

## **The Uncluttered Look Has Its Day**

By KEN JOHNSON

The Art Show is the Benjamin Button of art fairs. The annual production of the Art Dealers Association of America, it is still the most conservative of the three major and several smaller fairs happening this weekend, but it has gotten younger in spirit over the past decade. If it keeps aging in reverse, it may one day replace the Armory Fair and the Independent as the go-to place for connoisseurs of the hip.

It has a long way to go before that happens, as it still focuses on the relatively traditional handmade object; don't look for video here. But with at least a third of the 70 participating dealers offering works by living artists and well over half presenting art of the past half-century, it tips decidedly to the modern and the new if not the cutting edge.

In this year's most notable development, the show's directors asked dealers to mount more cohesive displays this time around. Many complied by offering solo or two-person presentations, while others assembled small theme shows. The days when dealers simply stocked their booths with as much of their inventory as they could cram in are evidently almost over, which may disappoint the assiduous treasure hunter but allows the casual art lover a less exhausting experience.

Many galleries have chosen an uncluttered, less-is-more strategy. Robert Miller, for example, has an elegant, near-Minimalist show of Diane Arbus's best known but still mysterious photographs of offbeat people, including a nudist family relaxing in a field, a gorgeous topless dancer and a set of young triplet sisters in their New Jersey bedroom. Even more spare is Luhring Augustine's show of small boxes and fragments of foam packing material cast in plaster, colored resin and metal and displayed like books on bookshelves by Rachel Whiteread.

Other shows that are as rewarding as they are spare include David Zwirner's selection of portraits by Alice Neel, each a marvel of psychological acuity and painterly verve, and an array of Kathy Butterly's lovely little ceramic objects at Tibor de Nagy. Displayed atop two big, white adjoined cubes, a baker's dozen of her finely made, eccentrically ornamental improvisations on the vase archetype delights the eye and the mind.

More contemporary idiosyncrasy can be found at David Nolan in the form of colorful recent landscape drawings by Richard Artschwager. Made in oil pastel, they play knowingly with pattern and perspective but look as if they were created by a self-taught hobbyist. The more you look, the stranger they seem.

Like Mr. Artschwager, the Austrian artist Maria Lassnig has been producing art since the 1950s, and she has similarly followed her own inimitable path. Painted with wide brushes in high-keyed hues, her expressionistically distorted pictures of partly unclothed people project existential angst with happy exuberance. They are at Friedrich Petzel.

Projecting its own mischievous spirit but more soberly is a series of handsome, quasi-Minimalist works produced by Franz Erhard Walther in 1992 (at Peter Freeman). Each piece consists of seven boxy, differently shaped and sized parts made of painted canvas. Lacking rigid infrastructure, these rectilinear elements have a slightly ruffled aspect; they resemble used furniture cushions. The title, German for "Song of the Storage," hints at what to do with them. Like puzzle pieces, the parts of each fit together into a single rectangle suitable for storage. When displayed on the wall they are separated into different arrangements, which is when they "sing" as art.

One of the fair's youngest soloists — in spirit as well as chronological age — is David Opdyke, whose expansive, extraordinarily detailed sculpture of a post-apocalyptic landscape is on view at Ronald Feldman. Made as if by an obsessive teenage sci-fi fan, it depicts a towering rocky prominence crawling with pipes, ladders and other kinds of industrial superstructure coming from oil processing installations on the ground level. Grimy gray, sprinkled in places with lichenlike green stuff, it pictures a technological future run amok.

Other worthy solo shows include abstracted, flattened paintings of people by Milton Avery at Knoedler; funky, geometrically painted assemblages of found objects by Jessica Stockholder at Mitchell-Innes & Nash; a fine selection of small sculptures and drawings by Auguste Rodin at Jill Newhouse; and, most impressively, a terrific show of magical, boxed assemblages and collages by that great poet of reverie and nostalgia, Joseph Cornell, at L&M Arts.

Shows that set up dialogues between two artists of similar or different places and times offer another kind of engagement. At Fraenkel, large black-and-white photographs of landscapes shot in the American West when it was still wide open and virginal to the occidental perspective are presented in a fascinating dialogue with pictures by the contemporary photographer Robert Adams, whose landscapes document the creep of industry and residential populations across the same territory after World War II.

Debra Force is showing big, radiantly transcendental watercolor landscapes by Charles Burchfield along with paintings by his perennially underappreciated contemporary Oscar Bluemner.

As for group shows don't miss the wonderfully direct 1959 self portrait of Marie-Louise von Motesiczky at the center of Galerie St. Etienne's excellent presentation of drawings and watercolors by Klimt, Schiele, Grosz and Nolde. Motesiczky's early study and lifelong friendship with Max Beckmann shows in her own vigorously brushy style, smoldering color and personal candor.

Among the few galleries showing centuries-old works, David Tunick offers a rich and diverse array of prints and drawings, including one of Rembrandt's great etchings depicting the crucifixion of Jesus and the two thieves, and a copy of "The Three Trees," his most ambitious landscape etching. Here also is a heretofore unknown imprint of Edvard Munch's femme-fatale "Madonna" and, most curiously, a study for a painting of Lancelot and Guinevere in a bedroom with an attacking horde outside the window, rendered in light blue watercolor by the founder of the Pre-Raphaelites, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

*The Art Show continues through Sunday at the Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Avenue, at 67th Street; (212) 616-3930, [artdealers.org](http://artdealers.org).*