

ART MARKET NEWS

Slow and steady wins the race at Expo Chicago

Without the hustle of New York, Miami and London, this fair has built a reputation for considered collectors and talent-seeking curators

by RACHEL CORBETT | 18 September 2015

There was scarcely a Jeff Koons in sight at Thursday's preview for the fourth edition of Expo Chicago (until 20 September). Nor were there many smiling daisies, dried butterflies or other high-priced baubles that have come to characterise the more aggressively commercial fairs in New York, Miami and London. Instead, the art on view in Chicago tends to be more staid, and so are the collectors.

The city's top galleries tend to highlight local stars, like McArthur Binion, whose elaborately cross-hatched canvas *DNA: Black Painting: IV*, 2015, was on view at Kavi Gupta Gallery, and Todd Chilton's playful geometric abstractions at Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

"Some collectors come three times before buying", says Marc Benda, a partner at the New York gallery Albertz Benda, which was showing torn-and-retaped canvases by Cullen Washington Jr and intricate drawings by Jen Ray, all priced at around \$20,000 or less. "They come back with their kids on the weekend and show the whole family," he says.

The fair has also developed a reputation as a leading marketplace for Midwestern curators and institutions. "That is one of the draws for us here as exhibitors, to bring our artists to attention for potential exhibitions at regional institutions", says Kristine Bell, a partner at David Zwirner Gallery, which was showing work by a mix of gallery artists, including Donald Judd, Oscar Murillo and Carl Bove. "Because there's less of a frenzy from collectors, the conversations are longer and more in-depth," she says.

This year, Expo organisers doubled down on that strategy, hosting 25 curators from 23 museums as part of its debut Greater Midwest Curatorial Forum. Despite the name, some of the curators flew in from as far as Mexico City (from the Museo Jumex), San Francisco (the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts) and New York (the Whitney Museum). But the majority came from institutions around the Midwest.

"The first year we came to Chicago, we sold four pieces to a museum," says the Los Angeles-based dealer Charlie James, referring to the 2009 sale of several works by the Los Angeles artist Steve Lambert to the Sheldon Museum of Art in Lincoln, Nebraska. He adds that the fair "has the fattest middle market", so he did not bring anything priced at more than \$15,000. This year, James sold several tongue-in-cheek works by Lambert and the New York artist Jennifer Dalton to private collectors, including one of Lambert's photographs declaring: "Capitalism works for me!" Meanwhile, a supply of Dalton's complimentary stickers with phrases like "Enjoying proximity to wealth" and "Deeply uncomfortable" could be spotted on fairgoers all day.

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