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ART: Still Hung up on FRIEZE?

By Frank Exposito, on May 21st, 2012

We sure are, and we don't mind explaining why.

The ease of getting to Frieze passed the first test. Most fairs after all are in Manhattan, so having to venture out to Randall's Island (important to mention its turn-of-the-century history of mentally ill residents) took some initial convincing. But now, congested city fairs seem as far behind as we first imagined the island would be, wild and untamed. We went to seek art and what we found on this first Frieze Island was what the Marquesas became for Gauguin, a natural well of inspiration.

As artist Joshua Abelow's dancing man freezes in mid-step, Frieze New York had paused to listen to the grumblings about previous art fairs, revamping some fair-going features with wider halls, natural light, and accommodating air conditioning. Founders Amanda Sharp and Matthew Slotover took into consideration the big art from artists like Anish Kapoor, whose work at the fair was exemplar of the saturate and oversized. Taller booth walls gave vibrant art more room, and in the case of James Fuentes Gallery, more opportunity from top to bottom. Cubic and color variegated, painting here became indistinguishable from pixelated low-res imaging, at least as eyes blurred when first standing present. Upon closer inspection, drips and canvas stains came into focus, details that would satiate even the highest resolutions of online viewing—presence duly subservient to extension as a way towards better communication. In Cory Arcangel's digital horizons at Team Gallery, mornings seemed more beautiful in computerized color than in the captured palette of an actual desert safari.

"It's all about color," Joseph Mimran explains, "The way color is used and about texture." The owner of Joe Fresh, the clothing label that uses monochrome hues of blues and oranges, spoke about his appreciations of art at the fair's inaugural dinner, hosting guests like Frieze founder, Ms. Sharp, collectors like the Horts, along with artists and their gallerists. "Personally, I don't intellectualize art," he says, "I'm much more visual and appreciate how art transposes itself onto everyday life." At TriBeCa's Super Linda, color was to be the unifying force that would bring art and fashion to the same dinner table.

"There's a great artist here tonight, Joshua Abelow, who really studies the use of color," Joe continues. "On the back of every one of his paintings, he'll put the formula for the color he used. He's a living Pantone guy. Last year, one of our sweaters borrowed its color from one of [Abelow's] paintings. It was the study of yellow, which has become such a big trend

color.” How does he feel about the transfer of art into fashion? “I don’t believe it’s like how others copy designs from the runway. It’s much more obtuse. Artists have had such an interest in pixilation recently that it’s made its way into fashion—in digital prints and hyperrealism. There isn’t a formula for it, nor do I think there should be. It would be horrible if all of a sudden artists became predictors of fashion. Fashion is about what we get out of art and how we use it to get to a real place.”

Back at the fair, in place of single file lines (the kinds big city gatherings usually require), drawings themselves broke free in anti-queues over found paper, canvas and vintage novels. Ghada Amer’s White Bang erupted figuratively in volcanic stitching while Shinro Ohtake’s inky bogs layered pen line and waste organically. Ryan McGinley’s nude figurines were collaged in a Bosch-like apex of bodies as Antonis Donef’s Untitled work expanded molecularly in drawn, detailed theory. Spilling into space, Samara Golden’s Bad Brains undid the usual frame with crude faces piling up over the flooring. In each, we were asked to linger a bit longer as our eyes were told where to go like guided visitors on foreign soil.

When asked the difference between Frieze and other fairs, Gallery Director Adrienne Rubenstein beamed back with enthusiasm. “Of the interactions we’ve had with fair visitors, I would say about 95% of them are relevant to our business. For our artists, Frieze landed and became a magnet for people from all ends of the globe,” she says right before we sit for Mexican fare at the Frieze dinner. “The food was really good and the light was nice; we could even see outdoors!”

“Frieze was an opportunity for us to do an exhibition, the kind we could have done at our gallery, James Fuentes. Even though it’s an art fair, it’s a stage, and we wanted to put on a show.” We could definitely relate. As we gazed at Justin Matherly’s propped up Laocoon at Bureau, a young man in a metal wheel chair came over next to the corporeal, concrete sculpture. He pointed to the jerry-rigged walkers elevating it and said, “Those are there to give it height.” Like in some life-affirming play, we stood disabled as art met reality in a place meant for those kinds of spheres. And all we did was stare.