

The New York Times, 40 Nations, 1,000 Artists and One Island, text/ Roberta Smith, May 2013

The New York Times

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ART REVIEW

40 Nations, 1,000 Artists and One Island Frieze New York at Randalls Island



Frieze New York A crowd arriving at the fair, on Randalls Island.

By **ROBERTA SMITH**
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Some people hate art fairs all of the time, and most people hate them some of the time. It's fashionable to be snarky and condescending about them, but that's too easy. Art fairs are here for the foreseeable future and represent the collective efforts — if not the hopes and dreams — of thousands of people who want art to be at the center of their lives.

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Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times
Paul McCarthy's "Balloon Dog."

89th Street, every 10 minutes. Frieze should figure out a way to extend the discount to artists. The most interesting thing about an art fair is the concentration of information about art, which artists arguably need more than anyone else.

Frieze New York tends to short-circuit art fair hating. It has unusually spacious quarters — a big white tent on Randalls Island, where it put down stakes last year — with more natural light than any New York museum. Viewing is enhanced by springy plywood floors that are relatively easy on the feet and is sustained, if necessary, by excellent food from outposts set up by hot restaurants (among them Mission Chinese Food, Roberta's and the Fat Radish).

Generally, fairs are not nearly as deleterious to the art world as auctions or, in some ways, the multinational gallery franchises that are currently big-footing around the globe. Fairs are crucial to the survival of many midsize and small art galleries that, in turn, are essential to local art scenes. Given that these scenes are increasingly scattered around the globe, fairs are one way for galleries to connect.

All in all, Frieze has brought a new level of ease to the marathon of the big international art fair, and this year the quality of the art is up too. Yes, tickets are \$42 (and must be purchased online), except for students, who pay \$26. Getting there is another \$12.50, round trip, on the ferries that leave from the 35th Street ferry dock on the East River every 15 minutes, or \$5.50 on the yellow school buses that leave from the Guggenheim Museum, at Fifth Avenue at

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This year around 180 galleries from nearly 40 countries are showing works by some 1,000 artists in all mediums, including performance. Some of the galleries are blue-chip, some are newbies (or art fair neophytes) that tend to be grouped in a section called Frame; most are in between. Nearly all have shown up with art that is several notches above last year's offerings and not nearly as many big, shiny things. The stylish surroundings seem to have encouraged a rise in uncluttered displays and curatorial thought.

There is much to see: new artists of all ages to discover and others to get reacquainted with. Leo Xu Projects, from Shanghai, is featuring work by Liu Chuang, a young Chinese artist first seen in the "Younger Than Jesus" generational show at the New Museum in 2009. One piece, "[Love Stories](#)," recently completed, consists of a table stacked with small, worn-out pulp fiction novels, some open, some closed. They were once part of a rental library, whose users frequently annotated them with comments, letters and Post-its. The sappy cover illustrations, together with the printed and handwritten Chinese characters, telegraph a poignant sense of isolation and longing.

There are blasts from the past. The [Almine Rech Gallery](#), of Brussels and Paris, has one of Frank Stella's "Exotic Bird" aluminum reliefs from 1976, which shows this American painter on the verge of a flamboyant new style. [Sfeir-Semler](#), a gallery split between Beirut and Hamburg, is displaying "It Can Be Made Accessible," a flat-footed yet oddly hopeful series of phrases typed on 16 index cards by the Conceptual artist Robert Barry in 1971. And there are works that may expand the past, like a display of pieces in stone, rope and newsprint, from the late 1950s to the early '80s, by Seung-taek Lee, a Korean artist whose sensibility relates to Arte Povera, at Gallery Hyundai, from Seoul.

Some artists look especially good. The stands of Esther Schipper and Maureen Paley have between them three examples of a sliding door by Liam Gillick, made of vertical slats of colored metal — like a Donald Judd version of beaded curtains — that successfully fuses his interest in Minimalism and design. At the Modern Institute, Eva Rothschild, whom I associate with off-putting slick black sculpture with sharp points, is showing a sculpture made of a tangle of rebar, punctuated by cylindrical segments of cast concrete and colored pebbles; set on a tall pedestal, it suggests a cheerful Brutalist monument to the atom.

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Frieze New York continues through Monday on Randalls Island; friezenewyork.com.

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Other sculptural tangles to consider are a slightly crazed example by Abraham Cruzvillegas at Regen Projects (involving more rebar, as well as feathers, fabric, chain, beer bottle caps and dried meat), and a much more delicate one made from yarn, wire and wood, by Matthias Bitzer, at Kadel Willborn.

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Tom Friedman's pizza sculpture.

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The numerous booths devoted to single artists contribute to the show's uncluttered look. Luhing Augustine has a wonderfully spare display of Tom Friedman's sculptures, enlarged yet exquisite renditions of comfort food (pizza, bread and a trio of Hostess classics), that looks from a distance like a carbo-loaders fantasy. At Gavin Brown's Enterprise, [Bjarne Melgaard](#), who never met a taboo he didn't like breaking, has painted the walls deep lavender, piled the floor with brightly colored blankets printed with drawings and texts, and topped it all off with his indelible woozy portrait paintings. It's all kind of comfy and womblike until you read the blankets and realize that the subject is Theresa Duncan, an artist who committed suicide in 2007.

At Galeria Elba Benitez (Madrid), Carlos Bunga has fashioned parts of large cardboard boxes into paintings, installation and reliefs, all involving airy, monochrome pastels for a pleasantly low-tech effect. At Kaufmann Repetto next door, Lily van der Stokker uses nearly the same palette to create a tableau of cartoonish and flowery domestic bliss made of a painting, an armchair and a small cabinet.

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Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times
"Love Stories," by Liu Chuang.

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Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times
"Mix (Americana)," by Alexandre da Cunha.

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Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times
An installation by Bjarne Melgaard is among the works featured at Frieze New York, which is less cluttered this year.

Some parting tips on attention-worthy art: at the L&M Arts stand, Barbara Kruger's "You Look Good," presenting that compliment of choice for people of a certain age in big white letters on black; Huma Bhabha's big, ravaged assemblage figures at Salon 94 and drawings on photographs at Stephen Friedman Gallery; Andrea Bowers's agitations on paper at Kaufmann Repetto and cardboard at Susanne Vielmetter (along with Nicole Eisenman's paintings); two ambitious sculptures by the brainy Isabel Nolan at Kerlin Gallery; Helene Appel's small painting, "Absorbent Cloth," a sweet portrait of a dishrag as formalist picture plane at the Approach; and Naama Tsabar's sarcophagus of fluorescent light tubes and thick, perforated black rubber mats at Dvir Gallery, the sarcophagus causing the mats to emit a bit of light and heat and a mild, not unpleasant odor. Did I mention that the efforts of female artists look particularly strong throughout the fair?

Also exceptional is a brief performance piece that Tino Sehgal, ephemeralist extraordinaire, has orchestrated at the Marian Goodman Gallery's stand. It brings to living, breathing, if not entirely human life a digital creature created by two other artists and fosters another of the concentrated, engulfing, brain-twisting experiences for which Mr. Sehgal is known, one that makes the essence of art tangible without making it concrete.

Other attractions at Frieze include an outdoor sculpture park, the centerpiece of which is Paul McCarthy's "Balloon Dog," an 80-foot-tall red inflatable sculpture, a fatter, more eroticized and much enlarged parody of Jeff Koons's work of the same title. It is an impressive spectacle if a rather ludicrous work of art. Among the commissioned projects found in and around the tent is a re-creation of Food, the artist-run restaurant from SoHo's long-ago, supposedly

golden age, a time before the mixed blessings of mega-galleries and art fairs.

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