



# Critic's View: Art Southampton

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by Esperanza Leon

The contemporary art world tends toward ostentation and hubris, the actual art getting lost in an event-driven scene, becoming a pawn in a game of ego-driven, self-promoting buying and selling that has no written rules.

Art fairs in particular have become loci for this activity. The press releases and coverage of these shows seem more a frivolous who's who of the supposed social and cultural elite than true recognition of the talent, dedication, and work (inspiration/perspiration) poured into creating art and presenting it in a manner that will get it seen and sold well.

Art Southampton closes the nascent Hamptons art fair season with a show that is double the size of its first edition and poised to become 'the' fair, one that balances established modern masters and 'blue chip' artworks with recognized contemporary artists and emergent, cutting edge talents. It has all the pomp and circumstance to be expected these days, but manages also to present an overall visually consistent (with a few exceptions) show.

A good number of exhibitors show the requisite Gottliebs, de Koonings, and Frankenthalers; Rivers, Rauschenbergs, Lichtensteins, and Warhols, going through the roster of important Post-War American artists. With 90 exhibitors, even in this spacious and well-laid-out venue, unless one knows to navigate toward the galleries that give justice to these artists, offering significant works without obscuring them behind a mix of second-rate ones or new generation Pop or Op art, finding important pieces is a challenge.

To avoid this, I actively searched out a few contemporary highlights, attempting to stay clear of the bombast, even if the first work I was drawn to—**Banksy's** contentious *Kissing Coppers* at **Keszler Gallery** (New York / Southampton)—is a part of this. But then I have a distant relation to this street piece from Brighton, UK.

Prominently displayed at **Galerie Terminus** (Munich), where a multi-million dollar 1962 Lichtenstein, *Woman with Peanuts* almost steals the show, is the painting *Splash Waterfalls* (2013) by young Berlin artist **Christian Awe**. With roots in the city's Street Art and Graffiti movement, Awe layers acrylic and spray paint, also employing stencils, to evolve a patterned, textured surface bursting with color. His works on paper in the same booth are also dense concentrations of paint that saturate the support. Visually pleasing, they might border on the sweet, but not saccharine.



"Splash Waterfall" by Christian Awe, 2013. Acrylic and spray paint

on canvas, 51 x 78 inches. Courtesy of Galerie Terminus.

Also showing intense hues and a gestural manner, **Jacobo Borges'** *4H* series at **Galeria Freites** (Caracas) was a chance re-encounter with a prominent Venezuelan neo-figurative artist who, at age 81, is drawing digitally (the medium indicated is Duborcom) to create unique prints with bio-figurative and landscape elements.

It is wonderful to see how this artist continues to reinvent his art utilizing effectively contemporary tools/mediums, if perhaps losing the harder edge of his work from the 60s, testimonials of difficult sociopolitical times. Despite the recent upheavals of his native country—or maybe because of them—Borges, who has explored painting, film/video, photography, installation, and performance over more than five decades, seems to be escaping to a lyrical, dream world.



“4H” series, “Duborcom” by Jacobo Borges. 78 3/4 x 78 3/4 inches. Courtesy of Galeria Freites.

At **Abmeyer+Wood Fine Art** (Seattle) I found five works by New York City-based artist **Ford Crull**. He is under-recognized, the dealer opined, even if he has work in prominent public collections like the Metropolitan Museum and the National Gallery. *New Multiculturalism* (2012) is among three large paintings exhibited, while two small works, one on paper and an earlier canvas, are of equal interest for the mark-making and symbolist content, including text, that the artist is known for, and which he leaves up to the viewer to decipher and interpret. Not unlike Borges, Crull delves into an ambiguously figurative world of dream and memory.



“New Multiculturalism” by Ford Crull. Oil, enamel, and oil stick on canvas, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy of Abmeyer+Wood Fine Art.

Featured at **Axiom Contemporary** (Santa Monica), several mixed media canvases topped with resin by **Michael Gorman** vie for attention alongside clay and metal sculptures by sisters **Jane Burton** and **Tyler Burton**, the first with corpulent Gaia figures, the latter slim and nymph-like pieces. Cowboys and ballerinas are Gorman’s current preoccupation, as an artist that paints diverse subjects with equally diverse media. **The Dark One** occupies the main wall of the booth with an

upward thrust of red strokes balanced by a horizontal graffiti-like script over the slim upper body of the matador figure. His work can be characterized by a frenzied manner, dynamic in content and style.



“The Dark One” by Michael Gorman.  
Mixed media on canvas, 92 x 48 inches.  
Courtesy of Axiom Gallery.

Across the way, also from the Los Angeles area, **Fabien Castanier Gallery** (Studio City) presented the work of 30-year old French artist, **Rero**. Still working within his Graffiti roots, he turned to what has become his signature crossed-out typography, here presented in cut-out and painted works on paper, plaster pieces, and an on-site, large wall piece elaborated with countless tubes of red lipstick on opening night.

His clever turn of phrases, like that in the wall piece, “I AM A LIE THAT ALWAYS TELLS THE TRUTH”, reflects back on viewers and their complicit role in the art world. The line striking through the text is one of the elements—along with incising, excavating, painting in and painting out—that symbolizes the artist’s role in creation and destruction, representation and negation.



On-site wall drawing with lipstick by Rero at  
Fabien Castanier booth.

As at artMRKT Hamptons, **Mindy Solomon Gallery** presented a clean, curated booth of subtle earth tones, featuring again painting by **James Kennedy**, here a large panel, *Flight Component* (2013). Kennedy is now based in New York City but maintained a studio/gallery in East Hampton for many years, where he evolved his style from atmospheric abstracts to the current structured line work of pattern and movement exploring space, rather than remaining a rigid grid of generally subdued hues.



Mindy Solomon Gallery booth with James Kennedy’s “Flight Component,” acrylic and mixed media on Masonite, 76 x 100 inches.

A somewhat surprising and final find at a gallery known more for finely elaborated, figurative work was **Josefina Concha** at the **Praxis International Art** booth. The Chilean artist had a solo show of her textile works earlier this year at the Chelsea, New York gallery that is headquartered in Buenos Aires.

Her *Cuerpos Zurcidos*, or sewn bodies, are not only sewn but woven, creating volume, texture, and harmonious swatches of color, in the case of *Cuerpo Zurcido III*. The artist has taken the painted picture space and recreated it with thread. Line and form are invested with new meaning, treading on the sculptural, as if the painting had dissolved and reshaped in an organic way.

Praxis also shows several pieces by local, Southampton artist, **Darlene Charneco**, though the vertical panels of paint, nails, and resin are less impacting than the 5-inch gems on the opposite end of the booth.



“Cuerpo Zurcido III” by Josefina Concha. Sewing on fabric, 94 1/4 x 47 1/8 inches. Courtesy of Praxis International Art.

**BASIC FACTS:** Art Southampton continues through July 29 at the Southampton Elks Club grounds, 605 County Road 39 Southampton, NY 11968. The art fair launched with a VIP preview on Thursday, July 25, from 6 to 10 p.m. with proceeds benefiting Southampton Hospital.

Hours for the art fair are from noon to 7 p.m. from Friday to Sunday and from noon to 5 p.m. on Monday. Passes are \$15 for one day and \$30 for a multi-day pass and \$10 for students, seniors and groups of more than 10 people. Children under 12 attend free with an adult.

Additional information is available at: [www.art-southampton.com](http://www.art-southampton.com).

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