

VENUS

MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

Freeman, Nate, Ghorashi, Hannah, and Greenberger, Alex, "There's no way we could do this at a normal fair': Opening Day at Independent," *ArtNews*, March 3, 2016

ARTNEWS

'THERE'S NO WAY WE COULD DO THIS AT A NORMAL FAIR': OPENING DAY AT INDEPENDENT



After five years in Chelsea, Independent—a younger alternative to the other main fairs this week, the Armory Show and the ADAA Art Show—migrated downtown for its 2016 edition. The fair's opening on Thursday, on four floors of Spring Studios, a massive event space with high ceilings and large windows letting in light from the West Side of Manhattan, had a crowd lining up around the block to get inside.

Elizabeth Dee, the fair's cofounder, took full advantage of the sprawling sixth-floor space and its view of the churn of a Tribeca traffic circle. For her booth, she built an elevated white platform in a corner to display 24 small paintings by Phillipe Decrauzet, the reds and blacks shifting like a spinning zoetrope, with one canvas-size block of white cube cut out to reveal a bit of the sky outside, peeking in.

"I had this project I was working on, and Elizabeth Dee asked me if we could do it at the fair," Decrauzet said in the booth, making a rare New York appearance. "It's about opening a window through the wall, and the unity of 24 paintings, 24 hours—an idea of time." They're on sale for \$8,000 each.

"We needed to have the utmost flexibility—there's no way we could do this at a normal fair," Dee added of the custom booth setup, arranged to catch the sun in concert with the theme of time passing.

Nearby, Gavin Brown's Enterprise had given frequent cohort Karl Holmqvist free reign over the gallery's booth; he chose to blanket the space with an installation of dirty white and black shirts and pants that fairgoers were free to walk all over. ("It looks like my bedroom!" one dealer said, laughing.)

The installation is on sale as its own piece, as is the slogan-stuffed wallpaper—cheeky exclamations, "CHARITY WILL NEVER WORK," etc.—and large excitable text-based canvases, which were on sale for \$18,000. Several were purchased in the fair's first hour.

Over at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, there was a series of works from William Pope.L, including some paintings from his "Skin Set Drawings" series. By mid-afternoon, three small paintings had sold for \$12,000, while two bigger paintings—one at \$45,000, the other at \$55,000—had been put on hold. The most striking of the Pope.L works on offer was *Coffin*, from 2008, on sale for \$70,000: a wooden box structure with "If you think very hard before the rocket falls" written in red, white, and blue on the side, and a strange sound being emitted from the middle.

"It's the sound of a flag waving, or a flag burning," said associate director Josie Nash.

The booth for Office Baroque offered an explicit connection to Independent's new neighborhood of Tribeca: it had on sale three gigantic works by David Diao, selling for \$250,000 each. They were painted in the 1970s at his Franklin Street studio, just blocks away. They had been displayed at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1979, rolled up, stored in the studio, and then not unrolled until the booth was installed a few days ago.

At David Lewis, Jared Madere had assembled a celebratory offering to the gods circa 2016, a messy, fern-strewn conglomerate of multicolored tinsel, flowers, strawberry syrup, salt, antifreeze, and glitter laid upon a plastic sheet. Studded among these leftover party relics were sparklers, unlit, which were set to go off periodically throughout the fair, "like fireworks," gallery director Dmitry Komis explained. "He needs the sparklers to activate the artwork."

The work was, in a roundabout way, like a set of dominoes, or a messy landscape upon which a toy train could chug through at any moment. "Those are nice ideas, yeah," Komis said vaguely. He expounded on the idea of locomotion, however. "The tinsel moves in the wind, so it's always sort of moving. But the plastic sheet is an important part of it as well, because he wants it to relay a feeling of excavation, like from an ancient burial site."

Unsurprisingly, the popular collective DIS's contribution to the fair—a large-scale untitled photograph of a carefree father with his daughter on his shoulders—was quite a crowd-pleaser over at Project Native Informant's wing. The father and daughter, who appeared to be of South Asian descent, sported thick contours of makeup on their faces that recalled, vaguely, the recent Kardashian makeup craze.

To top it off, literally speaking, a Winbot—a small, glass-cleaning robot—whirred slowly across the top of the glass covering the photo, making its way from the top to the bottom and back again. “You can think of [the Winbot] as a metaphor for flattening, Photoshopping,” a gallery representative told *ARTnews*. “There’s also the idea of constantly refreshing the image, because a lot of DIS’s work tends to experiment with the possibilities of stock photography.” And, of course, the work addresses ideas of representation. “It’s about how people of color use contour to perform different races and classes,” the representative added. If only the Kardashians were around to comment.

Borna Sammak’s equally eye-catching video sculpture *Not Yet Titled* (2016) flashed with an LED allure over at JTT’s booth. Swarming with samples of images taken from nature documentaries and a variety of animations, the screensaver-like video combines platypus fins, palm-tree fronds, American flags, and cartoonish waves in collaged, 30-second loops. “They appear quite seamless,” a gallery representative said. “They look very short, but one almost gets lost in them.”

In a fair highlighted by abstract painting (as fairs so often are these days), it was no surprise that New York-based gallery Karma had turned over the majority of its booth to Marina Adams, an Italian-born painter who makes repetitive work featuring brightly colored geometric forms. Some paintings were large, others were small, and most looked the same. The real star of the booth, however, was not the paintings on the walls, but the chairs at the gallery’s desk. The four chairs, each made of shreds of fabric and puffy material encased in clear plastic, were by Katie Stout, a young New York-based designer who has work in Bjarne Melgaard’s current show at the gallery. The chairs actually looked pretty comfortable, and within the first hour of the preview, all four of them (each priced at \$4,500) sold. “Someone came and just swept them up,” a gallery representative said.

Downstairs, at Chapter NY’s booth, the young gallery had already attracted a crowd of patrons, hungry for a look at two new Mira Dancy paintings. Dancy, whose work is currently on view in MoMA PS1’s “Greater New York,” has gotten a lot of critical attention for her paintings of women rendered in Fauvism-inspired rich blues and purples. They looked great, and, even just a half hour into the fair, buyers were interested in the works, which can go for up to \$22,000—no small price for an artist who just had her first New York solo show in 2013.

Turning right from the Dancy paintings was the booth for Fleisher/Ollman, a Philadelphia gallery that specializes in outsider artists. On view there were four ceramic pieces by Eugene von Bruenchenhein, a self-taught artist whose market is expanding rapidly. (In October, Andrew Edlin Gallery announced that they would start representing von Bruenchenhein’s estate.) Within a half hour of opening, many collectors were inquiring about the ceramic sculptures, which looked like pots or vases made out of leaves. Some were too late—one of the four had already sold.



Whereas von Bruenchenhein's pieces were understated and quiet, Peter Saul's paintings at Venus's booth were hard to miss. As per usual for the Pop painter, the paintings were brightly colored, hotly political, and sardonic. A large untitled one from 1973 featured a bubblegum-pink woman in a mustard-yellow car driving away from her strange house. This showing at Independent marked the first time the painting had ever been exhibited publicly. Several of the smaller works by Saul around it had sold—the painter is enjoying a late-career comeback, after all. But this painting, which is priced at \$150,000, had yet to find a buyer. Nevertheless, it seemed to be a favorite at the gallery, where the staff had already gotten attached to the painting. At the booth, they were cracking jokes about potential titles for the work—*Real Housewives of San Francisco* and *Barbie's Dream House* were two of them.