

CRITIC'S VIEW: Natural Selection—Finding the Hidden Treasures at Armory Modern

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by Charles A. Riley II

Let the pig off the leash, we're on a truffle hunt amid the 200 booths parading the length of two massive piers at the Armory Show. There is no time to waste on inferior fungi, so focus on Pier 92 and the serious business of the Modern section.

Right away as you enter you have a small but beautiful painting by Le Corbusier, easily missed except that it is signposted by a larger work by his frequent collaborator and friend, Fernand Leger.

The Corbusier is dated 1943, after the Purist period and reflecting a painterly freedom that some of the outlined forms of his earlier works did not allow. Show enough genuine interest and the kind experts at Moeller Fine Art will remove it from the wall and show you the calligraphic inscription on the verso dedicating it (architecture students will find their pulses racing) to Walter Gropius in 1954. We've made a great start, if art history is our goal.

Classic Modernism can be tracked to Barcelona's exuberant Mayoral Galeria, bursting with bright Miro paintings, most of them late work, as well as intensely congruent Calder. For gravitas, John Szoke Gallery from New York has brooding, tenebrous works on paper by Edvard Munch, including a devastating *Death and the Maiden*, as well as those web-like linear displays of virtuoso draftsmanship, the Picasso drypoint series, the best of which is *Sculpture, Tete de Marie Therese* of 1933. Sniff out the Picasso work on paper at Sims-Reed from London while you are at it.



"Sans titre I" by Joan Miró, 1970. 11 2/5 × 30 7/10 inches. Exhibited with Mayoral Galeria. Image courtesy of Artsy.

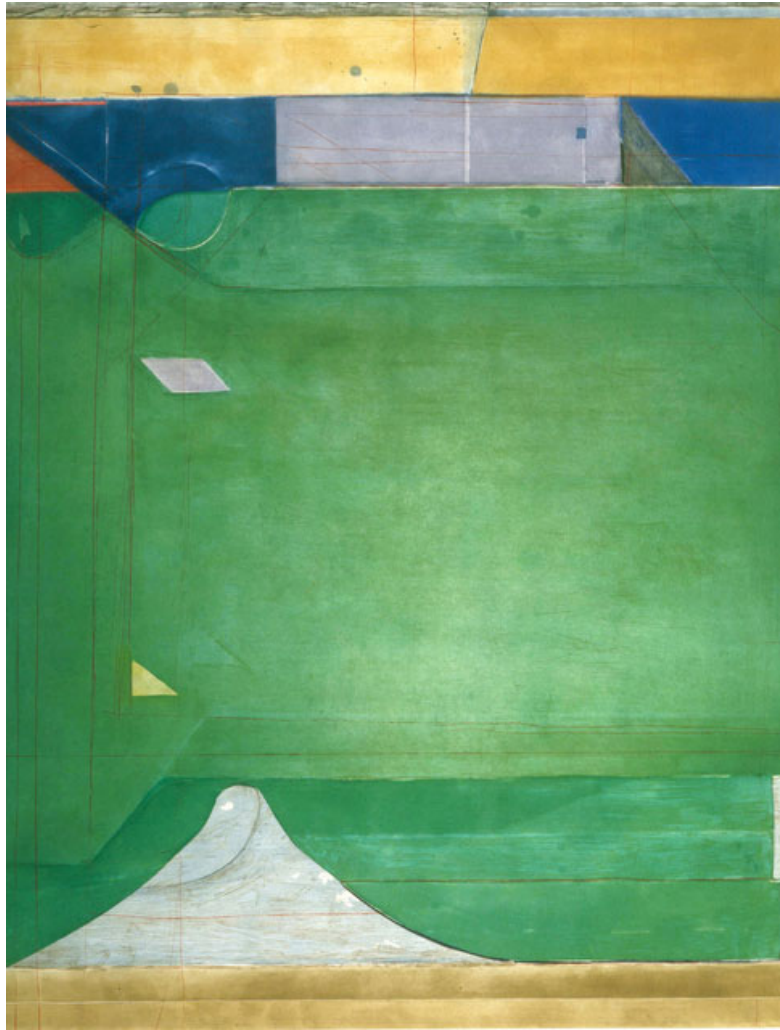


"Tête de Marie-Thérèse" by Pablo Picasso, 1933. From the series Inscribed "16931" on verso lower right, in pencil; "75/53 B250" on verso lower left, in pencil. Drypoint with scraper printed on montval laid paper. Exhibited with John Szoke. Image courtesy of Artsy.

Abstract Expressionism is not one of the strengths of the fair, except at Hollis Taggart where a glorious Alfred Leslie's, #44 (1959) next to Theodoros Stamos's *Sentinel III* (1960) gratify an appetite for strong chromaticism. Along those lines, follow the Bay Area trail to two galleries and track the Richard Diebenkorn and David Park paintings at John Berggruen Gallery (especially *Green* by Diebenkorn from 1986, an emerald) as well as at their San Francisco rival Hackett-Mill, where you will also find a marvelous group of paintings by Elmer Bischoff and Hans Hofmann, who taught in the Bay area.



"#44" by Alfred Leslie, 1959. Oil on canvas, 60 x 64 inches. Exhibited with Hollis Taggart Galleries. Photo courtesy of Hollis Taggart Galleries.



"Green" by Richard Diebenkorn, 1986. Color spit bite aquatint with soft ground aquatint and drypoint, 53 3/4 x 41 1/2 inches. Exhibited with John Berggruen Gallery. Image courtesy of Artsy.

While at Berggruen, you will undoubtedly have the Brice Marden suite of drawings all to yourself as they are too quiet for this crowd, even if they are immensely rewarding. If they whet your appetite, there are two exquisite "masking drawings" on paper by Marden at Senior and Shopmaker as well.



“Masking Drawing #6” by Brice Marden, 1984. Oil and ink on paper, 14 3/4 x 4 1/2 inches. Exhibited with Senior & Shopmaker Gallery. Image courtesy of Senior & Shopmaker Gallery.

A vast and vertiginous painting by Robert Mangold at Armand Bartos of New York offer the illusion that the wall is falling away—shaped canvas and elliptical calligraphy on a level that make it special in Mangold’s oeuvre.

You will have to wander some way along the pier but it will be worth it to find Danese / Corey’s deeply moving Deborah Butterfield horses. But that is the morel, the truffle is behind you tucked into a corner: a 1980 (early, in other words) iteration of her signature motif that is as unforgettable as it is important.



"Crystal" by Deborah Butterfield, 1980. Armature with barbed wire, 29 1/2 × 39 × 15 inches. Exhibited with Danese/Corey. Image courtesy of Artsy.

While in Danese, pause to enjoy one of North Sea resident April Gornik's large-scaled, luminist seascapes. And, while you send an attractive stranger to buy you an overpriced flute of Pommery, stoop to admire an intensely absorbing square work on paper by the phenomenally talented Theresa Chong, one of the gallery's stars.



“Water World” by April Gornik, 2013. Oil on linen, 78 x 70 inches. Exhibited with Danese / Corey. Image courtesy of Artsy.

Hype is inevitable when the monetary stakes are high, and where there is hype there are new media hucksters. There is the usual techno rubbish about “transforming the space” pushed by Artsy with its “takeover booth” by Hank Willis Thomas. It promises to send fairgoers out with their mobile devices where, guaranteed, they will clog traffic and never see a thing. If only somebody could hack one of these apps and send all the little addicts scurrying elsewhere. Then we would have so much more room to enjoy the real art.

BASIC FACTS: The Armory Show is held March 5 through 8, 2015 at Piers 92 & 94, 12th Avenue and 55th Street, New York, N.Y. www.thearmoryshow.com.

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