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30 Must-See Artists at the Armory Show

The Armory Show, one of the city's top fairs for 20th- and 21st-century art, had a shake-up in the last year: one director replaced following accusations of sexual harassment, and a shift in focus under its new director, Nicole Berry. There is a notable drive toward streamlining, with fewer galleries this year — a total of 198 from 31 countries at Piers 92/94, the contiguous exhibition space. The timeline is being tightened, as well, to create less of a divide between the past and the present, between post-World War II art (usually found on the sleepier Pier 92) and newer work. It's a smart move, since much "historical" art from the 1950s, '60s and '70s is now being shown in contemporary galleries anyway.

The impulse is toward slow looking and away from flashier displays. The prominent curator Hans Ulrich Obrist will be giving a public lecture, "Exhibition Making in the 21st Century" on Friday, and there are live discussions with artists: Carolee Schneemann at 1 p.m. on Saturday), and JR with the gallerist Jeffrey Deitch at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday. There is plenty of historical work here that has not been seen before — or seen much — as well as commissioned projects and a very good mix of international, emerging and blue-chip galleries. Here are some currents I saw running through the fair.

PAINTING

Painting is always in full force at art fairs. The field is strong this year, with titillating objects like Kehinde Wiley's first portrait after painting former President Barack Obama, on view at Sean Kelly (501). It's titled "Margaret, Countess of Blessington" — in case you're wondering why when the subject is a man, Mr. Wiley is recalling an original painting of Margaret by Sir Thomas Lawrence, circa 1821. A knockout newcomer to New York is the Norwegian painter Vanessa Baird, at OSL Contemporary (827). Her dark, erotic, sometimes violent pastels, hung in scroll-like strips papering the booth, are an excellent introduction to this painter, who has also illustrated the work of the Norwegian uber-writer Karl Ove Knausgaard. Pieter Vermeersch, a Belgian painter showing at Perrotin (802), explores color and surface in relation to each other with canvases mounted on painted walls with gently fading edges and gradients.

Other discoveries for this critic include Li Yuan-Chia, a conceptual artist and abstract painter at Richard Saltoun (114), and Huang Rui, whose deep red geometric canvases are at 10 Chancery Lane (106). Hackett Mill (212) has works by Milton Avery and the lesser known San Francisco painter David Park, while Ronchini (120) has an exceptional display of work by Katsumi Nakai, an artist who migrated from Japan to Italy after World War II and exhibited with the so-called Spacialists, Milanese artists of whom the best known is Lucio Fontana. Also check out Sarah Cain's playful, site-specific "two day painting" (2018), presented by Galerie Lelong (604); **Mary Corse's works with glittering highway paint at Kayne Griffin Corcoran (502), a run-up to shows at Dia:Beacon and at the Whitney Museum of American Art**; Claire Tabouret's military-drab-green paintings at Night Gallery (F27), in which women wear gas masks; and Dona Nelson's fabulous two-sided paintings at Thomas Erben Gallery (F7).