

Schwendener, Martha. "The Armory Show: Playing It Safe During an Unsettled Time," *The New York Times*, 6 March 2020.

## The New York Times



Inside the Armory Art Show, running through March 8 at Piers 90 and 94, in Manhattan. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

Last year the Armory Show weathered a crisis when Pier 92 over the Hudson River was condemned shortly before the art fair opened, precipitating a last-minute reshuffling of booths and the shutting down of a satellite display. This year, the fair has settled on Pier 90 and Pier 94 (dress for the outdoor walk between them) and the catastrophe is the coronavirus, which had already forced the cancellation of Art Basel Hong Kong last month. Though the Armory Show has opened smoothly, hand sanitizer stations are everywhere and elbow-bumping has replaced handshaking and air-kissing as the greeting du jour.

But what about the fair itself?

It's a solid one – if on the safe side – with lots of painting rather than complicated installations or technology. Fairs are not merely commercial ventures. Sections here that have been organized by curators affiliated with prestigious museums (like Anne Ellegood and Jamillah James, both of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) demonstrate the increasingly porous divide between profit and nonprofit.

Given the election season and the state of the world, the Armory Show has a sizable amount of activist art. Will these artistic gestures have an effect on policy? Who knows. Like many counterintuitive aspects of our moment, maybe the next revolution will kick off inside an art fair. Here are some themes and strains (pun cautiously intended) that caught my attention.

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## Art Tour of the African Continent



Omar Ba's "Untitled", 2020, at Galerie Templon (Booth 604, Pier 94). Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



"Future Ancestors 1," 2020. Phoebe Boswell's drawings are at Sapor Contemporary (Booth F6, Pier 90). Jeenah Moon for The New York Times.



Marcia Kure's "Ethnographic Museum: The Nok and Ife Series, Zango Kataf," 2017, at Officine dell'Immagine (Booth F23, Pier 90), Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

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Foreground, Niyi Olagunju's "Baga Nimba (Gold)", 2020, at Tafeta (Booth P6, Pier 94). His sculpture is flanked by Nkechi Ebubedike's "Women Stone Ring Blue" (2020), left, and "Women Stone Ring Red" (2020), right. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

The fair includes plenty of art closely associated with the African continent. Start with the presentation at the Paris gallery Magnin-A (Booth 614, Pier 94), since it has historic photographs by Malian artists like Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé, as well as the Benin-born Romuald Hazoumè's sly wall sculptures that remake African masks with plastic jugs and containers. The Senegalese artist Omar Ba has a fabulously collaged painting with evocative figures at Galerie Templon (Booth 604, Pier 94), while the Ethiopian artist Merikokeb Berhanu at Addis Fine Art (Booth P13, Pier 94) is presenting moody, mostly-abstract canvases.

Phoebe Boswell's drawings at Sapar Contemporary (Booth F6, Pier 90) are called "Future Ancestors" and feature deep sea fishermen from Zanzibar. The Nigerian-born Marcia Kure's photo-collages at Officine dell'Immagine (Booth F23, Pier 90) juxtapose images from fashion magazines with African masks. The sculptures of Moffat Takadiwa from Zimbabwe at Nicodim (Booth 511, Pier 94) follow a now tried-and-true tactic (think El Anatsui, from Ghana) of stringing together fragments of refuse, from bottle caps to computer keyboard keys to create lush, tapestry-like sculptures. The British-Nigerian Niyi Olagunju at Tafeta (Booth P6, Pier 94) is the most hard-hitting, creating partially gilded remakes of traditional sub-Saharan sculptures to criticize the global trade in objects that often had sacred or ritual origins in Africa.