5 Best Booths at the ADAA's Art Show | Artinfo

BY Noelle Bodick | March 02, 2016

Joseph Cornell's "Crystal Cage (Berenice)," c. 1943, showing at the Richard L. Feigen booth at the ADAA's 2016 Art Show.
(Photo by Regina Mogilevskaya)

Today the heavy, wooden doors to the Park Avenue Armory opened to New York's venerable Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA) fair — called the Art Show, for short — with more than 70 galleries touting wares from the 19th century to the present. Among all the events this week, the dealers here appear most posed to place their work upon the grand art-historical mantle, peddling canonical, though thoroughly market-tested artists. Marianne Boesky and Dominique Lévy, for example, share a Frank Stella presentation, while Howard Greenberg Gallery and Hans P. Kraus Jr. Fine Photographs both show works from the early 20th-century Photo-Secession movement. Meanwhile, Richard L. Feigen gallery digs up a Joseph Cornell suitcase, going for $3.8 million, alongside other museum-certified works. But among these more pedigreed artists were a handful of surprises. Here's a look at some deserving of the spotlight.

Bob Thompson at Donald Morris Gallery, New York and Michigan

As museums scramble to fill regrettable gaps in their collections, dealers at ADAA have apparently taken note and are offering up work by black artists: Bill Traylor, Beauford Delaney, and Bob Thompson among them. Of course, progress on this front is not measured just by numbers, and, rushed, can risk slotting artists too tidily into predictable identity categories. Nonetheless, it is a welcome revision at a fair that often feels like the conservative, stuffy cotillion dance of of Armory Week.

Take Bob Thompson at Donald Morris Gallery. It's been 50 years since his death — he was just a month shy of 29 at the time — and nearly 20 years since he had a show at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Today Donald Morris Gallery is showing Thompson's expressionistic works that transplant nude, Matisse-like figures into famous scenes depicted by Baroque and Renaissance masters, all leveled into a single, flat painterly plane. Here is a little Smurf-blue Botticelli Venus, snapped into her mottled clamshell. There, "Pieta Fragment" with figures in tones of yellow, blue, and sienna locked together. In all, the specificity of time and space are traded in for an almost edenic vision. Critic Meyer Shapiro himself championed this quality for its "poetic fantasy that looked exotic yet was native to him as an American Negro." Works are all priced under $250,000.

Barry Le Va at David Nolan Gallery, New York

In the heyday of postminimalism art, Barry Le Va's work showed at paradigm shifting exhibitions like the Whitney's "Anti-Illusion" (1969) and MoMA's "Information" (1970), alongside Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Carl Andre, and Robert Morris. Today, however, the septuagenarian's legacy has faded somewhat as compared to his bold-faced peers. But Le Va gets his due at David Nolan gallery's booth, where the artist has restaged one of his floor works, composed of thick, rumpled stacks of felt — some strips cut up and shredded — and dozens of scattered outsized metal balls. It isn't quite clear whom or what has wreaked the havoc — and that's just the point. Le Va calls upon the viewer to piece together the unseen action, what he refers to as a Sherlock-Holmes aesthetic. This somewhat distinguishes him from his fellow process artists. As author Mike Maizel writes in an excellent excerpt from the 2015 book

"Barry Le Va: The Aesthetic Aftermath," "Though all of these figures championed an aesthetics of disorder as a means of militating against a cultural or intellectual status quo, Le Va's consideration of the work of art as always already broken — always already vanished – constitutes a more fundamental intervention against the deep-seated metaphysics of singularity, clarity, logic, and presence." The day of the Art Show opening, the gallery representative on hand reported that they were still deliberating on the price of the work.

Edward Hopper & Company, Fraenkel Gallery, California

Writer Geoff Dyer has noted that American painter Edward Hopper "could claim to be the most influential American photographer of the twentieth century — even though he didn't take any photographs." Suitably, Fraenkel Gallery has culled a choice group of postwar American landscape photographs influenced by the painter: pared-down but poignant scenes captured by Robert Adams; the yawning expanses of the American road by Lee Friedlander; the lonely, ironic interludes by Stephen Shore; and quiet portraits by Diane Arbus. The cross-medium family tree puts in mind earlier efforts by art historians like MoMA photo curator Peter Galassi, who wrote in the 1981 book "Before Photography" that "photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition." Indeed, this sentiment is shared further back in the Park Avenue Armory, where Howard Greenberg Gallery and Hans P. Kraus Jr. Fine Photographs present a booth curated around the Photo-Secession movement. Founded in 1902 by Alfred Stieglitz, the members' pictorial photographs likewise took from the grab bag of painting and painterly processes.

Bill Traylor at Betty Cunningham Gallery, New York

Born a slave on an Alabama plantation in 1854, Bill Traylor only started making art at the age of 85, leaving him just 10 years to leave his mark. But in that decade, Traylor bore numerous abstracted forms, reflecting on life in the Jim Crow era and after. Betty Cunningham has hung a beautiful collection of such work at the Armory: works depicting spindly-legged dogs and arch-backed cats, as well boxy horses and mules — all silhouetted and drawn on salvaged cardboard. There are people, too, among the menagerie: Mexicans and black figures. Their gestures seem to be in dialogue. "High Steppin Cat" (1939-42), for instance, depicts a feline in a stiff military march with one of his diminutive white-mitten paws held up high, echoing the same gesture made by a "Mexican Man ('He Just Come to Town')" (c. 1939-1942), with a disproportionately small briefcase, pointy mustache, curved boots, and raised, outstretched hand. Works are priced in the $60,000 to $120,000 range.

Leoncillo Leonardi at CRG Gallery, New York

CRG Gallery recovers the Italian modernist Leoncillo Leonardi, following the exhibition of his peer, Alberto Burri, at the Guggenheim last year. (Meanwhile, Hauser & Wirth shows Fausto Melotti, another "rediscovered" Italian modernist.) Like Burri's tortured burlap, plastic, and wood surfaces, the lesser-known works by Leonardi evoke wounded, column-like vessels and bodies, eschewing the formal distance of abstraction for something more visceral and, at times, violent. A series of San Sebastiano, for example, takes on the pierced flesh of the martyr and saint. The ceramics range between $90,000 and

$250,000.