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CRITIC'S PICK

At the Shed, Frieze II Takes Off

The world's largest, most luxurious and hard-to-get-to art fair embraces its new manageable size and accessible location. Thank the art fair gods.

By Roberta Smith
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Among the changes wrought in the art world by the continuing pandemic is the downsizing and relocation of the Frieze New York art fair. The original Frieze swaggered into town in 2012 — the art-fair Everest. It came with its own architecture — a large and glamorous white tent — ferry line and land mass, Randalls Island in the East River (hence, the ferry). It had an array of indoor and outdoor dining opportunities; lots places to rest and regroup and ingeniously gussied-up porta-potties. But with as many as 190 participants it was an ordeal with benefits, the art-fair version of the New York Marathon.

Then came the pandemic. In 2020, the fair happened only online. In 2021, a shrunken, pale, nervous version limped into the Shed, hard by Hudson Yards on the Far West Side of Manhattan. It didn't quite fill the available space and was somewhat short on amenities. But, manageable in size and accessible by subway, bus and car, it wasn't the least arduous (unless you consider being anywhere near Hudson Yards an ordeal). With 66 galleries, it was less than one-third in size.

Now Frieze is once more back at the Shed, which is beginning to feel like home. Call it Frieze II. The Randalls Island original is a past glory, and praise to the art-fair gods. Whatever one thinks of the Shed, originally conceived as an outpost for avant-garde art forms, behaving like a satellite of the nearby Javits Center is another matter entirely.

Frieze II fully inhabits the Shed's three gallery levels — 2, 4, 6 — and the architecture has been used to subdivide the proceedings into five sections of 10-20 galleries each, imaginatively titled A, B, C, D and Frames (which contains most of the fair's kink). Each has its own look and feel, which adds some clarity. Here are some of the best booths and works.

Cross-Talk About Painting

On Level 2, Section B is the fair's alpha section, so start there. It has the biggest booths and the most solo presentations, a number of which bang heads about painting. At **James Cohan (B9)** Eamon Ore-Giron's paintings set a spiritual high note. Their radiating geometries of gold punctuated by orbs red, blue or black and white have a Pharaonic grandeur that can also evoke Hilma af Klint, Art Deco building lobbies and peacocks.

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Across the way, at **Gagosian (B8)**, commerce rears its ugly head. Albert Oehlen, a decidedly nonspiritual painter, is using the fair to introduce his entry into the global bottled beverages market, Kafftee/Cofftea. The hybrid drink — a combination of coffee and tea — is available from a handsome black-and-white dispensing machine (using tokens dispensed by the gallery) that announces “International Taste” and “Sleep No More.” On four large Oehlen canvases outbursts of crude graffiti-like flourishes of paint disrupt product labels and contribute to a mood of skepticism. So does Carol Bove’s immense homage to the monochrome **at Zwirner (B14)**. The walls are covered with orange-coral fabric and dotted with short, slightly crushed steel sculptures that match. It is a giant wraparound painted relief.

Around the corner at **Casey Kaplan (B13)**, Liam Gillick has mounted an extended homage to Minimalism and Donald Judd’s emphasis on sculpture using bright colors. As usual, Gillick pushes his objects to the edge of function — suggesting shelving, room dividers or slatted blinds — while their brilliant colors, weightlessness and impeccable execution, pull them back toward art. Across the aisle at **Stephen Friedman (B17)**, Jonathan Baldock’s ceramic wall pieces and sculptures hold their own against Gillick’s palette.

There are other, quieter solos to attend to here, including a six-work, five-decade survey of Joan Snyder’s innovative paintings at **Franklin Parrasch (B2)**. Opposite, at **Hyundai (B6)**, a display of pared-down Korean art begins with the gray-white brushstrokes of a painting by Kun-Yong Lee, which dialogues about the art-making process-with Snyder’s work.

At **Michael Werner (B7)**, an exceptional group presentation includes spectacular paintings by Francis Picabia and Sigmar Polke and a new work by Raphaela Simon. She seems to have abandoned her more decorous abstraction for “Half a Head,” a large sharp-nosed not-quite human creature in deep orange surrounded by, but also constrained by black. It may be a response to the nearly all-male phenomenon of German Neo-Expressionism, but there’s more to it.

Section A is quieter and more piecemeal than B, more like an Easter egg hunt. There are good things to be found in almost every booth. Some are front and center, like the two quilt-like works of the Filipino-born, American-educated artist Pacita Abad (1946-2004) at **Tina Kim (A9)**. “How Mali Lost Her Accent,” painted on a padded canvas, shows a brown-skinned young woman with piles of books ringed by the pennants and some of the buildings of high-end American colleges; “Weeping Woman,” from 1985 and decorated with cowrie shells, glass beads and rick rack, seems more like an icon.

Other gems might be discovered just as you’re about to exit a booth, like Sanford Biggers’s “Drunkard’s Path,” at **Massimo De Carlo (A1)**. An amalgam of antique quilts, it’s painted with a loose spiral in shades of brown meandering through the star pattern that reads as a night sky or a forest undergrowth. At **Luisa Strina (A2)**, don’t miss the small but vibrant untitled painting on paper from 1985 by the usually Conceptual Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles. It shows two bright red men in a room, fiercely fighting or maybe embracing. At **Xavier Hufkens (A7)** there’s a small enclosed area devoted to the yearning, pain-laced work of the British artist Tracey Emin. It includes a painting, some drawings, a neon piece and centers on a small gray-

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patinaed bronze of a woman who is set upon by forces she can't control. It is titled "In my defense — I thought only of you."

Level 4: Two by Two

Things seem to dip slightly in Section C, but there are several pairings of artists that perk them up again. **Rachel Uffner (C9)**, for example, has hung her walls with small gouache on panel paintings of Anne Buckwalter: these faux-naïve, exquisitely precise, carefully appointed interiors can initially seem slightly bland, but each contains some detail referring to sex between women. They surround the also small sculptures of Bianca Beck in carved wood painted — doused really — in bright rude colors whose curves and angles have a distinctly postcoital horizontality.

The proceedings turn funnier, darker and hotter in the Frame section, whose smaller booths are devoted to galleries that have been open for 10 years or less.

At Lubov (FR11) the mood goes Goth with Marsha Pels's "Dead Cowboy," fashioned from scrap metal and consisting of little more than a skull, a spine, gloves and boots on a laid-back motorcycle that is primarily a rib cage with wheels.

At Company (FR8) "Post You, Post Me" is a hyper-real, in-the-round showstopper made entirely by the Swedish artist Cajsa von Zeipel. It features several life-size mannequins of gorgeous, scantily clad women lying together on a rumpled bed, bodies touching and overlapping, yet oddly distant from one another. Hybridness rules. Limbs seem female as well as male. Fingers sprout sex toys and a separate piece "Celesbian Terrain" consists of a fully clothed, extremely alarmed woman (security?) with a crossbow protruding from one knee. But the piece is also affectingly humane. Across the aisle at Sé (FR7), a string of small paintings by Rebecca Sharp quietly update Surrealism. Around the corner, at **Château Shatto (FR1)**, the gestural abstract paintings of Emma McIntyre are striking in their confidence, color choices and brushwork if not yet original enough.

Instituto de Visión (FR4) has one of the fair's more modest and beautiful installation pieces. "The Sound of Fire" by Tania Candiani consists of 10 conical speakers made of handblown glass in several limpid colors; although they weren't when I saw them, they will play music based on the sounds of their own making.

Level 6: Out with a Bang

Section D is dominated by a procession of galleries with outstanding group presentations anchored by wonderful paintings. At the **Modern Institute (D5)** this task is met by large works by Matt Connors and Victoria Morton and very small ones by Andrew Kerr, although they gather around Marc Hundley's Surrealist riff that looks like bronze but is really painted wood.

At **Karma (D6)**, a 1972 Untitled stain painting that looks vaguely Fauvist by Robert Duran (1938-2005) stands out. Other works teetering between image and abstraction are by Marley Freeman, Ouattara Watts and Maja Ruznic, whose more clearly figurative new effort makes her look less Rothkoesque, which is a good thing.

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It's a crowd at **Mendes Wood DM (D7)**, but all worthwhile, especially paintings by Alvaro Barrington, Paulo Nimer Pjota, Patricia Leite, Mimi Lauter and Paula Siebra. **Sadie Coles HQ (D2)** has two terrific pieces by Alex Da Corte, one neon, one video; another big canvas by Victoria Morton and a small intense, scratchy one by Uri Aran.

The solo presentations here are both excellent. **Michael Rosenfeld Gallery (D10)** is surveying the obsessive figuration of the veteran artist Nancy Grossman, now 82 and famous for heads tightly shrouded in intimidating leather hoods. It is notable for the collages of figures that Grossman began making in 1973 using soaked tinted paper. They may be her softest, gentlest works.

And **Modern Art, London (D12)** is reintroducing to New York the mysterious narrative paintings of Karlo Kacharava (1964-1994), an artist, critic and poet who lived most of his life in Tbilisi, Georgia. Kacharava's small, dark, stylish works feel, like some of Kai Althoff's, at once archaic and contemporary. They draw from illustration and the comics, often involve language and collage and evince a mixture of romance, intrigue and deadpan humor that might be called Eastern European Noir. They end the first Frieze II on a high note.

Roberta Smith, the co-chief art critic, regularly reviews museum exhibitions, art fairs and gallery shows in New York, North America and abroad. Her special areas of interest include ceramics textiles, folk and outsider art, design and video art. [@robertasmithnyt](https://twitter.com/robertasmithnyt)

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