



CRITIC'S VIEW: Upstairs Art Fair Is a Rewarding Reimagining of the Form for The Hamptons

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by James Croak

We've seen a lean summer thus far, wherein two regular Hamptons summer cultural events withdrew due to poor market conditions. Both [Art Hamptons](#) and [Art Southampton](#) begged off this year, but with a suitor's promise to reappear in the next. The stock market tiptoes ever higher but [weak auctions](#) spooked the culture industry; the massive mobilization of tents and equipment that typically land in Southampton horse fields in July gave way to fields full of, well, horses.

[Market Art + Design](#) opened as predicted with its designer-oriented objects and some cultural satisfaction could be had perusing the aisles of that medium-sized fair.

And then suddenly two new fairs pop up: On the horizon this September 16-17 is a new high-end event at [The Bridge](#) exclusive golf club, promising an array of blue-chip art and classic cars. And this weekend, July 14-16, 2017, a smaller, scrappy fair previewed in Amagansett entitled the [Upstairs Art Fair](#). Fitting more appropriately into the scale of the Hamptons and containing no filler galleries; this fair features 13 galleries that know what they are doing and give a good profile of the mostly downtown Manhattan art scene.

The [Upstairs Art Fair](#) is an informal affair, no booths, no wall tags, no price list; it feels like a loft show, which it kinda is. But the art is thoroughly enjoyable, lots of thing to look at and muse about, plenty of opportunities to wonder and guess why an individual spent so much time on a piece.

One artist, [Robert Davis](#), exhibited by Rental Gallery, presents the most curious work among the baker's dozen; he creates highly skilled pencil drawings of 1970s buildings and people rendered perfectly in the [photorealism](#) style that took New York by storm in the late 1960s. This style was an outgrowth of Pop Art and a reaction to the perceived non-specificity of Abstract Expressionism. Davis doubles down on its heyday with imagery *from* the 1970s. As he was born in 1970 he could not remember much about this time, or if he does it is filtered through the listening-to-the-adults mind of, say, an 8-year-old.

My favorite is a perfectly crafted image of [Kathleen Neal Cleaver](#), a well-traveled and widely educated woman who married and then joined her husband [Eldridge Cleaver](#) in the Black Panther Party as the party's communications secretary in 1967. The Cleavers were constantly in trouble and on the lam for years, living in barely functioning countries such as Algeria and North Korea. Upon returning to the United States, Kathleen went to Yale Law school and then joined the white shoe law firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore. Eldridge became a Mormon and a conservative Republican, often

speaking at their conventions. Ah, the [Big Chill](#).

Davis's portrait of her seems to be from around the time he was born, still the heady time of the 1960s with the youth rebellion. Done from photographs, of course, but enlivened by his considerable skill.



"Cleaver" by Robert Davis. Pencil on paper. Courtesy Rental Gallery.

[Karma Gallery](#) maintains locations both in NYC and East Hampton in the summer. They are exhibiting at the fair some funny small figures made by Argentinian Andrés Eidelstein that were popular when Karma showed them at the [Independent New York](#) art fair last year and again here at this show. These are fun Disneyesque Pop art pieces that are sold individually, but probably work better as a group. Amusingly they seem to repeat the colorful mayhem of an art fair, and no less so in this upbeat venue.



Andrés Eidelstein. Courtesy Karma.

[Nicole Wittenberg](#) is a figurative painter new on the scene but already racking up some serious credits, such as the John Koch Award in Art, American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2012. Her work is figurative delivered with subdued color or often monochrome wash with lots of figures in embrace or performing fellatio. The images appear so quietly from the abstract background that my first thought was I was looking at a [Franz Kline](#) expression, especially in the piece *Upside Down Ben* shown with the [yours mine & ours](#) gallery. Nice overlap between figuration and abstraction, those suffering from overly stiff figuration (and you know who you are) would do well to spend some time looking at this promising work. The asking price of \$16,000 seems a little ambitious given I could find no auction presence, but I'm sure they would dicker.



"Upside Down Ben" by Nicole Wittenberg. Oil on canvas, 72 x 54 inches. Courtesy of the artist and yours mine & ours.

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All in all, it's a brief but fun installation up this weekend.

BASIC FACTS: Upstairs Art Fair continues July 15 to 16, 2017 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The fair is free and open to the public. It's located at [11 Indian Wells, Amagansett, NY](#).

Exhibiting Galleries: [Ceysson & Bénétière](#), [Eric Firestone Gallery](#), half gallery, [Halsey McKay Gallery](#), [Harper's Books](#), [James Fuentes](#), [KARMA](#), [Magenta Plains](#), [New Release](#), [Rachel Uffner Gallery](#), Rental Gallery, The Fireplace Project, yours mine & ours.

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