

VENUS
MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

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Independent New York is a Cut
Above, Moment by Moment



At this point, citing how refreshing Independent New York is compared to cavernous mob scenes like the Armory Show is a well-worn cliché. But this year's edition of the smartly curated fair provides further ammunition for the argument: An airy, light-struck new home at Spring Studios, with enviable views of Tribeca and Soho. (Though to be honest, first-time-exhibiting-at-Independent galleries, sequestered in a cramped ground-floor space, sort of get the shaft.)

Over by Canada's corner, I overheard a dealer introducing the spotlighted artist, Joanna Malinowska, to a collector who eerily resembled an amalgam of Matthew Barney and Jack Smith. "Did you ever meet _____?" he asked. "He owns one of your mammoth tusks!" There were no tusks on offer, per se, unless one counts a narwhal horn leaning nearby. Also available: two patterned wall-hangings composed of woven duck and turkey feathers, and a scatological-looking mountain of unfired terracotta clay, posed on four felt-bootied legs, whose title pays homage to Philip Guston.

Malinowska isn't the only one experimenting with odd materials at this fair. David Lewis is showing a massive floor piece by Jared Madere, last seen with a project in the lower-level gallery of the Whitney. It looks like the mountainous, artificial landscape of an overachieving model-train set-up, minus the train. A partial list of its ingredients includes salt, cheap garlands, antifreeze, and blackberry syrup. Paintings by BENDIX HARMS, shown by Anton Kern, are more conventional, but just as messy: palette-knife-smear depictions of cats, little chickadees, and other animals, all busily vomiting out French phrases. (The gallery is selling the German artist's chunky monologue; a special edition, with each cover uniquely adorned with a Harms drawing, is going for \$300.) Two galleries are showing older artists with a similar knack for wild, bodily grotesqueness. Hairy Who member Karl Wirsum has an amazing group of drawings, each \$10,500, at a booth jointly run by Jay Gorney and Derek Eller Gallery. (This trove was recently unearthed from the Chicago artist's attic.) At Venus Over Manhattan, Peter Saul holds court in all his perverse and political Day-Glo glory; the dude is 81 but continues to paint with the mad wonder of someone a quarter of his age. ("I don't know if the artist is still alive or not," one afternoon viewer wondered aloud, nearly giving me a heart attack before correcting herself: "No, he's alive!")

Independent also offers a fair amount of abstract painting that is notable for being excellent, not awful. There's Sebastian Black at Clearing, with variations on a theme: colorful, biomorphic blob-shapes oozing their way around an X-shaped latticework. (The smallest one, on reserve when I inquired, runs roughly \$10,000.) Office Baroque is showing stupendously large 1970s abstractions by David Diao, all clean, flat colors and interlocking circles. And Elizabeth Dee wins kudos for the most happily site-specific installation. You enter her booth by ascending a small staircase onto an elevated viewing platform, where you're

surrounded by 23 nearly identical paintings by Philippe Decrauzat, each \$8,000: simple green and red compositions encroached upon by varying degrees of lengthening, painted shadow. The series, I was told, has 24 parts in total, but one canvas has been left out; its place is taken by a same-sized rectangle cut into an artificial wall, offering a peek at the view outside the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Other highlights: Borna Sammak's unique paintings, shown by JTT, which are made with colored bits of collaged vinyl as well as heat-transferred T-shirt graphics (the latter mostly of the downmarket variety, like a kitschy image of a hungry shark asking for "MORE TOURISTS"). These canvases are accompanied by a sculptural video animation, a sort of frenetic screensaver frothing with stock imagery of landscapes and deep-sea creatures, among other things. Garth Greenan (in the aforementioned ground-floor purgatory, which you shouldn't neglect!) has a single canvas by Mark Greenwold: "Bright Promise (For Simon)," 1971-75, a quasi-photorealist bedroom scene featuring a young girl disrobing while an older, fully nude couple appears to wrestle on the floor. Gb Agency is showing a few works by Cally Spooner, including a video in which a faceless office drone receives lessons from a voice-coach in how to give bland corporate-speak a musical lift. And Maureen Paley — who has a knack for the kind of sly juxtapositions that can enliven the art fair experience — pairs a photo by Peter Hujar (of David Wojnarowicz with a hand over his face) with a much larger, also hand-centric image by Wolfgang Tillmans. It's this kind of subtle, thoughtful move that exemplifies Independent as a whole — a fair that's more a succession of moments, actually remembered, rather than a blur across two piers.