



# CRITIC'S VIEW: VOLTA, Taking on The Big Boys

March 7, 2015

by Gabrielle Selz

This year marks the eighth edition of the solo project contemporary art fair, VOLTA, and the first year it is being held in its new home at Pier 90, adjacent to The Armory Show. In its new digs, VOLTA New York is more polished, the younger sibling ready to take on playing with the big boys. Still, VOLTA, the fair known for celebrating the singular and in-depth presentation, has not lost its identity as a place for the discovering emerging talent.

Certainly this has been a breakout year for the artist, [Dustin Yellin](#), who is exhibiting a series of sculptural paintings at the booth of [Richard Heller Gallery](#). Just four years ago, Yellin founded Pioneer Works, a non-profit institute for art and scientific innovation in Red Hook, Brooklyn. This year, Yellin's work has already been exhibited at S2, the gallery attached to Sotheby's Auction House, and at Lincoln Center as part of the [New York City Ballet's Art Series](#).

Interested in creating objects that are themselves performances, Yellin's multiple layered panels are outlines of the human form frozen in glass. Comprised of collages of found imagery and acrylic paint, Yellin calls these artworks "Psychogeographies." They are painstakingly detailed interior maps that evoke lab specimens trapped under glass; each a tableaux that explode inward and outward like holograms of fantastical worlds.



"Untitled Small Figure 52" by Dustin Yellin, 2015. Front view, 13.75 x 35 x 7.75 inches. Courtesy Richard Heller Gallery.



"Untitled no. 56" by Dustin Yellin , 2015. 13.75 x 35 x 7.75 inches. Courtesy Richard Heller Gallery.

Next-door, at [Beta Pictori / Maus Contemporary](#), artist [Travis Somerville](#)'s focus is not the imaginary world within, but the tumultuous history of race relations in America. Having grown up in the South,

Somerville incorporates artifacts of popular historic Southern culture—water fountains, vintage money bags, whisky bottles, Klu Klux Klan hoods and cotton-picking sacks—to comment on the complex attitudes of oppression. Objects for Somerville are never just inanimate relics, but rather they radiate stories and compel us to reconsider the violent conflict of the American narrative.



Well Division by Travis Somerville , 2009. Exhibited with Beta Pictori / Maus Contemporary, Image courtesy of the artist.



Detail from “Well Division” by Travis Somerville. Courtesy of the artist.



“Narrative Structure 3” by Travis Somerville, 2013. Graphite on vintage cotton picking bag, 96 x 21 inches. Courtesy Beta Pictori / Maus Contemporary.

The sociopolitical role of the African-American male is also the subject of [Yashua Klos](#) at [Galerie Anne De Villepoix](#). Klos was born in Chicago and now lives and works in Berlin. His large woodblock sculpture, *Meteor*, was created for the VOLTA show. Having grown up without a father, Klos’s work is concerned with building the masculine identity. His sculptures and his collage works are composed of fragmented imagery. In a sense, they are ‘cubist’ constructions with multiple perspectives and shifting forms. With imagery emerging from the material, they are truly depictions of the process of coming into being.



“Body on Table with Deep Black Space” by Yashua Klos, 2015. Collage of woodblock prints on archival paper, 205 x 167 cm



“Meteor” by Yashua Klos, 2015. Maple, wood stain and polyurethane, 16.14 x 20.08 x 20.08 inches.

Directly across the aisle at [CONNERSMITH](#), the masterful oil paintings of [Erik Thor Sandberg](#) merge the human figure with landscape. A Magical Realist of the palette, Sandberg’s concave vistas envelop the viewer in imaginary worlds peopled by wild animals. Finding beauty in the grotesque, the strange and the fallible, Sandberg’s paintings are reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch and Peter Brueghel the Elder.



“Toehold” by Erik Thor Sandberg, 2015. Oil on curved panel, 36.25 x 71.25 inches. Courtesy CONNERSMITH.

The inter-relationship between body and landscape was a reoccurring theme at VOLTA, and [Jonathan Ferrara Gallery](#) presented the work of a highly accomplished, young talent, [Nikki Rosato](#). Rosato creates intimate portraits by mining the world of maps and superimposing the network of blood and nervous vessels within the human with the urban arteries of traffic systems. Each piece is fashioned from hand-cut road maps where Rosato has cut away the landmass—leaving only a dense fabric of lines. From there, Rosato either suspends her skin-like structures from pins or delicately molds them to hang upon wire armatures.



Artwork by Nikki Rosato. Courtesy Jonathan Ferrara Gallery.



Artwork by Nikki Rosato. Courtesy Jonathan Ferrara Gallery.

Paper is also the medium of [Simon Schubert](#). To display his work, [Foley Gallery](#) has created a dazzling white-on-white exhibition space, white rug, white folded paper wainscoted walls, white lights, white plastic chairs. Into this pristine environment, Schubert’s original paper sculptures gradually emerge like apparitions from out of the mist. Schubert’s intricate interiors are meticulously fabricated from the simple folding of paper. Delicate and detailed, these pieces evoke

a pristine isolation.



“Untitled (Light in Staircase I)” by Simon Schubert, 2015. Folded Paper, 39.50 x 27.50 inches. Courtesy Foley Gallery.



“Portrait Samuel Beckett (2)” by Simon Schubert, 2015. Folded Paper, 58.50 x 47 inches. Courtesy Foley Gallery.

A stark palette and low-key tonality are the components explored in the seascape oil paintings of Brian Novatny at [Ada Gallery](#). Pushing, blending, smudging, smearing, wiping, Novatny effects with oil are more akin to the dynamic of watercolor painting. Images of seas, rolling clouds, and maritime disasters arise from his tempestuous, fluid surfaces. The figure is all but absent from Novatny’s images, only the detritus and destruction of place points to the unfolding of human drama.



“Prairie Vagabond” by Brian Novatny, 2015. Oil on canvas, 58 x 50 inches. Courtesy ADA Gallery.



“Regina in the Clouds” by Brian Novatny, 2014. Oil on canvas, 48 x 40 inches. Courtesy ADA Gallery.

Finally, [Robert Henry Contemporary](#) presents the obsessive ink on paper drawings of [Derek Lerner](#), depictions of the urge to create and its effect on environments. Each abstract piece is crafted from millions of tiny ink marks: line-by-line, Lerner obliterates as he creates. Derek Lerner’s map-like vistas are intended as metaphors for viruses or cancers, growths that destroy as they bloom,

migrate and multiply.



“Asvirus 53” by Derek Lerner, 2014. Ink on paper, 59 x 87 inches. Courtesy Robert Henry Contemporary



“Asvirus 51” by Derek Lerner, 2014. Ink on paper, 20 x 20 inches.  
Courtesy Robert Henry Contemporary.

VOLTA has come of age. Galleries presenting solo-artist exhibitions are now appearing in all the fairs, but VOLTA has the edge. It’s still the place where, thankfully, viewers can sift through the mayhem and find not just gems, but artists emerging in that moment of their breakout. That in itself is worth the price of admission.

**BASIC FACTS:** VOLTA NEW YORK is presented from March 5 to 8, 2015 at Pier 90, located on West 50th Street at 12 Avenue, New York, NY 10036. [www.ny.voltashow.com](http://www.ny.voltashow.com).

---

Hamptons Art Hub staff will be covering Armory Art Week. Check back for reviews and art fair coverage publishing throughout the weekend. Follow us on Instagram (@hamptonsarthub #hamptonsarthub) for artwork spotted along the way.

---

Copyright 2015 Hamptons Art Hub LLC. All rights reserved.