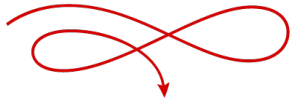


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Gangs of New York

The art world has taken Manhattan, bringing with it some surprises that have provided insight into what's really taking place in the market.

By Marion Maneker, September 8, 2024



The draw for the Armory Show is simply a foothold in Manhattan for galleries that don't normally have access to the city's customer base. *Photo: Timothy A. Clary/AFP/Getty Images*

Art fairs are like political conventions—highly orchestrated events designed to project confidence while nevertheless revealing enough anxiety to remain interesting. This week's Armory Show in New York, for instance, isn't a high-stakes venue, and sales aren't make-or-break for dealers. The draw for the Armory Show, which also includes the offsite Independent 20th Century and Art on Paper fairs, is simply a foothold in Manhattan for galleries that don't normally have access to the city's customer base. But there is a sense this year that some on-the-bubble galleries really need to get money in the door or there might be serious consequences.

Throughout the first two days, there were the usual complaints about timing (the end of the summer, beginning of the school year, etcetera), and the long shadow of the U.S. Open. In many ways, the Armory Show is now the gateway to the back half of the art calendar, teeing up all the familiar narratives and questions. Alas, there's always commentary that the fair should be pushed

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back a week, as if Frieze, the fair's new owner, had any choice when negotiating with the Javits Center.

A few moments before the fair opened, new director **Kyla McMillan** touted the rejiggering of the fair's floor plan and the latest variation on themes for grouping booths. But none of that matters very much. Of all of the world's art fairs, the Armory Show is laid out most like a supermarket, with two rectangles connected by a passageway between a V.I.P. lounge and venue for talks, and it's easy to get disoriented. In the aisles, most of the chatter centered—as it usually does—on the pace of the market. At two different stops, on Thursday and Friday, I ran into some members of the handful of families who actively *engross* art—they buy *and* sell a lot of it—and often act as wholesale suppliers for many galleries. So their view of the market is perhaps more fine-tuned.

The Downtown Scene

While the Armory's 235 galleries sprawled across the polished concrete floors of the Javits Center can be disorienting, the Independent 20th Century fair at Casa Cipriani in the old Battery Maritime Building is precisely the opposite. Only 32 galleries, all focused on showing work by 20th Century artists this year, and the fair was civilized and serene but filled with surprises.

Cristin Tierney and Abattoir Gallery collaborated to show the works of **Audra Skuodas**. Born in Lithuania during World War II, Skuodas arrived in the U.S. at the age of 9 with few memories of her childhood. Although she produced work for her entire life, Skuodas's art was rarely shown—even though her husband spent his career teaching art at Oberlin College. The galleries sold a painting to an institution for \$40,000, but the works on paper at the booth, combining colored pencil drawings with stitched metallic threads, were show-stopping.