

fiere resoconti: The Armory Show 2008

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New York, the temple of contemporary art market, celebrates the tenth anniversary of The Armory Show. With an edition that does not disappoint, but does not strike with innovation. More than two thousand artists participated in the fair. The quality is not lacking and the city confirms its reputation as catalyst for talent and intimately eclectic...

Facing the Hudson, one Pier, the 94th, celebrates the tenth edition of the premiere New York art fair, being granted the general approval for the reorganization of the location. 160 galleries from 39 cities and 21 countries worldwide. The New York galleries remain a strong presence, with an incidence of 31% (11% of the others is American with a large portion coming from Los Angeles), but there is a growing number of European ones, which have raised from 50% of the past edition to 53% of this year. A 2% is reserved for Northeast Asia, while the remaining 2% is divided between Israel, India and South Africa.

The number of visitors is about equal to that of 2007: an attendance record of about 52 thousands (including the colourful pair of German living artists, Eva and Adele), and the turnover of 85 million dollars confirms the sales forecasts (the estimate, however, is prepared on a sample limited to 10%).

The visual identity of the fair was commissioned to artists Mary Heilmann, pioneer of the abstract postmodern painting, and John Waters, film maker and photographer (Study Art. For profit or Hobby, one of the works featured), called to create a limited edition for the Pat Hearn and Colin De Land Cancer Foundation; their participation was particularly felt in view of the special relationship that both have maintained with the missing gallerists, founding members of The Armory Show.

The space where "the current scene of contemporary art" unfolds forms a large reversed T that intersects a circle, a sort of piazza, which fulfils the ancient role of place for exchange, rest and refreshment. More complex is, however, the fundamental task that the show sets to accomplish because of the overwhelming number of similarly aimed events, but leaving out the usual hypocritical and not constructive denigrations, we can not say that the quality here is altogether lacking. Certainly this fair, like many others, reflects the nature of this business oriented market, where marketing choices like "not being there" arise the suspicion of a more economical and effective way to be noticed (just think of the great missing names such as Gagosian, Marian Goodman and Barbara Gladstone).



Lo stand di Arndt & Partner con l'installazione di Thomas Hirschhorn - photo David Willem

To score an important point in the challenge for quality are those booths that decide to bet everything on the work of one artist or which entrust one artist with the development of the stand, thus preventing it from assuming a hybrid and impersonal shape. Even if this was to be just another trick to attract attention, a trick that in recent times has become particularly popular, the outcome is in many cases interesting: these booths stand out along the way with works and installations more organized and less crowded, making greater justice to the artists' work. To cite some examples: at the Hauser & Wirth (Zurich) booth, Martin Creed's door which constantly opens itself creating funny misunderstandings among the public, accompanied by a live pianist; the ironic and conceptual county fair by Annette Lemieux for Paul Kasmin in New York, Come Join In, which combines images of the '30s depression by Walker Evans with a rustic table with a white and red checkered tablecloth on which stands Daisy, a miniature cow and " Best in Show "; Jenny Holzer's provocative leds which keep imposing a stop to follow and understand them at Cheim & Read, and the disorienting installation by Daphne Fitzpatrick at Bellwether, Rampt It Up, a ramp made of old spruce wood upon which is a huge shoe, All The Days in The Life, made of papier mâché, copper and strings of flax, which is complementary to Chihcheng Peng's video, a reworking of a 1924 film by Buster Keaton on Sherlock Holmes; to close the set, the c-type print Untitled VII by English artist Anne Hardy, who fills her studio with disposed and found objects that betray in any particular the human presence and the hand of the artist. How can you then not notice the giant wall painting by the eclectic collective Assume Vivid Astro Focus that runs on several metres and delimits the VIP lounge area? A mix of street art and pop culture that once more ridicules the idea of the individual artistic genius, involving in its realization friends and acquaintances of the anonymous team leader, at Deitch Projects. If this piece can be accused of egocentrism, what should one say standing in front of the giant heavy Tool Table by Hirschhorn?

Of a very different nature is the theatricality one encounters in the retrospective on Eleanor Antin organized by Robert Feldam Fine Arts: a video, Loves of a Ballerina (mid 80s), you have to peek at through a crack in a real miniature theatre; a sophisticated self-portrait/installation from 1986, where the artist takes the role of the ballerina Eleanora Antinova, seducing us once again through her fantastic autobiographies.

Finally, to make her booth (Nicole Klagsbrun) into a true work of art is the young American **Beth Campbell** (recently at the Whitney with the installation *Following Room*), who with *Both Ways* takes over the exhibition space, creating a sharp edge between the two environments that confront each other in a perfectly spectacular reflection, like in a game of mirrors; her work explores the relationship between objects and physical space, using the double to understand oneness.



Beth Campbell - Both Ways - 2008 - installazione site specific - dimensioni variabili - courtesy Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York

Among the Italian galleries, the only one to follow this trend is Magazzino d'Arte Moderna, which presents the site-specific work *The leading paintings # 4* by Portuguese artist Pedro Cabrita Reis. The installation hits you for the juxtaposition of materials, a metal and neon minimal structure that creates a happy contrast with the lively orange of the wall; the architectural fragments are poetically combined with the colors; industrial floor preserves the work from the carpet of the neighbour stands, granting it some breathing space.

To represent Italy are also other galleries: Massimo De Carlo exhibits works by Boetti, Yang-Ming Pei and a monumental *Armleder*. The work that best captures your gaze, making it sink into a black abyss thanks to some optical illusion, is that of Polish artist Piotr Uklanski. The gallery Continua focuses on the work of Cameroon born Pascale Marthine Tayou, who animates the space placing in a circle a series of totems made of crystal, fabric and jewelry, which reflect the imagination of Africa. The artist reinterprets it in the light of its nomadic life experience, creating an ideal bridge between different cultures. Finally, Raucci / Santamaria, for the first time at The Armory, presents mostly James Yamada and Tim Rollins.

As globalized as contemporary art is, these days it distinguishes itself with the use of different materials and different choice of themes which reflect the particular link with its country of origin, especially when it comes to rapidly changing realities (China and India above all), which seek to keep their tradition and culture alive and still perceive them as extremely strong, even in the light of this new global perspective. This is the case of thirty year-olds Thukrai and Tagra (*Still life, New Delhi*), who reelaborate in an original way the cultural imaginary of India, inserting in the drawing their own funny caricatures, as well as shapes of technological objects with a captivating style that comes close to graphic design. Or the work of Meshac Gaba, which features sculptures-headgear made of cotton in gaudy colors typical of his continent (Michael

Among the new entry galleries, which constitute 9% of the total, the Belgian Erna Hècey stands out, exposing an avanguardie piece on the *Question de femmes* (1964) by artist Jef Geys, that will be present at the next Venice Biennale; and the Dutch Juliette Jongma, which brings on the scene the work of young film-maker Guido Van Der Werve.

Finally, one last look to single out some gems. In addition to established London galleries like White Cube, Lisson and Victoria Miro, Bortolami in New York stands out for a fine combination between the striped white and beige wall by Daniel Buren and the persuasive painting by Polish artist Piotr Janas; clear and impeccable are the images of the new series by Christopher Williams at David Zwirner, as well as the photographs by Californian James Welling made operating directly with flowers and plants on the negative; at Sikkema Jenkins & Co., the Venezuelan Arturo Herrera fascinates with his photographic breakdowns, which draw from the world of 'black and white animation, in order to regain form in a kaleidoscopic number of possible images; also intense are the fists finger-printed on sheets of lead by Parisian Kamel Mennour, at Claude Lévêque .



Anton Kern con un dipinto di Dan McCarthy - photo David Willems

In the stand of the most fashion-kitch gallery in New York, Jeffrey Deitch course, *Fucking Dirty Rats* (2005) by famous couple Tim Noble & Sue Webster still surprises us with its apparent immediacy and an irony that digs deep into our society. The questions that it leaves open are numerous, and so are the possible readings of those shadows. Is it not exactly the obsessive search of a possible identity what moves the chaotic world of contemporary art?