

## The Art Newspaper

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## New York Contemporary Fairs Round-Up

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The market finally starts to motor but sales at most Armory Week events were patchy and doubts grow about the main fair's future direction. A record 772 galleries at 12 fairs descended on Manhattan last month, with the largest clusters at the Armory Show at Piers 92 and 94; the Art Dealers Association of America's (ADAA) Art Show at the uptown Armory; and the Independent, which commandeered Dia's former home in Chelsea.

Despite the snow on the pavements, it felt like spring in the art market as the city shrugged off the recession's long winter and got back to business. "It's the first time we have felt a really positive mood in the US," said Hauser & Wirth director Marc Payot at the Armory, while secondary market dealer Christophe van *dec* Weghe said at the ADAA's Art Show: "The market is so much better than last year. There is much more optimism," So, was this a return to the good old days? "Things have softened up. People have gotten used to the new normal," said Andrew Kreps, while Lissan director Nicholas Logsdail said of the new mood: "Behaviour patterns are different. People are taking more time. You get the business, but it is slower."

New York was restating its claim to be the "arts capital of the world", according to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who opened the week's activities in a ceremony at the uptown Armory. But in a city with more than 600 museums and galleries vying for the attention of collectors and curators, did the fairs themselves stand out?

### Armory Show

The sprawling 12th edition of the Armory (3-7 March) was a far cry from the small idiosyncratic fair first held at the Gramercy Hotel in 1994, when works were scattered around the rooms, and Tracey Emin read stories in bed. "It was originally a Salon des Refuses," said Todd Levin, director of the Levin Art Group. "Now it's a legitimised thing-the brand has landed in a different place entirely." The fair was taken over in 2007 by Merchandise Mart Properties which manages around 70 tradeshow a year-and only one of the original founders, Paul Morris, is still with the fair (Pat Hearn and Colin de Land have died and Matthew Marks no longer exhibits at the fair).

Some top New York names on the international fair circuit, including Gagosian and Barbara Gladstone, were absent yet again, as were around 40 galleries who showed in 2009, allowing smaller galleries to graduate from last year's satellites. Many younger dealers took closet-sized booths along the aisles that led to the shrinking cluster of top-tier galleries gathered around the entrance to Pier 94.

Attendance overall was up 7% on 2009 with 60,000 visitors, and there was a buzz in the air at the preview as collectors including David Teiger, Eileen Cohen and the Scholls rubbed shoulders with New York celebrities such as Bjork, Sofia Coppola and Michael Stipe. As the fair closed, however, opinion was divided as to its success.

"We decided to come back to the Armory after skipping last year, and our decision proved right," said George Vamvakidis of Athens-based gallery The Breeder- who benefited from a strong contingent of Greek collectors in town (for the Koons- curated New Museum exhibition of works from the Dakis Joannou Collection) by selling a Jannis Varelas drawing to Greek collector for \$17,000. "The energy was amazing- you could see it was going to be a success from the very beginning," he added.

There was a "reclaimed liveliness in the air," agreed David Maupin of Lehmann Maupin who sold well from the off, including Nari Ward's *Toe, 2009* to Beth Rudin de Woody for \$35,000. "The fair turned out to be a great success. Collectors were enthusiastic and there was a feeling of camaraderie among the exhibitors." Such rapport was most evident among the Lower East Side galleries, who had a stronger presence than any year previously. "I'm probably one of the biggest new fans of the Armory," said Bowery-based James

Fuentes, who made sales including Brian DeGraw's *Unhappy Birthday*, 200S for \$7,000 to a Greek collection, and Lizzi Bougatsos' *Untitled*, 2009 to trader Alberto Mugarab. "We had the luxury of confidence because the fair is on home turf, and we all support each other." Fellow LES gallery director Joel Mesler of Rental was thrilled with the "lovely madness" of the fair, and sold out within the first two hours, including a Henry Taylor painting for \$35,000.

There were some detractors, including a museum director who coined the phrase "cash and- carry art" for what she deemed to be the dominance of cautious displays of painting and photography. Marc-Olivier Wahler, director of the Palais de Tokyo, said: "The art on show is what we in France called *mou*, which means flat or limp."

Some dealers were unsure, too. "It started well-the opening day brought sales and promises of greater things," said Ingleby director Richard Ingleby. "But as the days rolled by, the promises were not forthcoming. By the end it felt like really hard work," adding: "As it stands, the result is disappointing." Peres Projects' Javier Peres said: "The fair felt a bit flat this year." Had he seen the people he expected, and were sales as hoped? "No, and no. The quality of the fair was so-so-it did not feel the same with so many of the great New York and London galleries like Matthew Marks and Maureen Paley missing." Thaddaeus Ropac agreed: "This year especially you feel the wounds of those who have left. At the beginning, this fair was so original but it is in danger of losing its identity." While Ropac made several sales including Antony Gormley's *Aperture VII* 2010, for \$350,000, he was reluctant to ascribe success to the Armory itself: "The sales were not to do with the fair, but the fact that we're in New York. This fair has such potential, but needs to define itself." Despite strong sales including Paul Morrison's *Phylum (Mirror)*, 200S, for \$75,000, Alison Jacques agreed: "It's clear the market has recovered, but the fair needs to be more stringent in the selection of galleries so that its overall quality improves." Other dealers are weighing their future options. LA's Richard Telles said: "I'm looking for an alternative to the Armory, and will go elsewhere as soon as I settle on something."

Paul Morris. Merchandise Mart vice-president said: "The original fair was founded on new ideas, and was - at first-an eccentric idea to embrace. Pier 94 has maintained its original mission statement, [but] we cannot sit still. Like the galleries that exhibit at the Armory the fair must constantly strive to hit a high note with the best offerings of contemporary and modern art."

### **The Art Show**

The 22nd edition of the Art Show, moved back to coincide with the Armory, bought together 70 dealers from the Art Dealers Association of America (3-7 March). "It's a very special, small fair," said art advisor Stefano Basilico. "You have to be a member to take part, so it is prestigious in that sense."

The fair drew a well-heeled crowd, with US collectors including Amy and John Phelan, Wilbur Ross, Agnes Gund and Joel and Anne Ehrenkrantz and New York artists such as Eric Fischl and Ellsworth Kelly at the opening gala-the \$1.m proceeds of which went to the Henry Street Settlement. "We're governed 'by the fact we're committed to raising money for a charitable organisation," said former ADAA president Roland Augustine. "We do not, and cannot, compete with behemoth fairs like Basel or the Armory."

This resulted in a series of stellar solo stands. "Galleries have to take the risks that museums can often no longer afford to," said Lucy Mitchell-Innes, the new ADAA president, and an exceptional split drawing show of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele at Galerie St Etienne seemed to prove her point. This was matched only by the Willem de Koonings at L&M. "It was like putting on an exhibition in our gallery," said L&M director Robert Mnuchin, adding: "We only had one-and-a-half things for sale - we just wanted to put on a great show." That work, *Untitled*, 1970, sold for \$3.2m.

Fred Wilson at Pace- Wildenstein sold out completely, with prices from \$25,000 to \$85,000 attracting the Toledo Museum of Art, which bought *Jago's Mirror*, 2010. "There is really great material at the fair. It's almost like a village fete- the atmosphere is so intimate," said Pace's James Lindon. Luhring Augustine sold its entire booth of works by Albert Oehlen, priced at \$15,000 each. Roland Augustine noted the upswing in the market: "Last year dealers had their challenges before them with the demise of the financial markets but this year people are a lot more comfortable."

Themed stands were in abundance, too. Heads and faces recurred at Michael Werner, who sold three Thomas Houseago *Bronze Masks*, 2009 for \$50,000 each. Contemporary dealer Nicole Klagsbrun, taking part for the first time, said: "We met new people who didn't know the gallery, but were impressed with what we do." Other contemporary offerings were at James Cohan, who sold works by Roxy Paine with

prices from \$18,000 to \$60,000, and David Zwirner sold several Christopher Williams photographs at \$32,000 a piece and a John McCracken sculpture, *Glow*, 2009, to a US collector for \$75,000.

But, the Art Show's strength lay in its heartland of modern masters, according to Richard Feigen: "Some markets never had a problem - we deal with people who never felt the impact of the downturn." Reporting sales including a Gauguin drawing, *Tahitian Woman*, around 1890, for \$200,000, he said: "The art world is inundated with money-there's so much liquidity out there because people are afraid of currency. They've been told that art is a place to park money."