

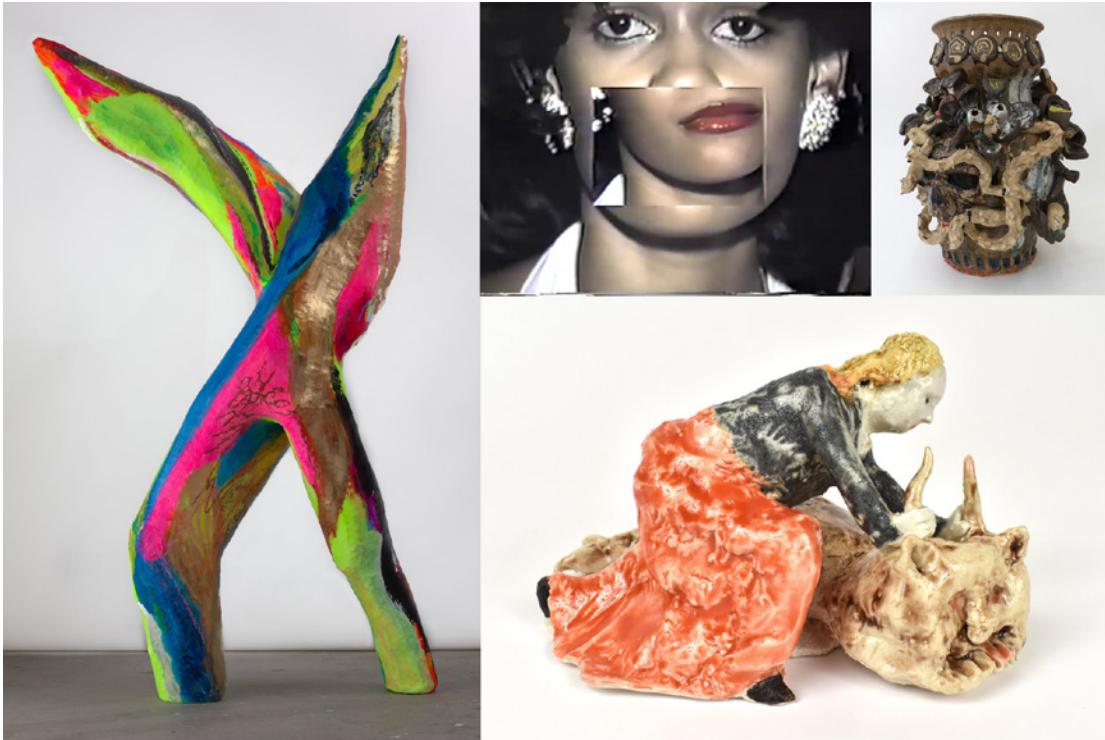
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A Striking Balance of New and Rediscovered at the Independent Fair

In this year's whimsical edition, the 11-year-old art fair looks back to lesser-known work from the 1960s.

By Will Heinrich

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Clockwise from left, Bianca Beck's huge papier mâchés; a still from Akeem Smith's video installation "Untitled"; Sharif Farrag's "Metal Mulisha Jug"; Mary Carlson's "Virgin and Demon (after a manuscript)." Credit...Clockwise from top left, Bianca Beck and Rachel Uffner Gallery; Akeem Smith and Red Bull Arts; Sharif Farrag, Adams and Ollman Gallery; Mary Carlson and Kerry Schuss Gallery; all via Independent Art Fair

Looking out the windows of Spring Studios in upscale TriBeCa during this year's 11th Independent Art Fair, I thought about the cycle of fashion. There are spectacular views of the teardrop-shaped roadway that leads out of the Holland Tunnel; on the same site, some two centuries ago, stood an exclusive gated park. Sooner or later, everything old is new again, and the most striking presentations in this fair, founded in 2010 by Elizabeth Dee to provide a curated alternative to larger art fairs, are revivals of work from the 1980s, the 1960s, or even earlier.

But there's plenty of room in this cozy coalition for young artists, too — and for older artists with brand-new work. The youngsters include Akeem Smith, with a dance hall video enclosed in a custom-built gate on the fifth floor, at Red Bull Arts (Booth 14), and, on the seventh floor, Sharif Farrag with an exuberant display of ceramic grotesques at Adams and Ollman (Booth 3).

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Also on the fifth floor, Bianca Beck's huge papier mâchés at Rachel Uffner (Booth 8) offer an amusing counterpoint to Mary Carlson's amazing little porcelain women just around the corner at Kerry Schuss (Booth 18), while the octogenarian Chicago painter Margot Bergman brings a lush series of large portrait heads at Corbett vs. Dempsey and Anton Kern's conjoined Booth 22.

Commute between four floors of art and consider the following guide to my favorite 10 booths a suggested tasting menu — but feel free, as always, to order à la carte.

Ground Floor



Vikky Alexander, "Ecstasy" (1982). Chromogenic color photographs. Credit...Vikky Alexander, Downs & Ross and Independent Art Fair

Downs & Ross (Booth 5) The Canadian Pictures Generation artist Vikky Alexander, who has been exhibiting since the 1980s, comes roaring back into New York with a group of conceptual photography-based installations and a discreet but powerful sculpture at this Bowery gallery. Airbrushed men and women in advertising-style tableaux, balanced against exposed black matting in black frames, feel curiously weightless, while a low glass table with sharp corners is positively disorienting. They're reminders of all the invisible forces, some benevolent, some not, that shape our lives.

Fifth Floor



Leigh Ruple, *Friendship* (2020). Courtesy of the artist and PAGE (NYC).

The Landing (Booth 7) There's something generous about the mottled surfaces in Leslie Kerr's paintings. Zippy 1960s abstractions with clean lines and bold colors, they make no bones about their sensual materiality as paintings. But work by the Northern California sculptor Jeremy Anderson (1921-82) is the centerpiece of this Los Angeles gallery's display: his 1965 piece, "Toys of a Prince (After D. de Chirico, 1914)," might be the sleeper highlight of the fair. An eight-foot-long mixed-media interpretation of the already confoundingly eccentric group of objects in a 1914 Giorgio De Chirico painting, it's one of the strangest, but most charming, notions I've ever encountered.

Cooper Cole (Booth 15) Industrial gray and blue backgrounds give the simple silhouettes in the Los Angeles artist Geoff McFetridge's paintings the look of sticky puddles. Their slightly trippy subjects — two faces speaking directly into each other's minds, via long probosces, or a sequence in which a man comes apart into blobs of color that then reconstitute as a woman — makes his works feel displaced and a little buoyant.

Parker Gallery (Booth 20) The Cuban artist Misleidys Castillo Pedroso constructs larger-than-life bodybuilders with exaggerated proportions, and the occasional doubled biceps, out of paper. Then she paints them in comic-book yellows, greens, or blues, with contrasting underpants. Schematic facial features, like a distinctive square chin, and the numerous dashes of brown tape with which they're affixed to white backings, give them the friendly mix-and-match appeal of trading cards. But there's something archetypal about them, too, like so many gods from a newly uncovered mythology.

Sixth Floor



Marley Freeman, "Beehive" (2019).Credit...Marley Freeman, Karma and Independent Art Fair
Dorothy Iannone, "Always Alluring," (1980-2019).Credit...Dorothy Iannone, Air de Paris and Independent Art Fair; Nick Ash

Alden Projects (Booth I) Robert Gordon worked for Frank Stella, showed at Castelli Gallery, collected prestigious reviews, and then, in the mid-70s, skipped out on the art world, possibly for the West Coast. Careful ballpoint waves cross most of the eight small drawings in this intriguing presentation, always slightly off center, the way you'd cock a porkpie hat. Filled with red triangles, covered in orange gouache, or underlined with pink highlighter, they evoke theater curtains, and the slightly ominous emptiness of a stage between shows.

Carlos/Ishikawa and Chapter NY (Booth I7) Two handsome mixed-media sculptures by the New Haven artist Stella Zhong, in this joint presentation from London's Carlos/Ishikawa and Chapter in New York, look something like leftover pieces of plastic foam packing. They project a confident air of humble functionality that's slightly complicated by a couple of extra little flaps and bars attached with magnets. Fictional newspaper clippings by the artist Rose Salane are each framed alongside a small object, like a button or a cigar guillotine, relevant to the story. Together, they might just be the clue you've been looking for.

Karma (Booth I5) Plenty of galleries hedge their bets by coming to fairs with multiple artists. But Karma, an East Village gallery situated in a large corner, is unusual in making this strategy into a convincing group show, with a line of handsome paintings on each of four walls: Homespun midcentury portraits and still lifes by the Japanese artist Zenzaburo Kojima (1893-1962). Oil-on-aluminum close-ups of cocktails and other cool drinks by Dike Blair. Vibrant minuets of abstract color by Marley Freeman, and the primordial exploding suns, in oil on burlap, of Alvaro Barrington.

Air de Paris (Booth 21) Teeming, highly-patterned figures make for a strong effect against milky-white backgrounds in two large new paintings by the Berlin artist Dorothy Iannone, working well into her 80s. Adam and Eve stand under a color-wheel sun atop a pedestal of lines from an Andrew Marvell poem in “All Our Strength and All Our Sweetness,” and “Always Alluring” is a perpetual calendar of winsome fertility symbols. As with her work from the '60s and '70s, also on view, they give an irresistible impression of order and harmony, like a symphony scored for the full complement of orchestral instruments.

Feature Project: Object & Thing (Booth 24) Alongside its more conventional booths, Independent has invited the brand-new Brooklyn design fair Object and Thing to preview its coming second edition in May. They, in turn, invited artists showing elsewhere in the fair to consign objects that bend the line between art and design, like a lamp by Dorothy Iannone or Dike Blair’s disconcertingly plausible Windex bottle.

Seventh Floor



Leigh Ruple's "Friendship" (2020). Credit... Leigh Ruple, Page (NYC) and Independent Art Fair

PAGE (NYC) (Booth 2) Three young women crouch in front of a deli in Leigh Ruple's five-foot-high oil "Friendship," making shadow animals on a sidewalk. These deep black shadows look realer, or anyway more solid, than the girls, whose green, mauve and yellow arms and motley faces make you think of fairies under colored spotlights. That's only one of the taut contradictions Ms. Ruple folds into the four large crisp compositions — frozen but vibrant — of this memorable solo presentation. Ask to look at her colored pencil studies, too.