

Fresh New Digs for Aging Independent

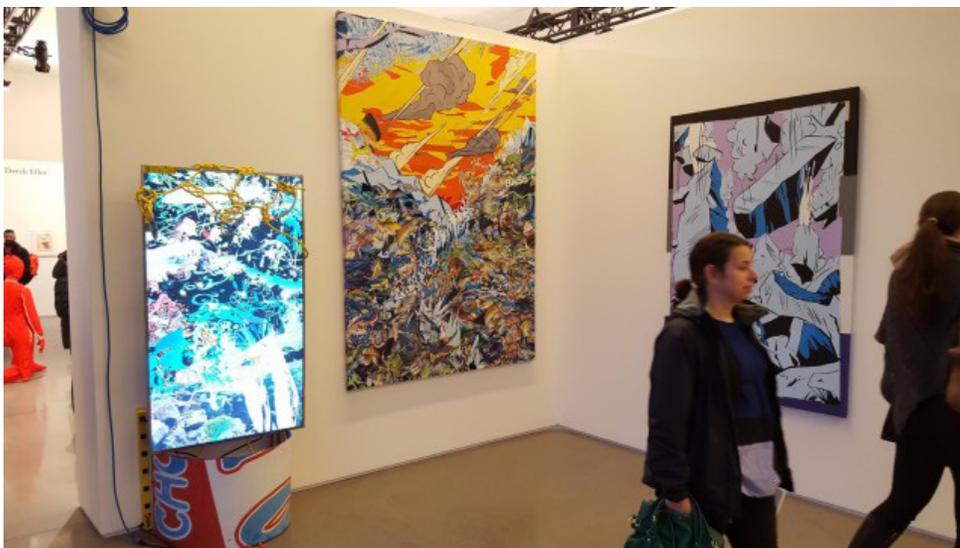
by Chris Green
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The Independent art fair is apparently all grown up and ready to cement its place of privilege in a new Tribeca location. This year's event space, Spring Studios, is better known for exclusive fashion and Tribeca Film Festival events, but the organizers believe it is just right for a fair that now considers itself to be mature and ambitious. Aging is perhaps a more appropriate characterization here—this year, the formerly new-blood establishment of the Independent seems as though it is content to coast into retirement.

The fair looks and feels like a baby-boomer. Youthful newcomers are treated with skepticism. The ground floor "Independent First" feels like a holding pen for new galleries hoping prove themselves worthy of sitting at the adult's table. And like most boomers, it is visibly tech-phobic, with few works that engage new media or digital concepts. The few non-profit organizations that have continued to participate throughout the years are given places of alternately privilege and disdain: Artists Space and White Columns are in a premium spot overlooking the establishment sixth floor, while Printed Matter is literally shoved out of the way under a staircase.

Admittedly, the space looks good, but for the most part it is the established names from big galleries that appear exciting, and only in contrast to a lot of surrounding work that doesn't stand out. Below are some hits and a few misses.

Seeing Ronald Reagan's face melt with welfare state-cutting rage on this wall of early Peter Saul works at VENUS was an all too timely historic throwback on an evening that featured another Republican Primary Trump-fest debate.



JTT installation view

JTT's booth is one of the few to venture into multimedia work. Borna Sammak's *Not Yet Titled* (2016) television sculpture loops abstract splatterings that go surprisingly well with his busy canvases made of heat applied t-shirt graphics and vinyl.

L.A. based gallery The Box brings together a tight exhibition pairing a mother and daughter, Eugenia P. Butler and Corazón del Sol. Butler's conceptual works, which play with

words and images à la Magritte (*I Yam My Bread* features a drawing of a yam and the cursive words “I yam my head”), play surprisingly well with her daughter’s organic yet digitally inspired sculptures. The “Video Game Room” installation by del Sol features “Mirrored Cubes and Untitled (Toy Sculptures)” (2015-16), pictured above, and a genital-shaped game controller. The work resembles aliens in a virtual simulation yet is based on the pair’s mother-daughter relationship.

DIS’s “Image Life” at Project Native Informant features a robotic window cleaner, (essentially a vertical Roomba), crawling over a photograph of an atypical non-nuclear family wearing Kardashian developed contour make-up that has been applied as tribalistic paint. It pushes the limits of stock photography and draws attention to the superficiality of such images. The robot, tethered to the floor by its power cord so as not to escape onto the walls, whirrs across the glass surface as an analogy for the cleaning function of photoshop touch-ups.

Delmes & Zander brings an eclectic booth of outsider works, including William Crawford’s erotic prison drawings and a series of montaged photographs by the anonymous nineteenth-century photographer nicknamed Obsession. The pieces, primarily featuring staged executions, are each a double-sided page from Obsession’s original album that was only uncovered in the 1990s.

Yngve Holen’s wall-mounted *Hater Headlights* (2015) converts spare scooter parts into a sleek and sexy anthropomorphic sculpture, but I also see a pared-down Transformer-themed lamp.

Mendes Wood DM put together a solid exhibition of Paulo Nazareth, the Brazilian artist famous for signing and selling bananas at Art Basel Miami Beach. His works confront the racial and socio-economic tensions gripping Brazil, such as in *Premium Bananas* (2012) which asks “What is the color of my skin?”

Joanna Malinowska’s work at CANADA’s booth verges on cultural misappropriation. On the one hand, her two small figures titled *Sophie Taeuber Arp & Her Sister Dressed as Kachina Dolls* (2016) are a smart connection of similar aesthetic forms across time and cultures—in this case between Taeuber Arp’s Dada marionettes and the geometric design of Hopi katsina dolls. But while katsina dolls considered appropriate for commercial sale are often produced by Hopi artisans, at their root katsinas are considered living beings, even family, by the Hopi, and their sale at auctions is consistently protested. Malinowska’s appropriation of ritual imagery and other colonially-loaded items like the Hudson’s Bay Company blanket and a diseased ceramic arm titled *Small Pox Epidemic* (2016) is insensitive, if not offensive, to indigenous cultures and histories. As it is, CANADA reps were apparently given a hard time by collectors who already owned some “real” katsina dolls.

Next door, Pope L. lands like a piledriver from heavyweight Mitchell Innes & Nash. The gallery is new to the Independent this year and presents the most coherent show of the fair. Pope L.’s work continues to be provocative and the sounds of flapping flags emerging from his 2008 *Coffin (Flag Box)* shook up an otherwise lethargic crowd at the opening. Canvases like *Black People Are Shit* (2012) are especially needed in such a privileged and white-washed venue.

Ei Arakawa and Karl Holmqvist at Gavin Brown’s enterprise give us plenty of dirty laundry to sort through – somewhere amidst the strewn thriftstore t-shirts in here is the message “Charity will never work” and “Enough clothes to Africa”.