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ART FAIR REVIEW

Two Critics, 13 Favorite Booths at The Armory Show

Among the standouts and discoveries in new art at the Javits Center fair are a Lakota artist, an emerging Cambodian American painter and a sculptor from Zimbabwe.

By Siddhartha Mitter and Will Heinrich

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The fall art season has arrived, with its manic harvest of exhibitions, and also The Armory Show, the major art fair in New York City that shifted its schedule and venue last year, moving to this early-September date and the Javits Center. With some 240+ galleries showing, and solid delegations from every continent, the fair is abundant and properly international again after a slimmed-down 2021 edition constrained by Covid-19 travel restrictions and hesitancy. Those are gone now — though the pandemic continues — and the scene is buzzing.

For collectors and gallerists, fairs like The Armory Show are a chance to transact, of course and to get together. But for the public at large, it's a great chance to take in a gargantuan amount of contemporary art in a single place. The fair is sprawling but spacious and navigable; the booths have color-coded signs for various special sections. Among these are "Focus," the curated section, organized this year by Carla Acevedo-Yates, a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, emphasizing work with social and environmental themes, much of it from Latin America and the Caribbean; and "Presents," for emerging galleries, including many first-timers, which is once again especially rewarding.

So how's the show? Pretty good. There's still a whole lot of painting, much of it figurative; some abstract masterpieces of earlier decades, like one from William T. Williams spotted at the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery booth, might make one wonder where today's counterparts reside. Largely missing too is digital art — a disappointment, given our increasingly tech-shaped lives. But hybrid sculpture, assemblage, drawing all have their day. "Platform," in the middle of the show gathers large pieces by 12 artists, organized by Tobias Ostrander, a curator at Tate in London; the theme is monuments and their alternatives.

As my colleague Will Heinrich and I wandered the floor to pick these 13 favorites, we were drawn to work that seemed to move against the currents.

Will Heinrich Selects



Plains Indian horse drawings are juxtaposed with a photograph by the Lakota artist Dana Claxton at the Donald Ellis Gallery booth. George Etheredge for The New York Times

Donald Ellis Gallery (Booth 111)

Plains Indian “ledger drawings” from the early 20th century, with their vibrant graphite horses in red, yellow and purple, are an art fair staple. But this year the horses frame three enormous photographs by the contemporary Lakota artist Dana Claxton. Showing Claxton’s fellow artist Iikaakskitowa against a green-screen-like background with a lasso, bow and arrow, serape, or lowrider bicycle, the pieces speak to the mutability of identity and to the complicated ethics and optics of performing one’s identity for an audience.