

ARTNEWS

Giant Yayoi Kusama at the Armory Began as a Sketch on a Napkin That She Faxed Over

BY *Nate Freeman* POSTED 03/01/17 2:34 PM



Yayoi Kusama, *Guidepost to the New World*, 2016, presented by Victoria Miro Gallery.

During the press conference for the Armory Show, about 30 minutes before the fair opened to VIPs, its director, Ben Genocchio, was addressing the press corps in the VIP Lounge. There were “bespoke culinary offerings” on offer, although the cloudy weather deprived attendees of the “sun-drenched views.”

“But look, you can see beautiful New Jersey!” Genocchio told me with his usual exuberance.

More interesting, though, was talk of another structural innovation designed for this year’s edition of Armory. It’s a clearing in the middle of Pier 94 that, on the map, is deemed the “town square.”

Freeman, Nate. “Giant Yayoi Kusama at the Armory Began as a Sketch on a Napkin That She Faxed Over,” *Artnews*, March 1, 2017.

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Genocchio explained that in North Africa and Spain, a town's center was dubbed its "sacred heart" (an appropriate term for a fair that opened on Ash Wednesday) and that he wanted to create that kind of epicenter for the first edition of the fair he has been able to fully organize. He wanted it to offer a break from the booths, drawing people in, he said. And so, to do that, he called upon Yayoi Kusama, who is very good at drawing people in. Her show at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. (an institution run by Genocchio's wife, Melissa Chiu) has a show up of her work that's inspired headlines in the local papers that all say something like, "Lines for the Kusama Exhibit at the Hirshhorn Appear Infinite."

"Kusama sketched something on a napkin, faxed it over, and we said, 'Great!'" Genocchio explained.

That was the genesis of *Guidepost to the New Work* (2016), which is presented by Victoria Miro as part of the Armory's Platform sector, curated by Sotheby's Senior Vice President Eric Shiner, who was until last year director of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. The initial sketch has become a not-for-playing jungle gym of Kusama's white-spotted red mushroom-y blobs that rest on a bright green astroturf. It's the kind of thing that will be Instagrammed many, many times, especially when the public starts coming to the fair on Thursday.

"It's going to be a phenomenal photo op," Shiner said when I ran into him by the Kusama. "She was on our list since day one. When Ben reached out, she said, 'I've always wanted to do something like this.'"

Then, **Marc Benda** of **Albertz Benda** walked up from his gallery's Platform project, which is an interactive photo-booth work by the German artist **Fiete Stolte**, *Eye* (2017). For the price of \$100, you enter a contraption that takes a haunting picture of your eye with your silhouette exploding inside the iris, which is then given to you as a unique work. (It's also there to be Instagrammed: "tag @albertzbenda for a chance to win a fine art print of your image," reads a note that accompanies your new \$100 Fiete Stolte.)

"What do you think?" Shiner said to Benda.

Benda took a look at the enormous clearing, in which a gigantic, multi-part, selfie-ready work by one of the world's most famous and recognizable artists now looms, impossible to miss.

"It's pretty... *subtle*, right?" Shiner said.

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