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What Not to Miss at the Armory Show at the Piers

By **KEN JOHNSON** MARCH 3, 2016

With 205 international dealers in modern and contemporary art, down from approximately 275 in 2011, this year's Armory Show is more spacious and easier to navigate than in the past. It's also comparatively mild. There's a relative dearth of the sort of aesthetic, conceptual or political extremism that might have shocked casual art fans a few years ago. Whether this reflects the fair's leadership under its new director, Benjamin Genocchio; competition from the numerous art fairs also going on around Manhattan; or a creative energy lull in art in general is hard to say. Nevertheless, it's still a great way to catch up on what's happening in art, from the cleverly inane to the soulfully poetic.

As usual, the fair is in two sections: "Modern," on Pier 92, has 56 dealers in art from the first two-thirds of the 20th century, while "Contemporary," on Pier 94, involves 149 purveyors of 21st-century works, including 14 galleries representing African artists in a section called "African Focus: African Perspectives." Here are a few highlights:

Modern

Gana Art

In Alberto Giacometti's "La Place," an Existentialist miniature in bronze from 1948, four of that sculptor's typically crusty, skinny men, each about four inches tall, stride toward a single, smaller, female figure who remains motionless, all on a flat slab. Despite its diminutive size, it has a vast sense of scale. Referring to this piece, Giacometti once said, "I realized that I can only make women who are still and men who are walking." Also at this gallery is a "Bouquet au Petit Vase" (1900), a shimmering picture of flowers in a vase painted with a soft touch by the French Symbolist Odilon Redon.

Donald Ellis

Departing from the fair's prevailing European and American Modernism, Ellis presents a captivating show of Plains Indian Ledger drawings, a genre that flourished from the 1860s to the 1920s. Most are small, lively, carefully detailed pictures on paper of horses and riders drawn by self-taught, anonymous artists. The biggest, identified as "Lakota (Teton Sioux)" (1894), represents a lively, ceremonial gathering of dozens of people and horses on a 24-inch-by-66-inch piece of muslin.

HelwaserGallery

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John Szoke

This print dealer presents three excellent mini-shows: works by Jean Cocteau on the outside wall and, inside to the left, prints by Edvard Munch, including a morbidly erotic drypoint depicting a voluptuous nude woman embracing and kissing a skeleton. Among prints by Picasso on the right side is "Portrait de Femme" (circa 1897), an 8-inch-by-6-inch picture of a woman drawn by the then-teenage artist in colored pencil and charcoal with exactingly sensitive realism. Made before the artist became known by a single name, it's signed and dedicated "P. Ruiz Picasso por Paula."



John Chamberlain, "Carmel Bandage" (2002).Credit2016 John Chamberlain, Fairweather & Fairweather LTD/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Danese/Corey

An invigorating, two-man show brings together tropically colorful sculptures made from crumpled auto-body parts by John Chamberlain and large, abstract canvases covered in poured and busily brushy paint by Larry Poons.

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Antoine Helwaser

Each of four small sculptures by Alexander Calder on pedestals displayed at the front of the booth is an infectiously playful, Surrealistic gem with a delicate mobile of colored shapes and wires gracefully balanced on the point of a curvy base.



Marsden Hartley's "The Seashell" (1929).Credit: Marsden Hartley, Jonathan Boos Gallery

Jonathan Boos

Outstanding here is "The Seashell" (1929) by Marsden Hartley, which depicts a green conch shell on a field of satiny pink cloth. Painted with robust sensuality, it merges oceanic and modern times.



Sylvie Fleury's "First Spaceship on Venus" (2015).CreditCourtesy of the artist and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris/Salzburg

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Contemporary

Thaddaeus Ropac

One of the fair's most entertaining booths presents "The Space Age," a group show. It includes "First Space Ship on Venus" by Sylvie Fleury, a shiny sculpture of a cartoon rocket ship about eight feet tall coated in glittery, pastel-purple paint, and "Space Investors" by Jules de Balincourt, a funny painting in which little figures of people in spacesuits float in deep space.

Habana

Among other works at Habana, the Armory Show's first dealer from Cuba, is "Don't Look Back" (2008-14) by Ivan Capote. It's a round, working clock whose cast bronze face has the 12 letters of its title replacing the numbers. In light of recently thawed relations between Cuba and the United States, it suggests an optimistic view of the future.

Jack Shainman

"Photo Bloke" (2016), by the Pop-realist portrait painter Barkley Hendricks, depicts a man in a pink suit and white sneakers against a pink background. This is coolness personified.



Kehinde Wiley's "Equestrian Portrait of Philip III" (2016). Credit Kehinde Wiley, Sean Kelly, New York

Sean Kelly

"Equestrian Portrait of Philip III" (2016), the most spectacular of several large paintings by Kehinde Wiley in the fair, depicts a young man, dandified to the point of silliness, on a rearing horse surrounded by birds and flowering and fruiting trees. It's a delightfully flamboyant recycling of European old master portraiture.

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Cherry and Martin

A lot of art these days looks back on heroic Modernism with cheeky irreverence. Nathan Mabry's all-gray Constructivist sculpture, "The Nostalgia of the Infinite (Le Rhinocéros)" (2016), made of aluminum and cast stainless steel, is a good example. It resembles a welded assemblage by David Smith, but has three sea gulls perched on it, one upside down.

11R Gallery

Every painting by Moira Dryer elicits regret for her death at 34 in 1992. Here is an especially poignant piece on paper, a green circle with a fringed circumference and a pink dot in the center. It hits a lyrical sweet spot.
Africa

What If the World

Dan Halter's expansive oval map of the world is made of stitched-together plastic-weave bags — the cheap, plaid carryalls used by immigrants and refugees around the world. It's a gritty metaphor about the global flux of vulnerable populations by a Zimbabwean who lives in South Africa.



Ed Young, "Not Me It's You" (2016). Credit: SMAC Gallery

SMAC

On one side of a thick, black panel, big white letters spell "Not Me It's You." The other side sarcastically exclaims, "We're All So _____ African." Created by the South African conceptualist Ed Young, it skewers humanitarian pieties with impudent verve.

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Correction: March 5, 2016

An art review on Friday about the Armory Show in Manhattan misidentified the location of the show's two sections. As schedule information with the review correctly noted, they are at Pier 92 ("Modern"), not 52, and Pier 94 ("Contemporary"), not 54.

The Art Show, which has offerings from American galleries, continues through Sunday at the Park Avenue Armory, Park Avenue, at 67th Street; artdealers.org/the-art-show/information; 212-488-5550.

The Armory Show, an international fair with more than 200 exhibitors, runs through Sunday at Piers 92 and 94, 12th Avenue, at 55th Street, Manhattan; thearmoryshow.com; 212-645-6440.

Independent 2016, with international galleries and nonprofit institutions, runs through Sunday at its new location at Spring Studios, 50 Varick Street, TriBeCa; independenthq.com/2016/new-york.

Many other satellite exhibitions are taking place this month, including:

Art on Paper, with works by artists who use paper in their sculpture, drawing, painting and photography. Through Sunday at Pier 36, 299 South Street, Lower Manhattan; thepaperfair.com.

Pulse New York, a showcase of contemporary art. Through Sunday at the Metropolitan Pavilion, 125 West 18th Street, Chelsea; pulse-art.com; 212-255-2327.

Volta NY, an affiliate of the Armory Show with single-artist exhibitions. Through Sunday at Pier 90, 12th Avenue, at 50th Street, Manhattan; ny.voltashow.com.

Spring/Break Art Show, a themed fair focusing on emerging artists in New York. Through Monday at Skylight at Moynihan Station, on Eighth Avenue across from Pennsylvania Station; springbreakartshow.com.

—*JOSHUA BARONE*

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