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From the Subtle to the Sexual, Independent's Eighth Edition Carves Its Own Path

By Scott Indrisek



Installation view of Independent, 2017. Photo by Adam Reich for Artsy.

Now in its eighth year in New York, Independent—which also launched an edition in Brussels in 2016—returned for its second year in Spring Studios on Thursday.

Location has always been vital for this highly curated fair, a sort of boutique alternative to its larger peers; its multi-floor site offers sweeping views of the surrounding Tribeca neighborhood, a refreshingly unclaustrophobic vista compared to the convention centers or tents most fairs find themselves within. Independent's relatively modest size—52 galleries and nonprofit spaces participate in 2017—ensures an experience that is substantive and rewarding without being existentially exhausting.

By and large, the works on view steer clear of fair clichés—the focus here is on well-informed collectors seeking the new, and the newly ascendent, so don't expect to find a surplus of blue chip names or Instagram-ready spectacles. The Armory Show is the place for gigantic Koonsian sculpture—here, you're more likely to find something a little less accessible, like two Magali Reus sculptures at The approach. Titled *Harlequin Darts* and *Toucan Brow* (both 2016), these layered oddities from the former Prix de Rome winner combine leather, steel, polyester webbing, and other commercial or industrial materials into unwieldy assemblages resembling mechanical horses or broken athletic equipment.



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Perhaps because of the visual drama of Spring Studios itself, dealers at Independent can relax a bit, allowing subtle pieces the proper breathing room. For instance: Karma, a New York-based gallery and publishing venture, has a range of minimalist, sculptural paintings from the late 1970s by the late Ted Stamm. The serial row of identically shaped, differently colored wood slabs—based on a found object that the artist had discovered on Wooster Street—recall a rougher hewn take on Blinky Palermo’s “To the People of New York City.” (They’re sold individually for \$15,000; larger shaped canvases on offer, riffing on the same shape, run for up to \$85,000).

Herald St of London has also chosen to privilege quiet inventiveness over flash. They’ve brought a series of slight sculptures by Amalia Pica, from the series “Device for mutual eavesdropping,” in which the artist fuses together pairs of drinking glasses. Nearby, a very different Pica series finds her experimenting with lo-fi patternmaking, building compositions on paper using various readymade office stamps. They are sold in sets of three, for a bit shy of \$6,000.

One might expect a New York art fair taking place little over a month into Donald Trump’s presidency to have a brashly activist edge, but most dealers have left their soapboxes at home. That said, the fair has its share of transgression—though it’s more of the psychosexual, rather than political, variety.



Installation view of *Independent*, 2017. Photo by Adam Reich for Artsy.

Certain large-scale pieces seem unlikely to find a home except with the most daring collectors, or at least the ones that don't have kids. At Mitchell-Innes & Nash, a multimedia triptych by Leigh Ledare (*Stalemate*, 2017), culls found imagery from Russian fashion magazines, advertising, pornography, and other sources, along with material sure to delight any future conservator (cleaning fluid, *foie gras*, and human excrement). The gallery director Bridget Finn explained that Ledare views it as “a montage, a map to the current social and political climate,” which seems about right. The three-part work, which costs in the range of \$40,000, is an oblique companion piece to a film shot in a Moscow train station that Ledare will unveil at this year's Whitney Biennial.

More button-pushing awaits at Galerie Christophe Gaillard, which is showing work from the 1970s by Michel Journiac, who died in 1995. Campy and unapologetically explicit, the work includes photographs of the artist miming various Freudian-inspired, incest-laden scenes (using his own parents as extras), as well as a massive sculpture of a dual-gendered Virgin Mary statue sporting both breasts and an erect penis. The latter piece, a testament to Journiac's complicated relationship to the church—he was once a seminary student—is on offer for roughly \$190,000.



Installation view of *Independent*, 2017. Photo by Adam Reich for Artsy.

If that doesn't satisfy your taste for irreverence, pay a visit to Carlos/Ishikawa gallery, which has huge wallhangings by **Darja Bajagić**, an artist known for mining the darker corners of the internet for everything from amateur erotica to serial-killer fan art. Equally titillating, though a bit gentler, is a vast series of crayon-on-paper portraits of mostly nude women from the 1970s and 1980s by an anonymous German artist. The works, collectively dubbed the "Disco Girls," are offered by Delmes & Zander for around \$1,200 each.

If all of that makes you mildly uncomfortable, don't despair—there is plenty at Independent that isn't aiming to provoke so bluntly.

Sprüth Magers has two pieces by the terrific **Kaari Upson**: a wall-mounted, two-part behemoth that resembles a sectional couch (\$100,000), and an artfully stacked installation of aluminum-coated cans (\$45,000). Jay Gorney has a solo booth spotlighting **Anna Betbeze's** stained, dyed, and burnt flokati rugs—a small one, like the orange, purple, and blue *Tatter Dumpling*, 2017, is available for \$12,000. Kerry Schuss is showing 31-year old **Chip Hughes**, who paints intricate, vibrating compositions atop stretched gingham tablecloths; a large piece, like *Demise Sunrise in Disguise* (2016), costs \$12,000.



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Figurative painting continues to be well-represented, with Kunstakademie Düsseldorf grad Melike Kara at Peres Projects, Nikki Maloof at Jack Hanley Gallery, and Katherine Bradford at Canada, among others.

And lest you think art's beauty lies in its total lack of practical utility, consider Neïl Beloufa's lumpy, strangely attractive sculpture at Ghebaly Gallery. Priced between \$30,000 and \$40,000, it springs from a series of furniture elements that the artist included in a 2016 solo project at the Museum of Modern Art. Director Holly Stanton says Beloufa characterizes the untitled work from 2017 as a "wall commodity;" it handily comes with four functional electrical outfits on its facade.

More usable *objets* are on view at Anton Kern Gallery, courtesy of David Shrigley. These include a band-worthy assortment of artist-created instruments, ranging from \$25,000 to \$45,000: single-string guitars and basses, and a huge, cartoonish gong, whose rumbling sound the dealer himself seemed especially eager to demonstrate. A group of musicians helmed by Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo performed with these experimental instruments at a private concert the night before the fair's opening. Slightly more approachable at \$5,000 a piece are a series of bass drum heads meant to be hung on the wall. Each resembles an oversized button bearing a typically Shrigleyian text like "I'm sorry I'm so very sorry." It's a message perhaps intended for anyone subjected to the merciless wailing of a one-stringed art-guitar.