

Sep 12, 2022

MEET THE 11 ARTISTS WHO REPPED BROOKLYN AT THE ARMORY SHOW

In its second year at the Javits Center, The Armory Show's impressive lineup of galleries boasted no shortage of local talent

By Vittoria Benzine

The Armory Show, New York's hometown art fair, returned this weekend for their second showcase at the sprawling Javits Center in Manhattan — conveniently more centralized than former, far-flung editions on Piers 92 and 94 jutting into the Hudson River.

The Armory Show started in 1994 as the brainchild of four local art dealers who wanted to share their artist rosters with wider audiences. Colin de Land, Pat Hearn, Matthew Marks and Paul Morris unwittingly launched a cultural phenomenon by organizing an art fair in a hotel showing only contemporary works by living artists.

Given that origin story, it's no wonder New York galleries — and Brooklyn artists — show up in full force. This year, Brooklyn-based artists brought all the attitude that makes this place special, transmuting sensitivity and audacity alike through paint of course, but also semiprecious stones and ancient ornamental techniques. Below we pay a visit to 11 of them.

Last September's edition was a post-pandemic warm up, but this year's flagship fall fair beckoned the art world back from the Hamptons and beyond, adding about 100 new galleries to their exhibitors roster.

Check out these creative stewards who did the borough proud at the globally-renowned Armory Show which ran last weekend, from VIP day on Thursday, Sept. 8 through the closing date on Sept. 11.

Mother Gallery splits its square footage between the original location in Beacon, New York, and their new downtown spot in TriBeCa — but at this year's Armory Show, they devoted their whole booth to a balance of small and large canvases, all by Brooklyn-based painter Jenny Morgan. Originally from Salt Lake City, Morgan's works of oil on canvas coax traditional portraiture's hard lines to capture the soul within the body and the aura emanating beyond it.

Na'ye Perez marveled us with his indoor mural "What You Know Bout Love..." earlier this year at BRIC. We caught up with the artist in person this weekend, where he spoke before smaller works at a joint booth presented in the fair's "Not-For-Profit" booth section by Blackpuffin and For Freedoms. The work at center (below) depicts a Bed-Stuy landscape — the two figures surrounding it both have ties to Brooklyn; the guy on the left, he says, is from Bed-Stuy. Perez is still, in his words, "remixing" materials, adding Coney Island sand to soon-to-be-extinct Metrocards across these canvases, Perez's works could skyrocket in value for more reasons than one.

At The Armory Show's "Solo" section, where all booths present just one artist, Saya Woolfalk collages materials and inspirations alike. Butterflies, gems, embroidery and colored paper all allude to anthropology, feminist theory, even science fiction across the artist's presentation with Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects. This is actually Woolfalk's second appearance at the fair, but this time, Leslie Tonkonow told Brooklyn Magazine, she put the full spotlight on Woolfalk's latest work, which stems from her show on view at the Newark Museum of Art through December.

Appearances by Brooklyn artists didn't just spring from tri-state galleries. Tehran-based +2 Gallery presented a duo showcase of Iman Raad and Andisheh Avini at The Armory's Show "Presents" section, focused on emerging galleries in their first ten years. Both artists are based in Brooklyn, but also connected to Persian culture. Avini is also a director at Gagolian. Their disparate styles harmonized Raad's mesmerizing palette and patterns with Avini's symbolic sculptures of wood, healing stones and marquetry — sometimes figurative, sometimes abstract.

Yesiyu Zhao returned to The Armory Show for his second consecutive appearance with Miami-based David Castillo gallery. Zhao's high contrast, high saturation energy particularly stood out from the group showcase, a maelstrom of figures punctuated only by bright faces. The artist's own bio says "His work explores gender fluidity, juxtaposing motifs such as soldiers, high heels, body hair, fishnet stockings," using recognizable emotional details to sustain the suspension "between masculinity and femininity, and between 'normal' and 'other.'"



Left to right: Pepe Mar and Yesiyu Zhao. (Courtesy of David Castillo)

West Coast tastemaker Shulamit Nazarian brought three artists from their 10th anniversary show, which was on view almost all summer at their Los Angeles gallery. Michael Stamm and Naama Tsabar both made return appearances with their Armory showcase, but this year was the first that both Brooklyn-based artists appear side by side at the Armory Show. Tsabar's interactive installation struck a chord, literally. Gallery director Seth Curcio told Brooklyn Magazine she smashes guitars in her studio, letting physics determine the composition. Each set of strings was hooked up to an amp, available for the strumming. Attendees banged out some tunes.

Back at The Armory Show's "Presents" section, rising star Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola showcased his sensual-yet-nuanced textile works — canvases draped in color, actually, durags, meant to represent the underrepresented soft side of black masculinity. The East Williamsburg-based artist got contemplative about his Armory Show debut with Carbon 12 gallery: "It's kind of a full circle moment for me," Akinbola wrote in an email to Brooklyn Magazine. He used to work as an art handler at fairs, and observed murky power dynamics. "It's nice to be able to subvert that same power through my work in the same space years later."

TriBeCa based Jack Barrett Gallery has been busy with fairs — Dallas in April, NADA in May, and now The Armory Show. Also in the "Presents" section, Quay Quinn Wolf marked a new addition to their booth. There, Brooklyn Magazine learned that Wolf sews precious stones on business garments, a multilayered comment on consumerism. Pyrite, featured here, is more commonly known as fool's gold.

Upon closer inspection, the suave blazer's actually made of polyester. Look even closer and you'll see a petrol can provides the perch. This understated work packed a punch.

Every year, the anniversary of 9/11 stirs the city's soul. This year's Armory Show booth by East Hampton gallery Halsey McKay presented an assortment of roster artists, including two of what artist Matt Kenny calls "Monster Paintings," a follow up to his summertime solo show. "We wanted to make sure it was seen by the large number of people who visit the fair," director Ryan Wallace told Brooklyn Magazine. "The fact that the fair ran through 9/11 was a consideration as the day has been such a major influence on the artist's practice."

It's an unspoken art fair truth: the biggest galleries get the most prime location. Front and center near the entrance and exit, a breathtaking painting by Bushwick-based painter Luisa Rabbia anchored the external wall of Littly Italy-based Peter Blum Gallery. The radiant colors draw the eye like a moth to the flame to the truth — beneath all the unique styles, egos, and agendas in this massive hall, down to the cellular level we share more than not.

Art is a connective tissue, and art fairs, more than anything, are family reunions.