

Jessica Silverman: "The Armory Show's VIP Preview Opened With Brisk Sales and a Lot of Chatter About the Fair's Future"

By Eileen Kinsella

September 8, 2023



Installation view of Yinka Shonibare. *Man Moving Up* (2022) at the "Platform" section of The Armory Show 2023. Photo by Eileen Kinsella.

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The New York fair marches on even as questions swirl about consolidation in the industry.

Gossip about recent art fair-industry consolidation was a major focus at the VIP opening day of The Armory Show, as art world denizens debated the impact of the Frieze acquisition of both Armory and EXPO Chicago earlier this summer.

For the near-term, and amid a buzzy opening that seemed to only be gathering momentum as the the day wound on (the fair runs until September 10), Armory Show executive director Nicole Berry was laser-focused. "I feel like this is just such a strong fair. And the response has been wonderful and supportive of that," Berry told Artnet News a few hours into the opening.

Berry said that everything was already very much in-motion for this year's edition when the Frieze acquisition was announced in mid-July. "My team has been focused on creating a great fair. A lot of the discussions about what happens in the future will be post-fair," she said. For now Frieze New York, which takes place just a few blocks south of the Javits Center in the multi-level venue of the Shed, at Hudson Yards, is scheduled to take place as usual, as is the 2024 edition of Armory, again at the Javits.

However, this year's fair, the Armory's third appearance at the Javits Center, was a tonal downshift from 2022. The 225 exhibitors marked a drop from last year's 240, and on day 1 there was a sense among fairgoers that attendance was light.

The broader art market correction that saw tepid at best (and disastrous at worst) auction results in New York this spring may now be manifesting in the primary market. Dealers at the VIP preview told Artnet News that sales were slower than last year. Sales figures are still trickling in, but beyond what works sell and for how much is the matter of what is for sale—some might characterize the bevy of figurative paintings on offer as evidence dealers are playing it safe.

To be sure, enthusiasm for art fairs practically piqued in 2022. It's hard to compare to the mood of a year marked by jubilation that Covid lockdowns and travel restrictions were for the most part behind us—enthusiasm that surely juiced sales and attendance. Perhaps in anticipation of that, organizers purposefully shrunk the fair slightly this year, according to Berry.

"The fair is about nine percent smaller based on our own decision," she said. "We felt like we wanted to bring it in a little bit. When we first started here at the Javits, we had really wide aisles and big spacious areas because of Covid. And now the beauty of this venue as opposed to the piers is...it's not cramped and crowded. But we sill wanted good energy and I think we found the right balance."

And there were still standouts. The special Armory section "Platform," which features large-scale works and was curated by Eva Respini, deputy director at the Vancouver Art Gallery, was particularly compelling, with star pieces like Woody De Othello's large-scale patinated bronze sculpture, presented by Jessica Silverman, that sold for \$400,000.

Also on view was Yinka Shonibare, Agnes Denes, and Teresita Fernandez, among others. Organized under the theme of "Rewriting Histories," it featured a mix of new works alongside iterations of previously seen hits, like Barthélémy Toguo's latest version of the massive *Urban Requiem* (2015), shown at the Venice Biennale last year.

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Installation view of Nara Roesler booth at The Armory Show. Image courtesy Nara Roesler.

Beyond this, there was a massive amount of figurative paintings on display across all sections of the fair—a fact that many visitors couldn't help but notice and comment on throughout the day. And business seemed brisk.

Dealer Ben Brown, one of only a handful of gallerists that simultaneously exhibited at both Armory and Frieze Seoul in South Korea, told Artnet News that the energy at Armory was decidedly better, especially with more confirmed sales. The booth, which had striking works on display by Yoan Capote, Candida Höfer, Vik Muniz, José Parlá, Enoc Perez, and Ena Swansea, was hard to miss within feet of the fair entrance.

Sales of works included those by Capote and Muniz; prices of sold works ranged from \$75,000 to \$100,000.

New York gallery Berry Campbell had a standout booth, a curated presentation of 12 postwar women artists. The gallery has a distinct focus on re-examining underrepresented women artists of the 20th-century. Gallery owner Christine Berry called it "an incredible day," noting high demand for artists including Alice Baber, Bernice Bing, and Lynne Drexler.

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Lynne Drexler, *Burst Blue* (1969). © Estate of Lynne Drexler. Image courtesy Berry Campbell, New York

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Works by Drexler sold for \$885,000 and \$200,000; the artist, who has been drawing intense interest, will likely be the subject of a traveling institutional retrospective at some point in the near future. A work by Baber went for \$200,000—Berry Campbell hopes to mount a solo show of the artist next year.

Later on in the day, the gallery let Artnet News know that a painting by Ethel Schwabacher had been sold for \$195,000.

A range of dealers appeared upbeat about VIP day, including Daniel Roesler, partner and senior director of Nara Roesler, which has branches in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Chelsea in New York. "We had an energetic first day with a steady flow of thoughtful engagement about our artists with New York and Brazilian collectors," said Roesler.

The gallery sold Heinz Mack's *The painter's garden (chromatic constellation)*, (2001), for €240,000 (\$258,000) and two Fabio Miguez mixed-media works for \$15,000 each.

Miles McEnery Gallery, which has been drawing buzz with a string of adjoining ground-level galleries in Chelsea, found success with contemporary favorites, including Inka Essenhigh, Jacob Hashimoto, Tom LaDuke, and James Siena. "There is a palpable electricity to the fair this year with robust sales from longtime friends and new collectors from across the U.S.," said Miles McEnery. Los Angeles dealer Anat Ebgi told Artnet News that the first day response was "amazing," and that their two booths nearly sold out. The main booth featured artists including Greg Ito, Faith Wilding, and Robert Russell while another booth was a solo presentation highlighting works by Alec Egan. Sales included nearly all of the works in the solo presentation of Egan's oil paintings at prices between \$45,000 to \$55,000.

In the group presentation, sales included works by Ito, as well as Jordan Nassar, Caleb Hahne Quintana, and Alejandro Cardenas and priced between \$35,000 and \$55,000. Additional sold artworks were those by Karyn Lyons Ming Ying, Janet Werner, and Amie Dicke, all priced between \$20,000 and \$30,000. Works by Fabian Treiber, Tammi Campbell, Krzysztof Strzelecki, Ryan Driscoll, and Angela Lane sold at prices between \$6,000 and \$16,000.

San Francisco gallerist Jessica Silverman, who is celebrating her 15th anniversary this year, said the gallery artists' "sustained presence in world-class museums demonstrates the high quality of our roster."

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Woody De Othello, *thought in mind* (2023). Image courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman. Photo by Lance Brewer.

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"The positive reception from institutions on the East Coast shows how our artists' material and conceptual rigor is timely and timeless," she added. Sales during opening hours included five table-top bronze sculptures titled *I Need You* (2023) by Rose B. Simpson—one to the Alford Collection of Contemporary Art, Rollins Museum of Art in Winter Park, Florida, and four others with important American collections.

Other first-day sales and an oil painting by Julie Buffalohead for \$50,000 to a Texas foundation. Several works on paper by Clare Rojas and Rupy C. Tut sold in the range of \$12,000 to \$20,000 and a weaving by Margo Wolowiec sold for \$38,000.

Paris gallery Templon, which opened an outpost in Chelsea last fall, sold work by Will Cotton for \$150,000, as well as works by Chiharu Shiota, priced from €60,000 to €100,000 (\$64,000 to \$107,000). All Philippe Cognée works on the booth for €30,000 to €75,000 (\$32,000 to \$80,000) were also sold.

Anne-Claudie Coric, executive director of Templon, noted a lot of interest from American collectors in international artists. "The first hour was extremely busy and it felt like we were back in the pre-Covid times."

The Armory Show is on view at the Javits Center from September 8 through 10.

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