Armory Show Survives Pier Pressure, Sees Big Names and Strong Sales on VIP Day

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A scene from the 2019 Armory Show.

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By 11 a.m. the champagne was flowing.

It was bone-achingly cold in New York this morning, when the Armory Show, New York's most established fair for contemporary art, threw open its doors to VIP guests. The bubbly was to celebrate an anniversary—the fair is turning 25 this year—but it could just as well have been a toast to the organizers having narrowly avoided a disaster.

Less than two weeks ago, Armory organizers announced that Pier 92, usually home to about one-third of the show's 200 exhibitors, had structural problems. They said that dealers slated to show there would be relocated south, to Pier 90. As a result, Volta, the sister fair that typically calls that space home, was canceled.

Silver Linings to Pier Problems

Volta ended up finding **an alternative now known as Plan B, courtesy of some helpful dealers and collectors**, and mercifully, Pier 90 turns out to have a remarkably similar layout to Pier 92: if you were dropped into it without being told about the change of venue, you could be forgiven for not noticing the difference. Armory Show organizers had gotten the job done, and as staffers began scanning VIP cards, many big art world names were already on hand.

There were collectors Beth Rudin DeWoody, Donald and Mera Rubell, and Susan Hort; Museum of Modern Art trustees Glenn Fuhrman and A. C. Hudgins; curators Hans Ulrich Obrist, Alex Gartenfeld, Cecilia Alemani, Massimiliano Gioni, and Gary Carrion-Murayari; other art-fair *machers* like Untitled's Manuel Mozo and 1-54's Touria

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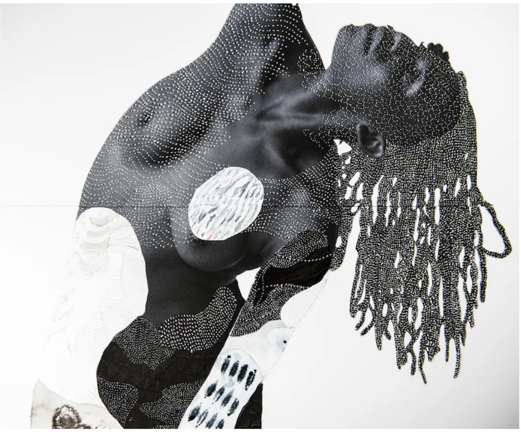
El Glaoui; and, last but not least, actor Paul Rudd (who was on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* **last night**, re-creating the music video for the song "King of Wishful Thinking" by Go West).



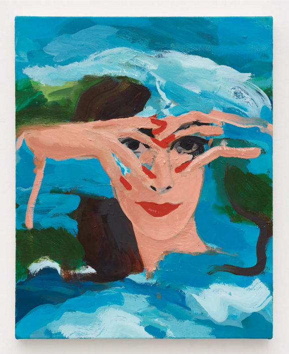
Work by Nate Lewis in the booth for Fridman Gallery.

COURTESY FRIDMAN GALLERY

No one seemed to be complaining about the venue—and it doesn't hurt that Pier 90 is only a couple minutes by foot from Pier 92 (which is still home to a VIP lounge) and Pier 94.

Some visitors even thought the potential debacle was providing some benefits, like Iliya Fridman, whose New York–based Fridman Gallery is showing on Pier 90, in the Focus section (for one- and two-artist booths) of the fair. "We're overwhelmed by the positive response to our presentation" of works by Nate Lewis, he said, amid a crowd that included artist and Pioneer Works founder Dustin Yellin. "The fair has gone out of its way to bring foot traffic to this pier, and it's definitely showing. We've had a rush of collectors buying work already, in the first hour." At that point he had sold four pieces from a series by Lewis, all priced between $8,500 and $12,500.

*[**See photos from the Armory Show's opening day.**]*



Becky Kolsrud's *Untitled* from 2019 in the booth for Tif Sigfrids.

COURTESY TIF SIGFRIDS

Fridman (whose Lower East Side gallery is hosting an "On-Hold Music Dance Party" on Thursday featuring sounds assembled by artist Nina Katchadourian while waiting on the phone on hold) said his good fortune owed in part to a switch in schedule, in which early-access collectors who had been slated to enter at noon could go to Pier 90 an hour earlier, at 11 a.m. "That worked," Fridman said.

Also in the Focus section, which was organized by Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art curator Lauren Haynes, Tif Sigfrids, the director of a namesake gallery in Athens, Georgia, is showing paintings by the young Los Angeles–based artist Becky Kolsrud. "She's interested in painting water and how to make something transparent opaque," Sigfrids said. "She's also painted fingernails a lot." Were her own red fingernails inspired by the red polish in a painting nearby? "They are, yes!" the dealer said. "I never paint my nails, but it seemed weird not to."

Before noon, Sigfrids—participating in the Armory Show for the first time—had sold half of her inventory of Kolsrud paintings, for $3,600 each. Asked if the move to a different pier was disruptive, she said the show organizers seemed to have smoothed it all out. "It's like Frieze in reverse," said said, referring to last year's unexpected heat wave that made Frieze New York, in a tent on Randall's Island, unbearably hot. "Whereas Frieze had to make it up to dealers afterward, here they had to do all that work up front. And they did a good job, with a special opening and help with storage. I have positive feelings about the fair."

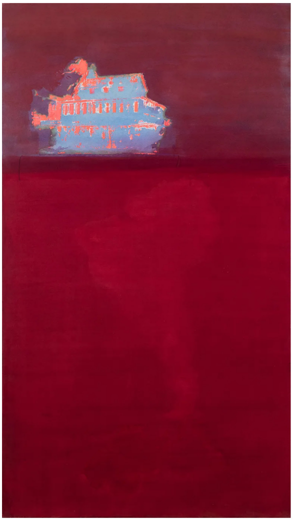
Sales Across the Spectrum

Nothing makes an art dealer feel more positive than sales, of course, and many reported early successes.

New York's Ryan Lee Gallery sold photographs by Stephanie Syjuco for prices between $5,000 and $15,000. Jeffrey Lee, a partner in the gallery, said, "There was incredible buzz in the first few hours."

The Brussels outfit Sorry We're Closed sold sculptures by Eric Croes to private collectors and one foundation for prices between $4,000 and $25,000. New York's 303 Gallery reported moving a bunch of paintings—a Sue Williams for $100,000, a Mary Heilmann for $95,000, and a Sam Falls for $65,000, among others. Within an hour of Pier 94's opening, an extroverted Devan Shimoyama painting had sold for $65,000 in the booth for the Chicago dealer Kavi Gupta. New York's David Benrimon Fine Art, participating in the Armory for the first time, said early in the afternoon that Tom Wesselmann's *Birthday Bouquet (Hat Vase)*, 1988–91, had sold for around $150,000.

On the high end of the price spectrum, New York's Hollis Taggart gallery parted with Lee Krasner's *Peacock* (1973) for "very near the $1 million asking price," according to director Ellis Kelleher. Nearby, the London firm Archeus/Post-Modern had a booth that was completely dark from floor-to-ceiling, amplifying the selection of light-based works on display from masters of the form like James Turrell, Larry Bell, and Keith Sonnier. The gallery reported that it had sold a jet-black acrylic painting by Pierre Soulages, *Peinture 202 x 143 cm, 14 août 2015* (2015), for a seven-digit figure. And New York–based Michael Rosenfeld Gallery had sold a nearly 8-foot-tall red canvas by Frank Bowling for around $500,000 in the fair's first hour.


Frank Bowling's *Untitled*, 1968, sold in the region of $500,000 at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery.

COURTESY MICHAEL ROSENFELD GALLERY LLC, NEW YORK, NY

For more darkness and light, the global giant Pace Gallery said it had sold a number of LED-panel works by Leo Villareal, who is one of the stars of the Armory Show: To enter Pier 94, one walks through a long, dark tunnel with shimmering lights by Villareal along its ceiling.

New York's Van Doren Waxter sold 12 wild ceramic works by Brian Rochefort for prices between $3,500 and $4,500, all within the first hour of the show, plus two drawings from Marsha Contrell's *Aperture Series* (2016), for $8,000 each, and Moira Dryer's *Untitled* (1982) for $16,000.

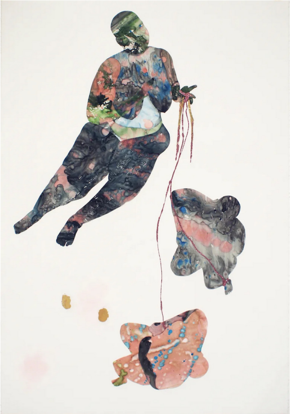
As is often the case in fairs, concise and focused presentations stood out. ACA Galleries was offering a multi-decade survey of the storied artist Faith Ringgold, who will have a solo show at the Serpentine Galleries in London in June. Victoria Miró gallery, of London and Venice, had devoted most of its booth to understated paintings by Celia Paul—seascapes and portraits that were rendered in brown and beige tones—who had a Hilton Als–curated exhibition at the Yale Center for British Art last year. Tucked off to the side, in a separate room, were Chris Ofili works on paper that depict what appear to be mermaids and are absolutely unmissable.

The Paris-based gallery Ceysson & Bénétière, which also has a location in New York, had given over its whole booth to the pioneering Supports/Surfaces artist Claude Viallat, whose work was priced between €8,500 and €60,000 (about $9,600 to $67,800) and had already sold one work for €14,000 ($15,800).

Jeffrey Deitch, the dealer (and former director of Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art) who now has galleries in New York and L.A., dedicated his splashy booth to a solo presentation of Ai Weiwei's "Zodiac" series, which depicts the 12 animals of the Chinese Zodiac calendar in Legos. (The works were also included as part of Deitch's collaboration with Larry Gagosian, "Pop Minimalism Minimalist Pop," during Art Basel Miami Beach last year.) The series is an edition of 10, with two of those editions being sold as individual works for $150,000 apiece. A full suite of the series carries the hefty price tag of $1.2 million.

Galleries on the Move

The Armory Show also provided an opportunity to catch up on galleries that are on the move. "It's been an incredible turnout—a remarkable improvement over last year, actually," said Adrian Sutton, the director of Blain | Southern gallery, which recently announced that, in addition to running its London and Berlin spaces, it will open in New York, in Cheim & Read's former space in Chelsea. Early in the day, a monumental Lynn Chadwick sculpture had been placed on reserve, and a sale was in the works for a figurative painting by Jonas Burgert.



Florine Démosthène, *Going On Without A Plan*, 2019, in the booth for Mariane Ibrahim Gallery.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARIANE IBRAHIM GALLERY

Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, which is decamping from Seattle for Chicago, is showing figurative collages made with materials like ink, mylar, and glitter by Florine Démosthène, a Haitian-American artist whose works, as a sheet of text tells it, "excavate new diasporic mythologies and ancient heroine figures while reconstructing Black female heroine personas." "We've had very strong interest from the beginning," said Ibrahim, who early in the day had so far sold seven works, for $7,000 a piece.

Ramiken gallery, which recently resurfaced in New York after a brief sojourn as a Los Angeles enterprise, was participating thanks to having won the Armory Show's first Gramercy International Prize for New York galleries that have never shown at the fair. On view at the booth are paintings by Andra Ursuta and Darja Bajagić, the latter of whom figured in a two-person show with Boyd Rice planned last year at New York's Greenspon gallery that was **scuttled amid controversy** surrounding previous provocative comments by the artist.

"I've loved both of these artists' work for a long time, and I've always wanted to combine them because they both reconfigure hardcore aesthetics with a playful extremism," Mike Egan, the gallery's founder said. At the booth's center is a 2019 Ursuta work shaped like a butterfly and inspired by ISIS's flag, with the title *Vanilla Isis (Antisocial Butterfly)*. Reading the text scrawled in white paint on its surface, Egan, doing his best **Axl Rose** impression, intoned, "Na-na-na-na-na-*ee–ee*!"

Works by Edson Chagas on offer in the Apalazzo Gallery, Brescia, Italy.

MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

A Los Angeles Presence

Ramekin may not be in L.A. anymore, but other dealers hailing from the city were out in force. Philip Martin Gallery, in the Focus section, had a solo presentation of Katy Crown wall sculptures of cast-aluminum string that the artist painted over with acrylic and graphite. Two of the works had sold before noon, each for $8,500. Charlie James had artist Sadie Barnett showing a massive installation—replete with a spacey couch, wallpaper featuring images of a hair pick, glitter sculptures, and photographs—in the Presents section, which is reserved for large-scale works.

Kayne Griffin Corcoran, another L.A. shop, sold a Llyn Foulkes work for $60,000 and three Mika Tajima pieces for $7,000 each. A Mary Corse painting was on reserve for a price around $400,000. Three recent paintings by Jonathan Lyndon Chase had sold to three U.S. arts institutions—the Walker Art Center, ICA Miami, and an unnamed one—

for undisclosed prices at Kohn Gallery. Luis De Jesus sold two Peter Williams paintings for around \$20,000 to \$30,000 each. Roberts Projects sold work by Kehinde Wiley in the range of \$100,000 and \$500,000, as well as a sculpture by Jeffrey Gibson for around \$225,000. "It's going better than could have been expected," Bennett Roberts, the gallery's cofounder, said. "And it's not just about the sales. It's about the follow-up and the other things that happen at this fair."

Elsewhere in the Presents section, Apalazzo Gallery of Brescia, Italy, had four new works from Edson Chagas's ongoing photographic portraits with African masks (an earlier example appeared on the cover of *ARTnews*'s "**Africa Now**" issue last year). Each work was on sale for €7,500 (about \$8,500).

Document from Chicago had a two-person showing that included four works by photographer Paul Mpagi Sepuya, who is currently the subject of a solo show at Team Gallery in New York. A large-scale collage is on offer for \$13,700, two works for \$7,100 each, and one for \$4,700.

New York's Cristin Tierney gallery dedicated its booth to video works by peter campus (he prefers lowercase letters), who is the subject of a retrospective that opens at the Bronx Museum this week. The gallery will also open a solo show of his work on Friday. Each video is from an edition of five and is on offer for \$20,000.

Liliana Porter's *Them with traveler*, 2019, was fabricated for this year's Armory Show and was part of Chicago's Carrie Secrist Gallery's Focus booth.

MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

Liliana Porter, who was the subject of a just-closed survey at El Museo del Barrio in Upper Manhattan, had work on offer in the booth of two galleries. Mor Charpentier of Paris had a small section of several works, and Porter fabricated several new works for the booth of Chicago's Carrie Secrist Gallery. These include a multi-object sculpture of figurines, titled *Them with traveler*, on offer for \$50,000; a 2019 clock work for \$10,000; and *To Hold a String (lady in red)*, showing a figurine on a wooden shelf holding a long string and priced at \$10,000.

Among the more unusual exhibitors at the fair, which runs through Sunday, was Vhernier, an Italian jewelry brand beloved by celebrities like Jennifer Lopez. A representative from the company showed off a handcrafted 18-karat-gold bracelet. "Our pieces are known for being very sculpture-like and artsy," the rep said.

One nice surprise was the inclusion of Belgian-style Stroopwafels—thin waffle snacks with a caramel syrup filling—in the small press lounge. Though the brand, Rip Van Wafels European Snack, is perhaps not the best known in the market (that would likely be Belgian Boys), the treat was a nice option for those not wishing to part with more \$20 for a sandwich and chips.

Perhaps no booth captured the fair environment as succinctly (or as bluntly) as New York's Pierogi gallery. Andrew Ohanesian was on hand there to activate his new *P.O.S.* work, which takes the form of a Verifone credit-card machine sitting on a pedestal. Ohanesian charges cards a minimum of \$5, and visitors sign the printed receipts, which carry the gallery's old logo on the back and a watermark of the artist's signature in UV-sensitive ink. "What am I selling?" Ohanesian asked. "I'm selling the sale itself." The Verifone machine is also on offer as a readymade sculpture in an edition of three, each priced at \$5,999.

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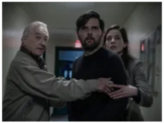

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