

Who's in? Armory Show risks expansion

Fair size rivals Art Basel Miami Beach; dealers pulling out threatened with legal action

By Lindsay Pollock | From issue 210, February 2010
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Fancy a Damien Hirst interior? Other Criteria will offer his wallpaper (pictured) at \$1,000 per roll

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NEW YORK. In a period of retrenchment, New York's 12th annual Armory Show has taken a contrarian approach, expanding to include 285 dealers, up from 239 in 2009. New exhibitors

range from Damien Hirst's Other Criteria, taking part in their first ever art fair and selling limited edition artist-designed wares, to Lora Reynolds, a five-year-old Austin, Texas gallery run by a former Anthony d'Offay and Matthew Marks staffer. The fair includes a contemporary section, with 211 dealers. The modern section features 74 galleries. The fair attracted 56,000 visitors in 2009.

The expansion makes the Armory show comparable in size to Art Basel Miami Beach, which included 273 exhibitors in December. The Armory Show is owned by Merchandise Mart, a Chicago-based conglomerate, which also owns Art Chicago, the Toronto International Art Fair and Volta.

Fair organisers say confidence stemming from a promising autumn season generated ongoing demand for slots beyond the June application cut-off. "People have approached us after the deadline," fair director Katelijne De Backer told The Art Newspaper. A confluence of events—the Whitney Biennial, the New Museum's Dakis Joannou exhibition and the ADAA Art Show among them—plus a renewed confidence in the art market, has made the fair attractive to exhibitors.

Nevertheless, a group of galleries have opted out—including Tanya Bonakdar, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, Marianne Boesky, and Cheim & Read—all of whom are showing in the Park Avenue Armory at the concurrent blue-chip ADAA Art Show. Two dealers, who declined to be identified, said they were threatened

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with "legal action" when they notified the Armory they intended to drop out. Giovanni Garcia-Fenech, the fair spokesman, said they try to operate with a degree of flexibility, but dealers who have contractually agreed to participate are held to those contracts.

The fair will include a geographic focus for the first time. Twenty-two Berlin dealers received shipping and booth rate discounts, leading to some other dealers to complain of unfair subsidies to the Germans.

Last year fair organisers introduced a second pier for modern dealers and this year the section has expanded. "The audience was serious, the energy was good and the attendance was beyond my expectations," said 57th Street dealer Michael Rosenfeld.

Dealers are hoping the autumn momentum carries over. "I can't bank on an art fair anymore, it's definitely a mistake to do that," said first-time Armory exhibitor James Fuentes, who shows young art on the Lower East Side. "I'm always optimistic, but I'm always prepared for it not performing very well."

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