

Timely rediscoveries await at Independent 20th Century

The fair's fourth edition includes timely works by Russian dissidents, queer underground artists and more

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Cristin Tierney's stand is devoted to mixed-media sculptures by Judy Pfaff
Courtesy of Cristin Tierney Gallery and Independent

The Independent 20th Century fair's fourth iteration at Casa Cipriani (4-7 September) brings together 31 exhibitors showcasing works by around 40 artists who were overlooked in the previous century. In some instances—like the visionaries Gertrude Greene, Jacci Den Hartog and Judy Pfaff—the fair aims to bring obscure careers into the spotlight. In other cases, it seeks to re-examine lesser-known bodies of work by icons such as Pablo Picasso, Edvard Munch and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

The fair's exhibitors are predominantly from the US and Europe, along with a few galleries from Latin America plus Jhaveri Contemporary from Mumbai and the Istanbul-born gallery Pi Artworks (which also has a London outpost). Besides a hefty number of solo presentations—such as Tony Shafrazi's stand devoted to Zadik Zadikian and Hales Gallery's Ken Kiff showcase—this year's recurring curatorial motifs are artists who are self-taught and works with poignant political themes.

The solo fallacy

Elizabeth Dee, the fair's founder and chief executive, tells *The Art Newspaper* that Independent 20th Century is a “collaborative effort” that complicates the “myth” of curating as a solo act, and praises the fair's international advisory team. “Our two Berlin-based curators looked into the social landscape of the 1980s outside the American perspective,” she says, citing the Cologne-based dealer Brigitte Schenk's presentation of the Kabakovs' installation *Little White Men* (1983), which delivers an absurdist rereading of Soviet trauma.

“Given what is happening in Ukraine, now feels like a very apropos moment to look at this particular history,” Dee says, adding that the fair's advisers are tapped into gallery shows around the globe and paying attention to themes that “might not be addressed in New York museums yet”.



Mariposa Gallery is showcasing provocative works by Peter Berlin
Courtesy of Mariposa Gallery and Independent

One factor that keeps Independent 20th Century and its contemporary sister fair in the spring fresh is that they typically feature a large proportion of new exhibitors. Dee says this keeps the fairs from falling into a predictable “trade show” format where organisers “lean back on loyal galleries and see what they exhibit two weeks before the opening”. Among the debut presentations is Mariposa Gallery, a nomadic, Paris-born venture that is making its New York debut with a solo stand devoted to Peter Berlin. The often leather-clad underground queer icon’s mixed-media work generally includes his own commanding likeness, as in the hand-painted prints of his strategically concealed anatomy that will be shown at the fair.

“Independent is an ideal stage for Berlin, a long-overlooked figure whose work has profoundly shaped contemporary art and queer visual culture,” says Alec Smyth, Mariposa Gallery’s cofounder. “At a time when sexual expression is increasingly under threat, his unapologetic self-representation feels more vital than ever.”

Established newbies

Besides emerging spaces like Mariposa, a suite of established enterprises are making their debuts at the fair, including the 60-year-old Swiss gallery Gmurzynska. Its presentation is devoted to passionately rendered mixed-media assemblages by the late American conceptualist Dan Basen.

“The idea of focusing on one artist or movement of the 20th century that deserves a closer look is very much in alignment with what we do,” says Isabelle Bscher, the gallery’s owner. “Opening our new space at the Fuller Building seemed the perfect moment to join Independent with the presentation of the rediscovery of a fascinating 1960’s New York artist who died very young.”

Cristin Tierney’s participation coincides with the unveiling of a new space, in Tribeca, and the gallery’s 15th anniversary. Tierney believes her gallery’s expansive presentation of mixed-media sculptures by Judy Pfaff, a prolific artist, delivers a timely message to the art community: “Let’s continue to rethink art history, innovate in how we do business and bring everyone we can along for the ride.”

Galerie Lelong is returning to the fair after a one-year hiatus with a display devoted to the Italian Argentine painter Elda Cerrato. The stand focuses on Cerrato’s charged *Maps and Multitudes* series, which she produced in reaction to political turbulence in Latin America in the 1960s and 70s.

Mary Sabbatino, Lelong’s vice-president, sees an overlap between her gallery’s commitment to championing women artists with Dee’s vision for Independent. “The fair’s scale and calibre has made it an optimal context for us to debut new artists and bodies of work in focused, informative presentations, and helped us to expand our network of collectors and curators who share our same passion for ‘discoveries’ that build an expanded canon,” she says.

- [Independent 20th Century](#), 4-7 September, Casa Cipriani at the Battery Maritime Building, 10 South Street, New York

