

Hromack, Sarah. "Art in America at the Armory." *Art in America*, March 5, 2009, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/the-market/2009-03-05/armory-show-2009/>



## Art in America at the Armory

by [Sarah Hromack](#) 03/05/09

*Art in America* headed to the west side of town for yesterday's preview of the 2009 Armory Show, the modern and contemporary art fair held on piers 92 and 94. This year's iteration of the decade-old event was preceded by anxious anticipation given the more-than-dismal economic climate, as dealers braced for the possibility of lackluster sales in a moment when galleries are stimulating the country's unemployment rate as much as its economy. Even in the most prominent booths, paintings, works on paper, and other wall-mounted pieces conspicuously outnumbered less buyer-friendly sculpture, installation, and video works. Nervous energy gave way to cautious optimism for some dealers as the day wore on and reserves began turning into sales (a centrally-placed champagne bar couldn't have hurt the process). "That would be perfect for the hallway," one prospective buyer observed of Doug Aitken's *Vulnerable* (2008), installed in 303 Gallery's booth.



Prominent curators, critics, and other cultural elites were on the prowl: Spotted within an hour of one another were Creative Time director Anne Pasternak and curator Mark Beasley, New Museum director Lisa Phillips, Kitchen director and chief curator Debra Singer, and Dia director Phillippe Vergne, along with Performa founder Roselee Goldberg (posing for the camera, fittingly enough, with Paul D. Miller, a.k.a. DJ Spooky). Curator Massimiliano Gioni was on hand, as was Marina Abramovitch, Sofia Coppola, Lou Reed, and the ubiquitous Jerry Salz, to name just a few.



Armory organizers were keen to point out the coincidence between the fair and this year's Whitney Biennial. Harnessing the fading afterglow of the exhibition, which closed in June, CANADA staged a solo show by Joe Bradley. Zach Feuer Gallery featured Phoebe Washburn, Arndt & Partner showed William Cordova, and Susanne Vielmetter banked on Edgar Arceneaux, Jed Caesar, Alice Koenitx, Rodney McMillian, and Ruben Ochoa. Shaky times call for strategic approaches; galleries tempered their programs to suit: At Anton Kern Gallery, for instance, an imposing sculpture by Lara Schnitger, *Saville Row* (2007), and an installation by John Bock reflected the gallery's propensity for larger-scale projects. An exceptionally modest wall work by Jim Lambie installed alongside a projection by David Shrigley, however, served as both a function of spatial constraints *and* a reminder of the times.

Some galleries, many of them foreign, threw caution to the wind, installing objects and executing projects unlikely to prompt strong sales. Stockholm's Milliken gallery mounted a thematic group show co-curated by its own artists, including Fia Backstrom, Felix Gmelin, Tris Vonna-Michell, and Olav Westphalen. Most prominent was Westphalen's *Vacancy*, a military-style watchtower built to scale. Modeled after a hunting perch, intrepid (and hopefully, insured) visitors are permitted to climb into its cabin-cum-screening room high above the action below, where a slide carousel projects Gmelin's *How Close is Socialism* onto the walls. Other projects included Kenny Scharf's 50-foot spray painted mural which greeted visitors outside Pier 94. Alex Bag's *Untitled (The Van)*, presented by Elizabeth Dee, allows visitors inside where customized video projections play. Also notable was Ronald Feldman Fine Arts' *Volksboutique Armory Apothecary*, an old fashioned medicine shoppe where artist Christine Hill prescribes various concoctions to patrons willing to fork over a \$20 fee. Priced at \$1,000 each, posters overhead prompted patients to wait patiently for a cure -- the best approach for times like these.

For more fair coverage, see Interview's selection of best [foreign galleries](#) along with other [top selections](#) from the Armory preview.



From the top: Doug Aitkin, *Vulnerable* (2003); Olav Westphalen, *Vacancy* (2009); Christine Hill, *The Volksboutique Armory Apothecary* (2009).