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Art Fairs

5 Must-See Booths at Independent New York, From Vietnam Protest Photos to a Racy Film Inspired by Yayoi Kusama

Despite the recent boom of all things digital, Independent is a highly analog affair.

Richard Whiddington, May 12, 2023

Despite the line out the door to Tribeca's Spring Studios yesterday, there was a murmur that Independent New York isn't quite what it used to be. The chatter was that the invite-only alternative to New York's mega art spectacles of Frieze and The Armory Show has lost its luster, having given some of its edge over to designers and consultants. Visitor comparisons to the Independent's pre-pandemic status abounded.

There might be something to those charges. The crowd was more low-maintenance than haute-couture, though Valentino's viva magenta was flashing on all sides, and on the roof the wares of jewelry designers faced off against pastries sweating in the May morning heat. Spring Studios remains a discombobulating maze, where wrong turns lead to sudden lounges and endless white hallways.

But change is inevitable for a fair now in its 14th edition. Among the 66 galleries and nonprofit organizations hand-picked by the fair, there are indeed some gems. New this year is Independent Editions (not the NFT kind) that sees the likes of the Paris Review, Cal Arts, and Texte Zur Kunst offering retro prints.

In the lead up to the fair, which runs from May 11 to 14, co-founder Elizabeth Dee stressed that it emphasizes "the next generations of rising galleries." If so, the future is decidedly analog: a set of neon signs, a television—that's about as high-voltage as Independent gets. In this moment of soaring digital art, there's hope for painters yet.

Here are five booths that stood out.

Susan Inglett Gallery & Specific Object



Kusama *Untitled* (1969). Image courtesy Susan Inglett Gallery.

In the mid-1960s, Yayoi Kusama had a realization: more people read porn magazines than *Artforum* (a fact doubtless still true, though the verb "read" really doesn't go with the noun "porn" anymore). Her response? To inject her work into men's magazines. In 1969, as part of her own business enterprise she rented a space filling it with soft polka dot sculptures Kusama created for naked photoshoots. She invited people to rent the room, a model, and a camera from her by the half-hour.

This is the starting point for husband and wife duo Susan Inglett and David Platzker's mini-show "An Assault on American Prudery" which presents the responses of three female artists to pornography. Also on view at the booth are original super-phallic t-shirts Lynda Benglis screen-printed to fund her infamous *Artform* nude advertisement cover and alterations Beverly Semmes made to porn magazines gifted to her by a parting neighbor. "Rather than fighting pornography, they each used it to have a conversation," Inglett said of the artists. "They asked questions, [such as] 'are [the women] victims in need of our support, or something else?'"