculptures featuring uncanny arrangements of human figures, was his teacher.) Mr. Holloway makes sculpture that veers irreverently between nature and culture, the crafted and discarded. Sculptures constructed with bronze casts of twigs are displayed next to plants made from papier-mâché, and a sculpture that has a stick of incense emits the scent of cedar trees.

Office Baroque

A Brussels gallery, Office Baroque, is showing large geometrically abstract paintings made between 1976 and 1979 by the New York-based painter David Diaó. The suite of paintings was shown at the Arts Club of Chicago in the late '70s and haven't been exhibited since. Their color schemes – with a contrasting mix of browns and bright, flat color – and compositions, based on chopped-up circles and rectangles, feels appropriate for the post-Vietnam War era, which championed reductive transparency. The canvases also fit in well with the current enthusiasm for re-examining modern aesthetic traditions.

Elizabeth Dee

Elizabeth Dee, a founder of the Independent fair, has a tight installation by the Swiss artist Philippe Decrauzat. Made especially for the fair, 24 red and green paintings are installed in a space that must be entered by climbing onto a platform. Playing with positive and negative space, as well as shadows, light and minimalist formats, the works extend conversations about painting and installation begun in the '60s and '70s by artists like Daniel Buren, Blinky Palermo and Olivier Mosset.

Peres Projects

Donna Huanca has erected a different kind of painting installation at this booth. Ms. Huanca's paintings begin with photographs of the human body, which are printed on canvas; she then paints with abstract vigor on top of these. Along with the canvases, there are bodily imprints on the wall, made by a model painted blue. The project recalls Yves Klein's "Anthropometries" from the 1950s, in which women were pressed – so to speak – into the service of

art. Ms. Huanca's project pays homage to Klein, but remakes it for a postfeminist age in which the young woman has become the artist and the model is not on view.

Maccarone

The bad-boy tag for artists is a bit of a misnomer in the button-down context of the art fair these days, but Nate Lowman does his best to live up to the charge. His current paintings are like washed-out photorealist vignettes: tough, banal and perhaps a little bad in their refusal to celebrate painting – or life. Made from fragmentary photographs – the kind of photo mistakes you'd delete from your phone – they feature close-up images of car windows, air fresheners dangling from rearview mirrors or scrawled markings on the windshields of impounded cars.

Fleisher/Ollman

Fleisher/Ollman is on the ground floor in Independent Firsts, along with a handful of other first-time exhibitors at the fair. Founded in the '50s to showcase self-taught artists, this Philadelphia gallery is showing the wonderfully composed paintings of Becky Suss, who had an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia last year. Ms. Suss's paintings, which often depict the inside of her grandparents' home, play well against the self-taught artists also in the booth, like James Castle, and illustrate the blurring in contemporary art between outsider artists and everyone else.

White Columns

Another burgeoning site for self-taught artists is White Columns, the alternative space directed by Matthew Higgs, also a founder of the Independent. White Columns is displaying here the exuberant Expressionist paintings of Gerasimos Floratos, but also the folk-inspired ceramics of Bruce M. Sherman, installed in a mezzanine overlooking the sixth floor, a bird's-eye vantage that offers a different, more expansive perspective on art-fair viewing.

Independent 2016 runs through Sunday at Spring Street Studios, 50 Varick Street, TriBeCa; independentnewyork.com.