

BMW Art Guide
by Independent Collectors

Interview with Benjamin Genocchio

Fair Director at The Armory Show

Tell us a little bit about the history of the fair

The Armory Show is a true New York institution and part of the essential fabric of this city's cultural scene. I like to call it "the child of Chelsea" because it was founded in 1994 by four New York dealers – Colin de Land, Pat Hearn, Matthew Marks and Paul Morris. The first few editions were staged at the now famous Gramercy Park Hotel, where an international group of dealers and artists, including Jay Jopling, Tracey Emin, Jeffrey Deitch and Jeff Koons came together for what was the first "hotel-fair" of its kind. After several successful additions, the fair moved to a more expansive location at the 69th Regiment Armory on Lexington Avenue where it took on the name "The Armory Show" to honor the Regiment's legendary 1913 exhibition which famously showcased avant-garde works by European artists. Today the fair is in its 23rd year and welcomes 65 000 annual visitors. Like the art scene in New York, it has grown and changed over the years to reflect of the international art world we know today.



How do you, as fair director, ensure that the event stays contemporary and current in the fast-paced world that is the art market?

There are over 300 art fairs taking place annually around the world – but only one takes place in a 250 000 square foot venue in the heart of Manhattan. We hold an incredible asset and that is being a genuine part of this vibrant city. We are not a franchise event and we are not a convention center fair. What makes The Armory Show memorable, and what makes it great, is our authenticity and our commitment to being an extension of New York's cultural scene. Since I began as Executive Director, I have been searching for ways to make the fair more memorable, more experiential. What we have come up with for 2017 is a complete redesign of the floor plan and the introduction of new exhibitor sections that are designed to showcase a textured and diverse art experience.

Is there something in this year's program that you are particularly looking forward to?

One thing I am particularly excited about this year is a new section devoted to large-scale and site-specific artworks and commissions. This section, known as "Platform", invites artists such as Yayoi Kusama, Ivan Navarro and Abigail DeVille to stage large-scale artworks that directly engage with the venue and bring it to life. Ivan has created a text-based light and sound sculpture made specifically for the fair. The loud and soft noises

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made by attendees during the fair will be captured by sensitive microphones and then represented in light, charting the various levels of sound intensity in a three-dimensional sculpture composed of metal and Plexiglas. Yayoi Kusama has produced an incredible 11-part cast aluminum sculpture that will be placed at the center of Pier 94 while Abigail Deville is creating a work inspired by the industrial nature of the Piers. It's these kind of initiatives that I am passionate about and that I see as the future of this fair – to be a catalyst for incredible and ambitious creative projects.

What do the artworks being presented at this year's fair reveal about the current trends and market?

Quality and coherency have been the most important factors in our consideration of galleries and artworks for this year's fair. As with every year, our selection committee has worked very hard to ensure that the artworks represented reflect the best possible material on the market. This year, we have over 70 solo or dual booths – an incredible display of curatorial precision. This year, galleries are taking ambitious steps to highlight influential artists through solo-presentations. White Cube, for example, will be bringing a solo-presentation of works by Cerith Wyn Evans – an incredible Welsh conceptual artist who is less known here in the United States. Gallery Continue, also a new exhibitor, will present a solo booth of Carlos Garaicoa, a well-respected and established Cuban artist. In the current market, galleries are taking measured risks with recognized artists. However, it is hard to summarize the entire market in one phrase. Our younger galleries, for which we have 30% more participating this year, are bringing a diverse mix of emerging artists and that suggests a market that is equally interested in discovering new and fresh work. But one thing remains consistent across those genres of established and emerging and that is quality and diversity.

What advice do you have for the collectors that will be attending the fair this year?

My advice is to be an active collector and take full advantage of the art fair experience – art fairs provide an unprecedented opportunity for collectors to engage with gallerists, artists and curators. It's easy to overlook the importance of this, but I would argue that it is more important than ever that collectors be curious, engaged and active participants in the act of collecting. One of the initiatives we have worked hard to push forward this year is the idea of presenting different precincts across the two Piers, where each one offers something distinctive and particular. That is why we have established five exhibitor sections, each one offering something different from the next. I would also encourage collectors to take the time to explore the expanded "Presents" section, where young galleries present the work of emerging artists. I would also urge collectors to visit the "Focus" section, a curated presentation of solo-artist booths, organized by curator Jarrett Gregory. "Focus" has been organized with a genuine curatorial eye, presenting a selection of challenging and significant artists for collectors to discover, two of which are being honored in this year's Whitney Biennial, opening later in the month. One of the great strengths of The Armory Show is that we offer a place for patrons to collect across centuries and price ranges – the breadth of artwork available is incredible, which is why so many collectors return a second and third time during the fair's five day run.

In addition to the Armory Show, what exhibition or event is on your "must-see" list?

The upcoming Whitney Biennial is one that I am very much looking forward to, as well as the Venice Biennale, opening in May. This year, we are incredibly proud to have so many artists participating in our fair who will be honored at these upcoming events. Within the "Focus" section, Chicago-based photographer Deana Lawson and the multi-talented Vietnamese artist, Tuan Andrew Nguyen are both included in The Whitney Biennial.

Meanwhile, **Fiete Stolte**, who will present an interactive installation within the "Platform" section, has been tapped by curator Christine Macel for her exhibition in Venice entitled "Viva Arte Viva" as have a great number of artists represented by our exhibiting galleries, including Cerith Wyn Evans who will have a solo-presentation

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with White Cube at the fair. I am also really looking forward to Berlin Art Week and all the openings happening then. As a fair director, I do a tremendous amount of traveling and I get to visit so many wonderful art exhibitions – it’s certainly not something I can complain about.

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