

ART & DESIGN

Review: At NADA Art Fair, Collecting for Pleasure, Not Status

By ROBERTA SMITH MAY 14, 2015

If you like your art fairs of manageable size and relaxed mood, as well as free, with a more-than-respectable level of quality, the fair of the New Art Dealers Alliance, or NADA, is for you. Especially if you don't have, oh, \$179 million, give or take several zeros, to toss around. And also if you thrill to the idea of simply taking art home in a large shopping bag and starting to live with it immediately.

The latest iteration of New York's NADA fair, is a place for, shall we say, less-established artists, galleries and nonprofit organizations. More important, it is a training ground for something the art world sorely needs: people who collect art the old-fashioned way.

It's a pretty basic formula. Without access to art advisers, private curators or spreadsheets, old-style collectors follow their eyes, not the herd, seeking things that are maybe overlooked and undervalued. They find dealers they trust and listen to as a way of learning to hear their own reactions.

Real collecting begins in lust: I have to have this, live with this, learn from this, figure out how to pay for this. It cannot be about investment or status. Like making art, writing about it or organizing its public display (in galleries or in museums), collecting is a form of personal expression. It is, in other words, a way to know yourself, and to participate in and contribute to creativity, which is essential to human life on earth.

As usual, NADA is a mine of grass-roots creativity displayed in close quarters. Its 103 exhibitors — up from 65 in 2012, its first year — hail from as far as Australia and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Nearly a third of them are newcomers, inhabiting stands that generally come in three sizes — small,

smaller and closet (six feet by six feet). See the cluster of 20 paintings by Patrick Berran at **Chapter NY**.

Of course, there is more worthy art here than can be done justice in a short review. The fair's art thrives mostly in two dimensions — in painting, collage and photography. Among the tiniest are the exacting geometric Polaroids of Corey Escoto at **Regina Rex**. There are several episodes of ceramics, none as all-out as the new (and different) work of Nicole Cherubini at **Samson Projects**.

Painting continues to absorb energy from all sorts of pictorial and stylistic sources. The disparaged subcategory of “zombie abstraction” persists, usually used as a springboard to greater complexity. **Ltd Los Angeles**, near the fair's entrance, features several practitioners, the most interesting being Leif Ritchey, who excels at pale, manipulated pours and textures.

But figurative painting is diverse and rampant, as confirmed at Ltd Los Angeles by the big, swirling works that Gerald Davis, previously known for small, weird drawings, has developed (out of late Pollock?), and the rude, cartoony pseudo-Expressionist paintings, thick and thin of paint, by Alex Becerra and Radamés Figueroa, known as Juni. The neon sculptures of James O. Clark are also here; they draw on Minimalism, as do anodized titanium paintings and a mesmerizing kinetic sculpture by Nathaniel de Large at **247365**.

At **Klaus von Nichtssagend**, more or less representational paintings by Benjamin Butler and Holly Coulis stand out. Thomas Lawson, making work that's much more robust than what he did as a Pictures Generation artist in the 1980s, contributes two ham-handed canvases dominated by blond beehive hairdos that could almost be outsider art, and a more photo-based work derivative of David Salle.

Proyectos Ultravioleta from Guatemala City has painted its walls burned yellow and devoted them to the bright lapidarian collages of Elisabeth Wild, an artist born in Vienna in 1922.

NADA offers a rare opportunity to see **Essex Flowers**, usually found in the basement of a flower shop of the same name on the Lower East Side, operating briefly above ground, covering three narrow walls with three large

photograms by Tatiana Kronberg. At **Callicoon Fine Arts**, you can see the latest puzzlelike paintings (both red) of Sadie Benning and a rare two-part (floor and wall) textile painting by Ulrike Müller. At **Jeff Bailey**, Martin McMurray's book sculptures have hilarious titles, including "Sneering Wagnerian Leftovers," from "Pukwidge" in 2010.

Quite a bit of energy is provided by newcomer galleries and artists. At **Formato Comodo** from Madrid, Teresa Solar Abboud, Guillermo Moro and Miquel Mont offer contrasting notions of assemblage. At **Rod Bianco**, from Oslo, the irrepressible Vaginal Davis meditates in several mediums on prostitution.

In the aisle farthest from the show's entrance, **Klowden Mann**, from the Los Angeles area, introduces the varied pictorial pursuits of the immensely talented Katie Herzog, including small paintings of a public library that were made under the influence of different drugs. **Vitrine** from London provides New York's first look at the hugely gifted Jonathan Baldock, who can apparently do just about anything with felt. The **Eric Firestone Gallery** from East Hampton, N.Y., has dedicated its space to Misaki Kawai's boisterously bright paintings, complete with matching furniture.

Also in this last aisle, don't miss Lucky DeBellevue's quiet extravaganza of painting and related works (including pillows) at **Kai Matsumiya**; Siebren Versteeg's digital paintings (and a terrific video) at **Bitforms**; and in between, at **Johannes Vogt**, the precise juxtapositions of words, shapes and shadows in the paintings of Josh Reames, whose work has hung in the space with black plastic pasted with stickers in the shape of golden bullet holes.

NADA New York 2015 runs through Sunday at Basketball City, 299 South Street, Lower East Side; 212-594-0883, newartdealers.org.

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