



CRITIC'S VIEW: Politics Left Behind, Armory Show 2018 Keeps Pace with Changing Face of Art World

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by James Croak

The annual [Armory Show](#) opened this week with a five-acre exhibition sprawling across Piers 92 & 94 on the West side of Manhattan. The fair has a new director, Nicole Berry, and she continues with the format of six divisions—five gallery areas plus live events—developed by the preceding director. There are a total of 198 galleries showing their wares in this massive space, including a few surprise inclusions.

The show is well-presented and carefully audited, shrill politics were left at the door and presented works are upbeat and include something for everyone. Like a jukebox crammed with scores from Mozart's Requiem to Wu-Tang Clan, there is a satisfaction to be had in the pluriform, post-dominant narrative of the turned-21 century.



Yinka Shonibare offered by the James Cohan Gallery. Photo by James Croak.

Art fairs are the ultimate “showrooming” venue, an internet meme for eyeballing a desired product in a brick and mortar store and then fetching it cheaper online. Many were remiss to imagine that this method wouldn't extend to visual art. It has.

Slowly this routine worked its way into the art world, wherein the internet accompanied viewers right into the pristine white box and collectors had ArtNet or [ArtPrice](#) auction offerings on their screens, comparing artwork asking prices to recent auction sales. Typically the difference was immense, and I boasted I could guess the age of the artist by the size of the gap: artists of the baby boomer generation seem unaware that databases exist, and a millennial wouldn't buy a toothbrush without a price search.

The art world has responded by moving online, not entirely yet but the [trend is well underway](#). This is creating a more profound experience and meaning for art fairs: similar to attending an orchestra a couple times a year after listening mostly to recorded music. What is lost online is the physical presence of the work, which becomes ever more engaging as we're getting used to artwork being

“not there,” in the same way that film caused us to forget about the superior experience of attending live theater.



Mary Sibande at Gallery Momo from Johannesburg. Photo by James Croak.

The benefits for dealers are obvious, assuming it works; they can experiment more now that they're free of the albatross around their neck of making the rent and light bill every month. Especially gratifying are the notions of no more rent gouging or Hurricane Sandys to soak the drywall. And no more worries about the ever-thinning Saturday traffic as a 24-hour market means there's always someone out there in a jolly mood and ready to purchase.

Keeping up with the times, the prestigious [Frieze New York](#) art fair, held annually on Randall's Island, has eliminated the [physical space requirement](#) for a gallery in their fair requirements and [The Armory Show](#) is expected to follow suit next year. This is huge. Presently, and amusingly, The Armory Show denotes the 2018 exhibitors not with photos of the dealer, staff, or artists, but instead with [pictures](#) of their individual white boxes! The newly departed.



“Common Day II” by Gabriele Beveridge, 2018. Offered by Parisian Laundry Gallery, Montreal. Photo by James Croak.

As this writer dates from a time when an artist was supposed to maintain a studio within walking distance of his or her gallery, this now implies there is no residency requirement. Perhaps artists will no longer have to “move to New York” to show that they're “serious.”

With all this in mind, it's significant that two major galleries that hadn't participated in the Armory Show for more years than anyone can remember, [Perrotin](#) and [Gagosian](#)—institutions unto themselves maintaining 18 white boxes between them—set up booths at this fair. The more is definitely the merrier regardless of the back story.



“Night Lie” by Taro Izumi, 2017. Video. Photo by James Croak.

We are in the age of [mechanical reproduction](#), and have been since 1935 or so when Walter Benjamin first noted much art was being made by machines: woodcuts, etchings, engraving, photography, and others. What these works had in common was they were flat. Computers greatly advanced these techniques but now are extending machine use to building sculpture. It was a natural progression that three-dimensional “printing” or “[3D printing](#)” would create artworks as well.

Ever on the vanguard of this slightly explored area is [Claudia Hart](#), who is showing 3D sculptures at [Upfor Gallery](#). (Should they be called prints?) Hart teaches the same at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The works are handsome and engaging but my first reaction to virtually created figures was probably akin to the first time [J.M.W. Turner](#) saw a photograph: it seems like cheating somehow. But I’m definitely in the minority, as I see these machines installed at art schools across the country. Given the incidence of the same at this fair, the practice is no longer on the way, it is now here.



“Kryptonite Mortification 04” by Claudia Hart, 2007-2016. 3D printed. Courtesy of the artist.

Probably the most developed artist in this new 3d printing genre is Austrian [Oliver Laric](#), offered by the [Tanya Leighton Gallery](#) of Berlin in the fair’s Focus section. He scans bronze and marble sculptures from antiquity and then prints them three dimensionally in plastic, mixing clear and opaque sections.

There is something compelling to these figures that keeps them from being just another Pop Art knockoff. And since it’s essentially a digital data file, he could email the file to a buyer to print at a different size to fit the available space. It was a short while ago that artists were mailing 35mm slides to dealers; perhaps soon holograms. The possibilities boggle the mind.



Oliver Laric scanning “Youth of Magdalensberg,” 1st century B.C.



“Jüngling vom Magdalensberg” by Oliver Laric, 2018. 3D

printed. Courtesy of the artist.

One artist who *is* mailing digital files of sculptures is showing alongside Hart at the Upfor Gallery. Artist [Moreshin Allayari](#) “rescued” Iraq artifacts by digitally recreating works destroyed with sledge hammers by Islamic State. (Many of these were originals that had been safely hidden away in the Baghdad Museum and ISIS was destroying plaster fakes.)

Her gallant work to preserve our common history, the “Material Speculation” series, is available online on a site named “The Distributed Monument.” It is a large 3d file that anyone can [download and then 3D-print](#) the previous contents of some of the great museums of Iraq. The site also includes the best stealable quote: “The act of downloading, and the user’s desktop is the space of exhibition.” Let’s see anyone hammer this.



“3-D printed reconstruction, King Uthal” by Morehshin Allahyari, 2015. Courtesy of the artist.

There are several large site-built sculptures at the fair, and each odder than the next. The Clint Eastwood film “High Plains Drifter” includes a scene in which the “Stranger” demands that every building in the town be painted blood red. For reasons unclear, California artist [Rachel Lachowicz](#) duplicates the sizeable sheriff’s office from the movie and covered it with red lipstick. She’s been doing the same for awhile, recreating well-known modernist sculptures and covering them with lipstick. Whatever. Anyway it’s good fun and made me chuckle.



“The Sheriff / Barbershop” by Rachel Lachowicz, 2017.
Photo by James Croak.

81-year-old Chicago artist [Richard Hunt](#) is still alive and welding away, several of his nonpareil formalist inventions are displayed via the [Kavi Gupta Gallery](#), also of Chicago. Hunt is the natural heir to the malleable iron craft of [David Smith](#) and due for a retrospective, and a big one.



“Hanging Form” by Richard Hunt, 1962. Photo by James Croak.

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And I’ll close with everyone’s favorite lunatic pieces created by [Nam June Paik](#), the Korean artist who recently passed but invented video art along the way. Here at the fair Gagosian shows one of his very last pieces, made the year before he died.

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BASIC FACTS: The Armory Show is on view Thursday, March 8 through Sunday, March 11, 2018 at Piers 92 & 94, 711 12th Ave, New York, NY 10019. www.thearmoryshow.com

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