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CRITIC'S PICK

A Fair Where the Art Shines (Grandstanding Not Required)

This year's Art Show at the Park Avenue Armory cuts through the noise of politics. Painting reigns supreme, but the standouts include ceramics and works on paper.



Joe Fig, *Cindy Sherman: Untitled Film Stills/Hauser and Wirth*, 2022. oil on linen mounted on MDF board. 12 3/4 x 19 inches. 32.4 x 48.3 cm

By Martha Schwendener

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I have crossed over to the dark side: I now like art fairs better than biennials and large contemporary survey exhibitions. Technically, there is a lot of overlap, since biennials often involve covert gallery sponsorship and back-room wheeling and dealing. The noise

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of grandstanding politics, however, has all but overwhelmed the art in many recent survey exhibitions. A top-notch fair like the Art Show at the Park Avenue Armory, organized by the Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA) to benefit Henry Street Settlement, allows the art to shine.

The 34th edition of the fair, which celebrates the 60th anniversary of ADAA, features 78 galleries and several previously overlooked artists — particularly women and Black and Latinx artists. Coinciding with this, the comedian and actor Cheech Marin, who just opened the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture in Riverside, Calif., kicks off the fair's series of talks on Thursday evening. Here are some other significant strains running through the fair.



Painting

New York is a painting town: home to the historical New York School of painting in the mid-20th-century and apartments that don't accommodate sprawling installations. But the medium takes on many forms. Robert Kushner's "Blue Flounce" (1975) at DC Moore (Booth D4) is a playful painting on polyester fabric that pushes back — hard — against the "heroic," macho gestures or sublime color fields of the New York School. Gladys Nilsson at Garth Greenan (Booth C6) exhibited with the Hairy Who, a group of 1960s and '70s Chicago artists inspired by humor and cartoons, and her densely packed works here reflect that. Geoffrey Holder at James Fuentes (Booth D7),

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curated by Hilton Als, offers a look at a Trinidadian-American dancer, actor and designer (among other things), who also painted sultry portraits. The New York dealer Mary-Anne Martin (Booth A25) has a wonderful roundup of 20th-century Mexican painting, including a quiet little Frida Kahlo still life, rendered on tin and featuring a prickly pear fruit, hung alongside works by José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and Alfredo Ramos Martínez.

More recent paintings are on view in other booths. Joanna Pousette-Dart offers elegantly shaped canvases with bold, flourishing marks at Philadelphia's Locks Gallery (Booth C8), while Joe Fig at Cristin Tierney (Booth D14) offers jewel-like portraits of people looking at contemporary art in museums. Marcus Jahmal's brand-new paintings at Anton Kern (Booth D12) are like sly updates of Philip Guston, providing a similar, sly social commentary and Ross Bleckner's new canvases at Petzel (Booth A6), with ageless flowers hovering against stark black backgrounds, suggest a suspension of time in painting.

Finally, one of the standouts of the last edition of Greater New York at MoMA PS1 was Paulina Peavy (1901-1999), a spiritualist who treated painting as just another tool in her practice of seeking healing and enlightenment, after encountering a U.F.O. spirit called Lacamo at a 1932 séance. At Andrew Edlin (Booth C15), you can see some of her glorious, faceted abstractions, as well as three masks she made and she wore while painting, in an attempt to channel the teachings of Lacamo.