

CRISTIN TIERNEY

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

On the Hunt for Artistic Gems at Frieze



“Shady,” an outdoor installation by Kapwani Kiwanga, a Paris-based artist and the winner of the Frieze artist award. The installation is on view through Sunday at Frieze New York on Randalls Island. Credit George Etheredge for The New York Times

By Roberta Smith

May 3, 2018

Art fairs are in the uncomfortable position of being the bane of the art world’s existence and among its primary staffs of life. In the face of this contradiction, Frieze New York, on view through Sunday on Randalls Island in an improved tent structure, is arguably the most resourceful.

It has lost some of its sheen and a few clients to Tefaf, the Dutch fair now in its second year at the Park Avenue Armory. Frieze’s response to Tefaf — whether by choice or circumstance — seems to have been to skew younger and a bit squarer.

This year, nearly 40 of Frieze’s more than 190 participants are first timers — a turnover that the fair says is normal. Nonetheless, some of the newcomers are galleries that Frieze would probably not have considered in previous years; but here they are, putting

their best feet forward. The result is a fair that feels less groomed, more democratic and global — something of a relief — especially in its lively Spotlight section, where dealers have devoted solo shows to neglected postwar artists from around the world. It also has more ups and downs. There's plenty good to look at; you just have to seek it out.

Frieze's redesigned quarters forsakes the endless Quonset hut effect of its original white, gently snaking structure for five connected, wider tents with low-peaked, modernist roofs, shorter aisles, a greater variety of vistas and entrances on the sides, instead of at the ends. Initially it can be confusing, so it's best to pick up a fair map before setting forth.

Facing the North entrance, 303 Gallery has orchestrated a scruffy yet white-on-white presentation centering on "Blind Spot," a stack of sparsely graffitied cubes by Eva Rothschild. Tracey Emin has some new paintings at Xavier Hufkens that blend Cy Twombly, Julian Schnabel and Georg Baselitz, but are actually startlingly good. David Zwirner has devoted half his space to a beautiful selection of Josh Smith's paintings of Death in colorful robes suggest something livelier. Gavin Brown's enterprise has a stark presentation of photographs taken or found (and usually manipulated) and then arranged in six big framed gangs by the great filmmaker Arthur Jafa. Presented on a single wall overlooking a noticeably empty gray-surfaced floor, they form a kind of diary and include images of art (van Gogh, Cady Noland), well-known figures (Marilyn Monroe, Martin Luther King Jr.) and terrorist acts. They meditate on contemporary life, but especially black life. Their virtually omnivorous range indicates, as I overheard someone remark, "a mind on fire."

Playing off Mr. Jafa's work is Leigh Ledare's more stylish, occasionally erotic gangs of found images, displayed horizontally at the Box. And in between (literally), at Kai Matsumiya, is a kind of palette cleanser in the display of Rainer Ganahl's wonderfully random photographs of art world lectures being given by such luminaries as the art historian Linda Nochlin and the performance artist Andrea Fraser.

Solo shows definitely have the edge this year, although a drawing survey at Canada, selected by the artist Jason Fox, may entice, and a major Bruce Nauman sculpture is great to see at Hauser & Wirth, despite overwhelming the rest of the display. Most of them contain one gem or another.

Want to see a new fiery view of nature by the talented painter Shara Hughes? Try Rachel Uffner's booth. A sublime sculpture made mostly of wire, wool and air by the extraordinary Sonia Gomes? Head to Mendes Wood DM. A big found kilim textile embroidered with river-like currents of silver and gold thread by Raqs Media Collective? Follow the money to the Frith Street Gallery.

Looking for other new talent? Consider the conceptual sculptor Cameron Rowland and the object-oriented painter Torey Thornton at Essex Street, and at Josh Lilley, dark tapestry-like works by Tom Anholt, a British painter. Promising young painters who happen to be women? Farah Atassi's riffs on Picasso at Ghebaly Gallery, and Gracie DeVito's fairy-tale paintings, sometimes with rippling edges, at Tif Sigfrids, a gallery

that, in what may be a sign of the times, has just relocated to Athens, Ga., from Los Angeles.

Showing a giant card table and two folding-metal chairs by Robert Therrien, Gagosian Gallery provides the fair's best selfie op. Runner-up is Kun-Yong Lee's "Corporal Term," (2014) at Gallery Hyundai, a tall, stripped tree trunk with its roots embedded in a cube of dirt as sharp-edged as Tony Smith's proto-Minimalist black box. The best use of large scale: Charles Harlan's booth, presented by JTT and Kayne Griffin Corcoran, in the Focus section. His "Birdbath" is a bright blue fiberglass baptism pool, tilted downward, as if toward hell, by an old-fashioned, handmade bird bath.

The new design allows the categories to be more concentrated, which could be more actively exploited. The unity of the Spotlight section, for example, is thrilling. You are surrounded by galleries presenting solos of little-known or underappreciated postwar artists, like a seminar in the flesh. Ryan Lee Gallery is presenting unfamiliar 1960s figurative paintings in saturated color by Emma Amos, which instantly links with Faith Ringgold and Bob Thompson's works from that same era. At Weiss Berlin, four beautiful soft-edged abstractions made since 1980 by Edward Clark. In a compact show at Lyles & King, "Unseen Dick Paintings (1988-1993)," demonstrates that the early work of Mira Schor continues to shock. At Partners & Mucciaccia, Carla Accardi's vine-like abstractions from the 1950s lay the groundwork for her Arte Povera installations, while the pale abstractions of Helen Lundberg at Cristin Tierney gallery include one that resembles a variation on Superman's logo. And Jhaveri Contemporary from Mumbai, will introduce you to the luscious semi-abstract figurative paintings of Mohan Samant (1924-2004), whose motifs are sometimes reinforced by delicate bent wires that float above the canvas, resembling drawing in ink. If it's older material that moves you, Donald Ellis's devastating display of North Plains Indian ledger drawings is arguably the fair's best show, and near the Spotlight section.

Frieze, which originated in London, has energetically pursued what seems to be the main art-fair defense, which is to add enough bells and whistles to look as little like an art fair as possible. Maybe even act like a temporary museum. It has an active program of lectures and panels as well as an education program and docents, and great food. This year it inaugurates an Artist Award, sponsored by the Luma Foundation and chosen by a jury from open-call submissions. The winner is Kapwani Kiwanga, a Paris-based artist whose outdoor installation, titled "Shady," is made of large swathes of colored semi-transparent agriculture fabric layered on steel frames. It conjures a confusing set of associations, including barriers, escape routes, makeshift shelters, stage sets and Minimal art. Also new this year is "Live," a series of performances taking place in various booths and spaces.

As if this weren't enough, Frieze has established its first themed exhibition, a tribute to Hudson (1950-2014), the visionary art dealer whose gallery, Feature, gave first shows to some of the art world's current best sellers, including Takashi Murakami, Charles Ray and Raymond Pettibon. This is more than a little ironic, since Hudson rarely participated in art fairs. In addition, Feature was one of the great feeder galleries of the late-20th century: The kind of place whose discovery of new talent has long been

CRISTIN TIERNEY

essential to the operation of the big galleries that are in turn essential to the fairs. And also the kind of place that rising rents — not to mention art fairs themselves — threaten to put out of business.

It needs to be said that 190 booths feels too big for Frieze, making it a little too much like the Armory Show. Tefaf by comparison has just over 90 participants. But it is equally worth pointing out that the five separate structures of Frieze's new design have built into them the option to downsize, something that all art fairs should consider.