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Prisant, Barden. "My Last Live Art Fair?- "The Art Show"." *Forbes*. March 16, 2020.



Since so many art shows are being cancelled, I have a bit of down time. Hence, I thought that I might take a minute to revisit one of the last ones I was able to attend in person, The Art Show.

Full disclosure- I have to admit that I have a soft spot for it. For 32 years, the Art Dealers Association of America has held The Art Show at the Park Avenue Armory here in NYC for the benefit of the Henry Street Settlement. This is a not-for-profit I hold in high regard, and, this season, they raised \$1.1 million, which will help fund programs for vulnerable New Yorkers.

While the Settlement's programming has remained constant over the years, that of The Art Show has slowly morphed. By my informal count, at this year's outing, approximately 75% of the galleries in attendance included what they self-described as Contemporary Art.

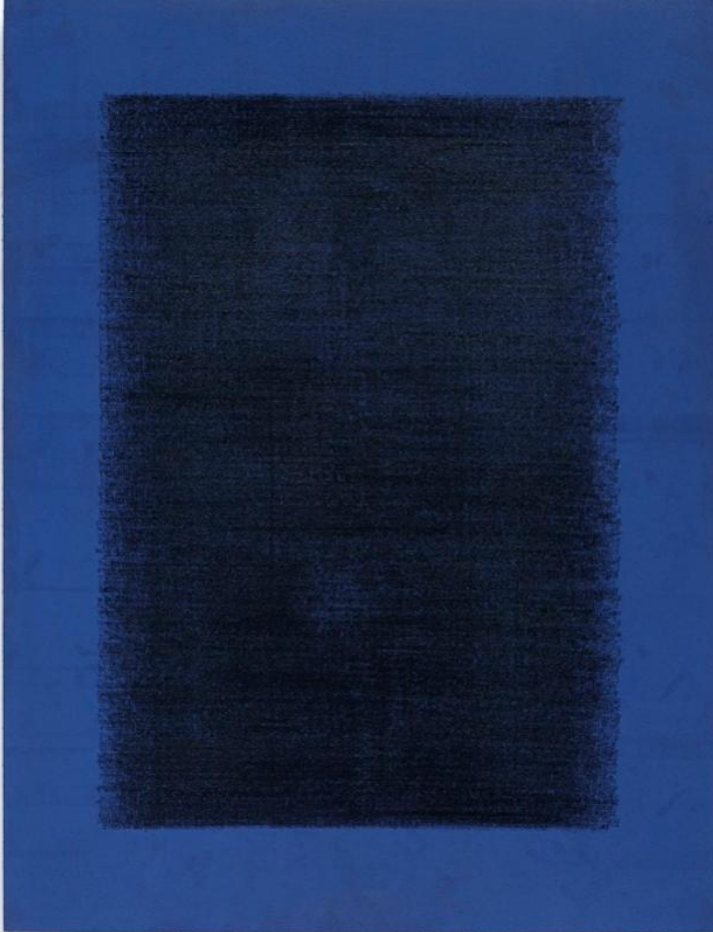
"20 years ago, the cross-section was different", observed one of the exhibitors, Eric Baumgartner. He should know, as his firm, Hirschl & Adler, (a force in 18th/19th C. American art for decades), has been a show fixture. "There were dealers like Richard Feigen", (an Old Master specialist), "or Richard York", (who carried pieces dating back to the mid-18th C.).

As I have written in the past, the art market in general has skewed in recent years towards 20th/21st C. works, at the expense of their earlier forebears. "Contemporary did not sprout up from nothing", Baumgartner reminded me, "It had a foundation- us".

This realignment, though, has seemingly benefitted The Art Show. According to Andrew Schoelkopf, the current President of the ADAA, "People are very happy with the show. A number sold out their entire booths the first day". By way of example, I was advised that Pace Gallery had indeed sold every work on display by the artist Adam Pendleton (1984-) on that first day. (Price?- \$80,000-\$225,000 each.)

As well, the Sean Kelly Gallery almost sold out its entire booth of works by Idris Khan (1978-), each of which was priced at \$58,000.

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One of the Idris Kahn's at The Art Show- "Light Through the Dark," 2019, oil based ink on gesso and ... [+]
©IDRIS KAHN, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SEAN KELLY, NEW YORK

Janine Cirincione, Director there, told me that they have mounted such solo shows of Contemporary art for the last seven years, obviously to good effect. She had nothing but praise for The Art Show, observing that it is an "elegant quiet fair, not a rough and tumble marketplace". Take that, Miami Basel.

A few of those works flying out the doors might have been sold to some of the celebrities who invariably attend the show, especially its gala preview- Drew Barrymore, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Steve Martin, among them. Part of The Art Show's success, according to Schoelkopf, has been the "focus on engagement-the experience", and having dealers represent living artists certainly helps with that. "We have primary artists coming and giving talks during the show", he explained. Certainly, Eric Baumgartner might have had a bit of trouble getting Gilbert Stuart in for an afternoon.

Another realignment has been the move to a "thematic" program, wherein each booth has to define in advance a narrative it plans to convey. "Years ago", said Baumgartner, "it was just 'bring the best of what you had', and it has evolved into what we have now". Part of his issue with this is that 10 months in advance of the show, exhibitors must present what the "theme" of their booth will

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be. Sometimes, the challenge can yield what seems to be prescience. For last year's show, Hirschl & Adler picked "Women Artists from the 1920's-1950's", just as #MeToo was in the ascendant.

Ultimately, The Art Show is an extension of the Art Dealers Association of America, and I asked Schoelkopf about the organization's current mission. He responded that "it is grappling with changing regulatory and tax changes current and forthcoming; to offer support in a changing environment". How little did he know at the time that a somewhat different "changing environment" was just around the corner. As he had also observed that there had been "an influx of international buyers", he must now be thankful that his show went off when it did, and not now.