

# VENUS

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## MANHATTAN

Kennedy, Randy, "An Art Fair That's Less About Business: Independent Projects Draws Dealers to New York," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2014

# The New York Times

When the international collecting world descends on New York in early November for the fall contemporary auctions, most pretenses still left about the distinction between art and commerce tend to fade away: Value is measured in sales records and successive zeros. But one art fair opening to coincide with the auctions is trying hard to remind viewers of all the other ways to value art. The fair is doing so in part by making it very tough to tell that it is even a commercial enterprise, one in which hundreds of thousands of dollars of art will indeed be bought and sold.

Independent Projects, which will run from Nov. 6 to 15, at 548 West 22nd Street, the former Dia Art Foundation space in Chelsea, is essentially a spinoff of Independent, a highly unconventional annual art fair founded in 2010 by the New York gallery owner Elizabeth Dee and the London dealer Darren Flook. Independent did away almost entirely with the kinds of merchandise booths that critics of art fairs complain bitterly about and gave galleries a chance to put together work in ways that felt much more like curated exhibitions.

Independent Projects aims to take the antimall concept even further, inviting about 40 dealers from around the world to organize shows focused on single artists. After the first weekend, when the sales are made, the fair will continue to run for five more days as a kind of group exhibition, geared toward the public, with docents on hand.

Ms. Dee recently sat down to talk about the rapidly shifting landscape for showing and selling art in the 21st century.

*Q. In the same way many artists once lived in the orbit of the court, the church or the salon, many today live in the orbit of the international contemporary art fair, which has grown into a dominant — though much bemoaned — mechanism for selling art. Looking at them more than a decade into their growth, what has turned out to be good about art fairs? And what not?*

*A. I don't see art fairs as necessarily evil or creating a monopoly in conflict with artists. Artists have more potential for exposure and a market that sustains them, so that's a*

positive, and fairs also give galleries a brand that reaches an international base. Art fairs are quite successful at what they aim to achieve, but they don't serve everyone's needs.

*Why not?*

For one, I think collectors are feeling increasingly overwhelmed with the scale of conventional art fairs. You walk into a space and there are over a hundred galleries and well more than a hundred artists. It used to be that when Art Basel was one of the only fairs that you would attend all year, you would have 10 days there to go through everything very carefully, go to the talks and lectures that were part of it, to develop a rationale about the artists you were following or which new ones you should be looking at. But to do that when every month or every other month you're at another major fair is a huge undertaking. All of this is basically a long way of saying that context is even more critical now because of the explosive growth of the art market. If a fair has a particular point of view, it's appreciated. It's conducive to collectors' interests and it becomes an experience, once again, about the art, rather than one of having to constantly sort through all of the information that needs to be considered.

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*ou've talked about how the traditional 20th-century art-gallery model — dealers discovering artists, nurturing their careers slowly and carefully, and sticking by them — isn't working very well anymore, especially for midlevel galleries, as the pace of the market races and pressure on artists mounts. Have fairs contributed to that breakdown?*

The art world is now so big, there are multiple swim lanes in which people are operating. The one that's getting a lot of attention is the new model — which you could call the megagallery model — but the pressures on smaller galleries have to do with the larger economy beyond the art world and the costs involved, with all the fairs that one needs to do and with the international position one has to maintain. It was a little easier 10 or so years ago to think about artists and their careers and for the business side of the gallery to take up a much smaller percentage of your focus. That's not the case anymore because the cost of doing business has grown. The 20th-century model is still supportable, but you have to be very good at both the strategic side of your business and the strategic thinking for your artists.

*Besides being smaller and organized more like exhibitions, how are Independent and Independent Projects different for galleries, artists and collectors?*

Collectors are immersed in the work rather than the power hierarchy and market influence of the small or gigantic white boxes that you see in traditional art fair layouts.

Those layouts are navigated according to the economic realities of the art-fair system. The larger stands are front and center and dominate the attention in a fair. Viewers spend the majority of their time focused there. And the gallery that's next to that gallery may not have anything to do with it as far as programming. There's not going to be commonality from space to space. Because of the infrastructure at Independent, there's a democracy in the way things are exhibited. It helps to develop artists in ways that art fairs cannot and it connects buyers with kinds of work that traditional art fairs do not. There are great examples like Rosemarie Castoro, a geometric abstract painter who had not had a market for decades, but she was reintroduced at last year's Independent fair by the gallery Broadway 1602 and sold several works to major collectors, and now there are museum acquisitions in the works.



*Who might be the Rosemarie Castoro of this fair?*

There are artists like David Medalla, who's being shown by the gallery Venus Over Manhattan. He's been part of the avant-garde since the 1960s but hasn't had the attention he deserves and there will be seminal work by him, including a bubble machine

that's interactive and is considered one of the first autocreative sculptures. It's probably not the most practical work to show in an art-fair environment. But we're showing it and it will get attention not only because of what it is but also because of the art that's going to be shown around it.

-Randy Kennedy