



# CRITIC'S VIEW: Art Southampton - Art of the Nude and Plenty of Programs

July 8, 2016

by James Croak

The East End's largest and most elaborate art fair has descended for the second year onto the grounds of Nova's Ark Project on Millstone Road in Water Mill. This fifth installment of [Art Southampton](#) is sponsored and arranged by the powers behind the larger [Art Miami](#), a fair whose stature is second only to Art Basel Miami Beach, and they bring their seamless organization and clout to gather top providers of visual culture under one tent for five days.

This year's 2016 edition of the fair began July 7, 2016 with a mobbed VIP preview party, benefiting both the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill and Southampton Hospital. One for the mind and spirit and one for the body.

A fair consisting of a tent and a bag of wall hooks no longer stirs the crowds, so major fairs add museum-like programming and [ancillary events](#). I counted 13 talks and presentations on the schedule for the five days of the fair, and not one seemed like a clunker. There were few overlaps in scheduling, so it would be possible to attend many of the programs. For this writer, these are more attractive than aisles of worried dealers and suspicious pricing for often thin efforts.

Gracie Mansion, née Joanne Mayhew, adopted the name of the NYC mayor's residence and started a hot '80s East Village gallery by going anti-white box— the layout favored by the reigning minimalism—and famously located her gallery in her apartment bathroom. Her taste was so smack on for the raucous East Village scene that for years resumes bragged of exhibitions in her crapper.

On Sunday, July 10, at 3 p.m., Mansion, now with ArtNet (this writer's former employer) is presenting at Art Southampton on a [panel discussing art and artists of the 1980s](#), all of whom she undoubtedly knew. Anyone planning on reaching for their wallet to add pieces from this singular sliver of art history to their collection would be remiss to skip it.



Gracie Mansion bathroom-gallery, 1982.

Septuagenarian art dealer Louis Meisel famously coined the keeper term "photorealism" and shows mostly that at his [Louis K. Meisel Gallery](#) in New York City. A surprise addition to his gallery is the contemporary Israeli artist [Yigal Ozeri](#), who has had a very public journey from romantic painting to

photorealism. Ozeri's work has a large following who seem loyal regardless of where he points his brush.

For the last few years Ozeri has been painting nubile Waspettes against foliage. I know Ozeri to be a clever man and this deliberate kitsch seems in line with one prevailing aesthetic at the fair, which was full of it: dozens of artists painting and photographing pretty, late teens as if Betty Friedan was really Betty Crocker.



"Untitled; Zuzanna" by Yigal Ozeri, 2016. Exhibited with Louis K. Meisel Gallery. Photo by James Croak.

Another such example is [Kevin Berlin](#), who frequently wanders about art fairs, including this one, surrounded by a bevy of body painted or scantily clothed women who are part of his performance art pieces. His half-hearted and forgettable Picture Generation paintings are derivative of artists showing a decade before he arrived, but he doesn't seem to care and neither do we as he adds to the festivities with anti-PC drama.



Artist and top hat designer Kevin Berlin with some of his bikini-clad women at the VIP Opening of Art Southampton. Photo by Tom Kochie.

Spotting a trend in an art fair is a fairly simple procedure: simply wander around for an hour without judgment and notice how about a third of the dealers seem to be showing the same thing. I suspect this is how the beloved and late [Bill Cunningham](#) singularly named the coming clothing fashions in advance of the runways by standing on street corners and noticing something new or something not seen in awhile.

On the first night of Art Southampton, it was anti-PC gratuitous nudity, not porn but unabashedly sexuality of young girls, often with stylish commercial overtones. In addition to Ozeri, [Monroe](#), a Dutch born photographer (who annoyingly uses a one-word name) is the daughter of an unnamed photographer and unnamed fashion model launching her own career with nude shots of herself against desert landscapes and rock formations. Her gallerist described her as too modest to allow anyone else to shoot her so she performs this solo with a camera on a timer. These works were presented by the [De Re Gallery](#) along with other similar artists doing nudes.



“solo four” by Monroe, 2015. Exhibited with De Re Gallery.

This nude girl/nature imagery in the modern world dates from [Édouard Manet](#) (1832 -1883), regarded as the first modern painter after realist painting had to become something else when photography started to displace it in the middle of the 19th century.



“The Luncheon on the Grass (Le déjeuner sur l’herbe)” by Édouard Manet, 1863.

There are endless varieties and frankly acres of barroom paintings of fertile-age women posed against the trees of the woods. Manet was hardly the first for this juxtaposition, but he may have been the first who wasn’t outright kitsch in the tradition of [Francois Boucher](#), whose French Rococo dreck appeared a century earlier. The task is to guess why it is appearing now, again in a fine art setting, as did the work of Manet.



“Wild Horses” by Brian Bowen Smith, 2014. Exhibited with De Re Gallery. Photo by James Croak.

[Brian Bowen Smith](#) has one of the more elaborate shots of this genre, also at De Re Gallery, showing seven young women prancing through the surf with horse head masks a la the “Equus” stage play. Here the sexual overtones—ride me, my wet body!—are hilarious and all the subjects seem to be having a good time. Smith’s portfolio is filled with tasteful but low key commercial shots of fashion models, but I suspect he is at his best when his id is unbridled as it is here.

One involving photographer at the fair is the sophisticated [Alexis Martino](#), whose wall of small photos, often nudes, at the Ross School booth, is an above average installation for an art fair. Martino teaches at Ross School and continues this “art of the nude” imagery with dozens of young females in somewhat gratuitous poses. But we accept it because her portfolio demonstrates highly thought through and staged imagery. This is one artist to watch for in the future.



Artwork by Alexis Martino. Exhibited with the Ross School. Photo by James Croak.

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**BASIC FACTS:** Art Southampton is held July 7 to 11, 2016 at the Art Southampton Pavilion at Nova's Ark Project, 60 Millstone Road, Bridgehampton, NY 11976. [www.art-southampton.com](http://www.art-southampton.com)

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