

CRITIC'S VIEW: Five Booths That Stood Out from the Crowd at The Armory Show 2018

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by Kelcey Edwards

With more than 200 galleries from around the world exhibiting at this year's The Armory Show, there was a plethora of works large and small to consider, and simply finding one's way through the morass of booths, gallerists, fairgoers, collectors, performance artists and photographers felt like an immersive theater experience.

Under the guidance of The Armory Show's new executive director, Nicole Berry, this year's fair featured the buzz-worthy "Platform," a site specific group show of commissioned works organized by [Jen Mergel](#), including a striking, large-scale translucent piece by [Tara Donovan](#)—*Untitled*, 2018—presented by [Pace Gallery](#). The Donovan work—after two hours of rapid-fire art viewing—was as welcome as a tall, cool glass of water.

While there was more art to see than a viewer could possibly digest, the fair's commitment to presenting fresh discoveries and relevant work was everywhere on view. Below are a few highlights from this reviewer's tour, compiled into a list of greatest hits for anyone who might have missed The Armory Show 2018.

Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois (Paris)

For this year's edition, [Vallois](#) presented emerging and international and French avant-garde artists from the 1960s to the present, including works by [Martin Kersels](#), [Niki de Saint Phalle](#) and [Jacques Villeglé](#), among others. The standout of the booth was the video installation by Japanese artist [Taro Izumi](#), a "trickster artist," as he's described by Charlotte Herr of Gallery Vallois.

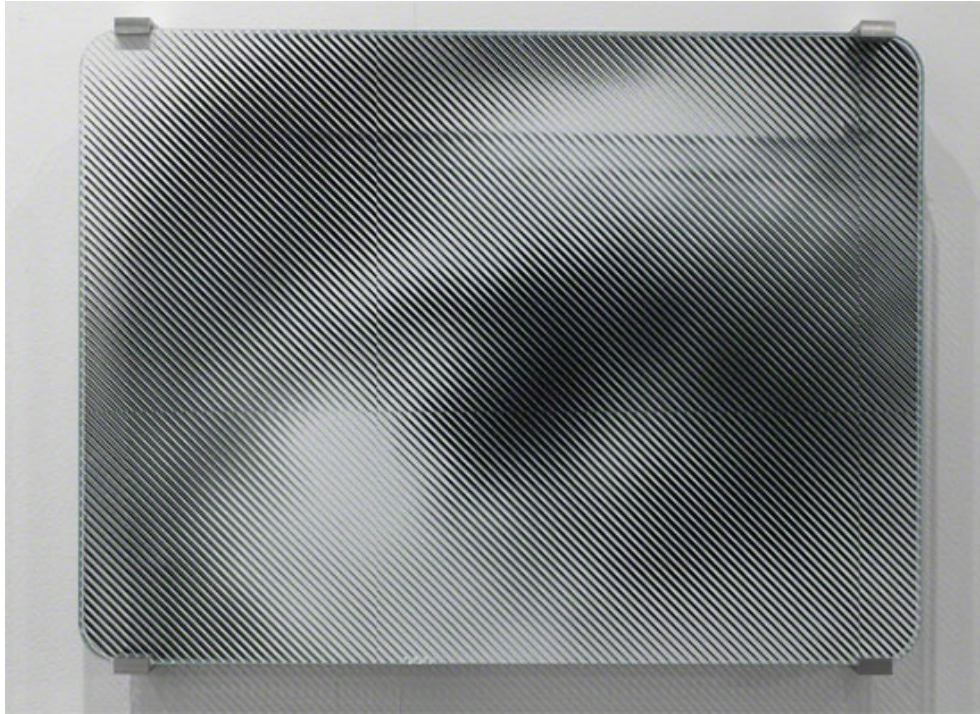
Using irony, play and disturbance, Izumi's video *Night Lie* features a nude model whose body is painted like the night sky. With the model posed as a tableau vivant lying on a bed frame and facing away from the camera, Izumi superimposes a close-up of the painted model's skin on the night sky of Paris, an effect that is as disorienting and strange as it is poetic and romantic. Much like a surrealist *trompe l'oeil*, the play on the image and the *double entendre* of the title *Night Lie* gives new meaning to the romance of Paris, the city of love.



“Night lie” by Taro Izumi, 2017. 4 videos, n° 1/2, Edition of 2. Courtesy of Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois.

Jeffrey Deitch (New York)

Renowned street artist [JR](#) is best known for plastering giant, monochrome photographs of the faces of immigrants and other marginalized groups in urban centers. Claiming the streets as his gallery, JR’s street art engages and challenges audiences to consider immigration and identity politics today. For his exhibition in the [Jeffrey Deitch](#) booth, he superimposed the stoic faces of Syrian refugees over archival images of immigrants at Ellis Island. As crowds gathered around the installation, the effect on viewers of the gaze of his subjects—families and strangers with uncertain futures peering out across time and geography—was both poignant and chilling.



“Migrants, archives from Ellis Island #9” by JR, 2018. 2 layers of float glass, 23 31/50 × 17 18/25 inches. Courtesy of Jeffrey Deitch.

Lia Rumma (Milan, Naples)

At the [Lia Rumma](#) booth, I was immediately struck by a stark multimedia piece—a black silhouette of a cloven creature on a white background that looks at once prehistoric and fantastic, with the number 2584 overlaid on the image in neon. The work, *animale 2584*, is by Italian artist [Mario Merz](#) (1925-2003), who was a key member of the radical Italian Arte Povera (“poor art”) movement of the late 1960s.

Merz was known for his expansive mixed-media paintings, sculptures, and installations, through which he advocated a populist, human-centered vision. Rebelling against what he saw as the dehumanizing forces of industrialization and consumerism, Merz preferred to work with everyday materials and organic matter, like earth, found objects, and neon tubing. The numerical title of this piece, like others in his oeuvre, references the Fibonacci sequence (a series of numbers in which each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers, eg. 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 (etc)). Merz references these numbers in search of the infinite in contrast with the temporality and specificity of modern life.



“animale 2584” by Mario Merz, 1998. Black paper on Folex, neon, 59 x 136 inches. Courtesy of Lia Rumma.

Marlborough Contemporary (New York)

[Marlborough Contemporary](#) presented a striking piece by renowned New York based sculptor [Tony Matelli](#). The work, titled *Reclining Figure*, incorporates figurative and botanical elements.

Matelli violently broke apart then reconfigured a found marble sculpture that originated in a collection of garden statuary. He subsequently patinated and painted the marble to achieve a look of antiquity, then paired it with hyperrealistic cast bronze fruit, creating an uncanny juxtaposition of the eternal and the perishable that is both unsettling and comical.

The piece, which sold early in the weekend, is a fascinating departure from the hyperrealistic sculptures of human figures and plants for which Matelli is best known, as seen in such prominent recent public installations as the High Line.



“Reclining Figure” by Tony Matelli, 2017. Marble and painted bronze, 47 1/2 x 61 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Malborough Contemporary.

Galerie Forsblom (Helsinki, Stockholm)

At [Galerie Forsblom](#), [Kim Simonsson](#)'s sculptures were exhibited alongside works by [Ai Weiwei](#), [Ron Gorchov](#), [Peter Halley](#), [Jacob Hashimoto](#), [Secundino Hernández](#), [Chantal Joffe](#), [Jason Martin](#), and [Toni R. Toivonen](#). At the entrance to the booth stood figures from Simonsson's "Moss People" series. The life-size sculptures are the result of a technique Simonsson developed to combine stoneware, paint and green nylon fiber in order to yield a smooth, mossy-looking surface.

“The name ‘Moss People’ refers to children’s innate camouflage,” Simonsson explained. “The moss green figures blend perfectly into their natural surroundings, just as a soft carpet of moss covers the ground, rocks and tree trunks and acts as a sort of protection. In the Moss People world, lost and disconnected children, evoking different characters, gather in a Shaman Party, choose leaders and end up creating false idols.”

Perhaps the figures resonate because of the mysterious side of childhood that is a shared and yet deeply personal memory for us all. Simonsson’s message, though subtle, is there for all to consider—if we, like the children in Simonsson’s world—are lost and disconnected, how guilty are we of creating false idols, and how has this impacted us as we choose our leaders?



"Hut" by Kim Simonsson, 2017. Ceramic, nylon fiber, wood, 51.97 x 78.74 inches. Courtesy of Galerie Forsblom.

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

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