



What Sold during Armory Week

Benjamin Sutton | Mar 9, 2020 1:07pm



Installation view of Fortnight Institute's booth with works by Chris Oh and Adams and Ollman's booth with works by Marlon Mullen at Independent Art Fair, 2020. Courtesy of Independent Art Fair.

The slate of early March art fairs known as Armory Week wrapped up in New York on Sunday, with the art market defiantly doing business during a global health crisis. This year marks the end of Armory Week in its current iteration. On Thursday, The Armory Show revealed it will take place in September beginning next year. The fair will also switch venues—from the Hudson River piers to the Javits Center.

That announcement briefly distracted from the week's predominant concern: how the deadly COVID-19 outbreak that is transforming daily life for billions across the globe will impact the art world.

"We had a few cancellations, but not an overwhelming number," said Jane Cohan, the co-founder of New York's James Cohan Gallery. The gallery is one of 178 showing at the fair this year, down from the 190-plus galleries that exhibited in 2019. "It might speak to the art world's

independent, defiant spirit,” Cohan continued. “If you tell us to stay home, we’re going to make a point of going out and getting together.”



Installation view of James Cohan's booth at The Armory Show, 2020. Photo by Madison Voelkel for BFA. Courtesy of James Cohan Gallery and The Armory Show.

By all accounts, the looming health crisis and New York governor Andrew Cuomo’s declaration of a state of emergency didn’t dampen collectors’ desire to find and acquire new works. They flocked to The Armory Show’s preview on Wednesday, with many making five- and six-figure purchases and at least two that hit the million-dollar mark. The pace of sales suggested that the fair’s vast contingent of curated presentations and booths was paying off.

“The fact that dealers decided to take risks with really strong solo and two-artist booths, very thoughtful thematic booths—that’s what it’s all about,” said Nicole Berry, The Armory Show’s executive director. “Dealers are really participating in this fair to tap into the American collector community and American institutions.”



Rina Banerjee Fermented origins, filtered and foaming, weathered from ...Galerie Nathalie Obadia



Rina Banerjee Conspicuous waters waffled into sky and mountains cracked to ...

Gallerists in every sector reported a strong institutional presence at the fair, due in no small part to its third annual Curatorial Leadership Summit, a day-long, invitation-only program on Thursday.

“We’ve seen a lot of museum directors and curators from institutions all around the country,” said Nathalie Obadia, the owner of Paris- and Brussels-based Galerie Nathalie Obadia, who turned heads with a solo booth of works by the Indian-born American artist Rina Banerjee

. “We do about 10 fairs every year, and many collectors do about the same number, so it’s important to do something that stands out, that lets people engage with the work.” Collectors were engaging early on: Obadia sold one of Banerjee’s sculptures for \$50,000 and two drawings priced between \$15,000 and \$20,000 during the fair’s preview.

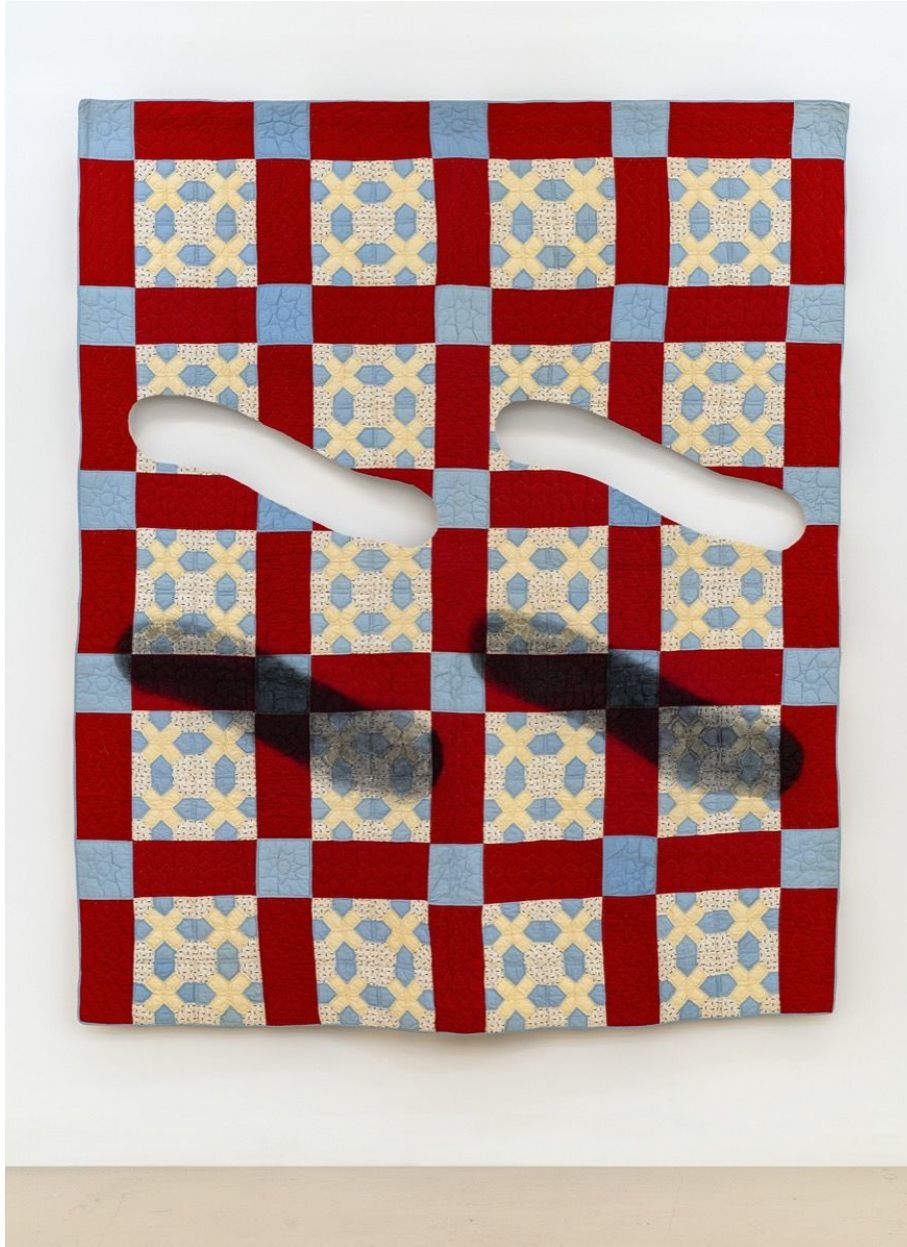
Other standout sales from the fair included the following:

- Los Angeles’s Roberts Projects sold Betye Saar’s monumental mixed-media assemblage *Mojotech* (1987) for \$1.2 million.
- London-based gallery Victoria Miro made 14 sales during the fair’s first day, selling unspecified works for prices ranging from \$10,000 to \$1 million.

- Antwerp's Zeno X Gallery sold the Luc Tuymans painting *In The End You're Just Dad* (2010) for \$700,000.
- New York's Bortolami Gallery sold multiple works by Mary Obering for \$430,000 apiece, and one work each by Marina Rheingantz and Claudio Parmiggiani for \$100,000.
- Los Angeles's Kayne Griffin Corcoran sold a new Mary Corse painting for \$280,000 and two of her works on paper for \$45,000 each, as well as a new Hank Willis Thomas work for \$80,000.
- London's Stephen Friedman Gallery sold two works by Denzil Forrester for \$321,700 and \$193,000, a sculpture by Yinka Shonibare CBE for more than \$160,000, and multiple pieces from its special presentation of works by David Shrigley for prices ranging from \$12,900 to \$25,700.
- Paris- and Brussels-based Galerie Templon sold a portrait painting by Kehinde Wiley for \$240,000, a work by the Senegalese artist Omar Ba for \$110,000, and an unspecified number of Iván Navarro works for \$100,000 a piece.
- New York's Hollis Taggart sold a Hans Hoffmann work for \$225,000 and a painting by Michael Corinne West for \$125,000.
- James Cohan gallery sold the large Firelei Báez canvas anchoring its booth to a collector for \$170,000.
- New York's 303 Gallery sold three works by Alicja Kwade for prices ranging from \$20,000 to \$150,000, as well as a work by Jeppe Hein for \$75,000 and a Karel Funk painting for \$60,000.
- The Brazil-based art gallery Galeria Nara Roesler sold an undisclosed number of works by Raul Mourão for prices ranging from \$10,000 to \$130,000, multiple Vik Muniz works for around \$60,000 apiece, and all the Cristina Canale works it was showing for \$20,000 each.
- Bologna-based gallery P420 sold two paintings by Irma Blank for \$12,500 and \$140,000, and a stitched fabric composition by Adelaide Cioni for \$10,000.
- Gavlak, which has locations in Los Angeles and Palm Beach, Florida, sold a Yoshitomo Nara work for \$125,000 and a riotous work by Jose Alvarez (D.O.P.A.) for \$75,000.
- Miami Beach's David Castillo Gallery sold a Sanford Biggers quilt work for \$60,000. The gallery also sold three paintings by the rising star Vaughn Spann—*Earth*, *Wind*, and *Fire* (all from 2020)—for \$50,000 each to collectors in Chicago, Florida, and New York, respectively.



*Vaughn Spann, Fire, 2020. Photo by Zach Balber.
Courtesy of David Castillo Gallery.*



Sanford Biggers, Somethin' Close to Nothin', 2019. Photo by Zach Balber. Courtesy of David Castillo Gallery.

“The Armory Show is the classic New York fair, and it’s a very American fair—I don’t think I’ve spoken to any European collectors yet,” David Castillo said Thursday afternoon in his booth, which at the time contained only one unsold work. “But it didn’t feel like it’s slow. I’m sure some people stayed away, but it wasn’t noticeable.”

Downtown at one of Armory Week’s other major fairs, the Independent Art Fair, there was no noticeable drop in attendance due to the coronavirus, either.

“We actually had slightly more people come to our preview this year than last year,” said Elizabeth Dee, Independent’s founder and CEO. “We’ve had a few cancelations from a handful

of collectors, but there are also several collectors who were originally going to miss the fair because of travel plans who've had to cancel those plans and were able to come to the fair after all."

With 68 galleries taking up four floors of the Spring Studios complex in Tribeca, the fair offered a more focused, boutique presentation than The Armory Show's sprawling piers. Independent featured more than its fair share of paintings, both figurative and abstract, but also a strong strain of ceramics and works grappling with issues of identity.

"When you're a fair, the temptation is ever-present to go big. But as you get bigger, you sacrifice a lot," Dee said. "As a retired gallerist, I understand what galleries and artists need from fairs."

Dealers got what they needed during the fair's preview, with 19 galleries reporting sales and 6 of them completely selling out their booths. Notable sales reported at Independent included the following:

- New York's Garth Greenan Gallery sold out its solo booth of works by Cannupa Hanska Luger, an artist of of Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, and European descent, with works priced between \$10,000 and \$74,000.
- New York gallery Karma sold out works by three of the artists in its four-artist presentation (featuring Alvaro Barrington, Dike Blair, Marley Freeman, and Zenzaburo Kojima), with prices ranging from \$7,000 to \$70,000.
- Los Angeles's David Kordansky Gallery sold seven works from its solo presentation of works by Shahryar Nashat, with prices ranging from \$10,000 to \$55,000.
- New York's Nicelle Beauchene Gallery sold out its solo presentation of works by Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, with paintings priced at \$25,000 each and drawings going for \$3,000 a piece.
- Seoul- and Los Angeles-based gallery Various Small Fires sold all the Jessie Homer French paintings in its booth devoted to the self-taught artist. Prices for French's work ranged from \$12,000 to \$25,000.
- Detroit's Reyes | Finn sold all the works by Nick Doyle it was showing in the fair's first hour, for prices between \$10,000 and \$18,000. The gallery also sold a work by LaKela Brown for \$8,000.
- PAGE (NYC), headquartered a few blocks away in Tribeca, sold out its presentation of colorful, stylized paintings by Leigh Rupple, priced at \$10,000 each.
- Portland, Oregon-based gallery Adams and Ollman sold all the works in its two-artist booth, with Sharif Farrag's riotous ceramics selling for prices between \$3,000 and \$10,000, and Marlon Mullen's paintings of covers of art magazines and catalogues selling for prices between \$8,000 and \$10,000.

- Chicago's Monique Meloche Gallery sold out its solo presentation of works by the painter Candida Alvarez, all priced at \$8,500.

"I've done a lot of fairs over the years and I love this team," said Leslie Tonkonow, the principal at New York-based gallery Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, which was showcasing a dazzling solo presentation by Saya Woolfalk.

"I think the fact that Elizabeth Dee had a gallery for so many years means she's really advocating for us."

The need for support and solidarity was Armory Week's resounding chorus. The fairs saw no major downturns in attendance or sales, but there was a sense of impending hardship. Reminders of the unfolding COVID-19 epidemic were everywhere, from forced changes in social behavior (elbow and fist bumps replaced handshakes and cheek kisses) to ubiquitous hand sanitizer stations. And the week was punctuated by news of major events being canceled or rescheduled in the art world (one of Italy's biggest fairs, Miart, postponed its upcoming edition) and beyond (Austin's music, film, and tech festival South by Southwest pulled the plug on its 2020 edition with just seven days notice).

With Art Basel in Hong Kong and Art Central already canceled, the next major art market moment after Armory Week and the ongoing TEFAF Maastricht fair may not be until the Art Cologne and Art Brussels fairs in late April, or Frieze New York in early May and the major spring auctions that follow, all of which are currently scheduled to proceed. But the continued spread of coronavirus could lead to more cancelations or the need for galleries to refrain from attending fairs out of a need for safety—turning off a key revenue stream for many dealers. According to cultural economist Clare McAndrew's "The Art Market 2020" report, published Thursday by Art Basel and UBS, art fair sales accounted for 45 percent of dealers' total sales by value in 2019.

Further down the line sits a second, more procedural change: The Armory Show's move to September. It remains to be seen how the rest of Armory Week's fairs—from Art on Paper and Volta to Spring/Break—will respond: Will they follow suit, stick to their current schedules, or opt to join Frieze Week in early May? But between the pressures of the coronavirus crisis and the upending of New York's art fair calendar, dealers and fair organizers will be facing some difficult decisions and looking for creative solutions in the coming months.

"Fairs should and need to evolve," Dee said, noting that Independent will not coincide with The Armory Show or Frieze in 2021. "Galleries also need to evolve—they're still operating on a model that was developed more than 50 years ago."