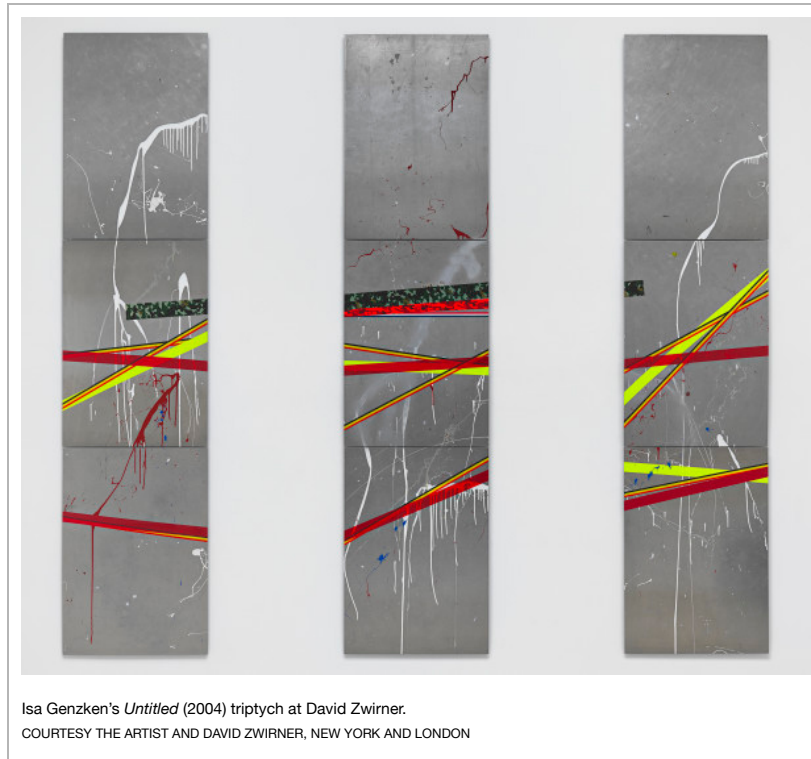


ARTNEWS

EXPO CHICAGO RETURNS, WITH BIG AMBITIONS, AND SOME EXHIBITOR TURNOVER

BY *Matt Morris* POSTED 09/18/15 4:45 PM



Isa Genzken's *Untitled* (2004) triptych at David Zwirner.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK AND LONDON

Since its phoenix-like arrival on Chicago's Navy Pier four years ago under the direction of Tony Karman, [Expo Chicago](#) has sought to recover its city's former reputation as one of the significant stops on the global art market circuit, a sense of which had waned after the 1990s with the decline of the long-running Art Chicago fair. Each year of Expo has seen modest growth, with more exhibitors and the continued development of a schedule of talks and programs, commissioned installation works, and interactive social-practice-light projects, like this year's *Truth Booth*, an inflatable structure by Hank Willis Thomas, Jim Ricks, and Ryan Alexiev, in which visitors record their working definitions of truth.

The inclusion of curator-critic-czar Hans Ulrich Obrist in Expo's schedule of talks (Saturday at 4 p.m.)—in conversation with artists who have comprised the Hairy Who artist group—not only boasts the star power that the fair is aiming to attract, but is also well timed to a surge of interest in the Chicago Imagist tradition, as seen in Leslie Buchbinder's 2014 documentary, and celebrated exhibitions this year in New York at Matthew Marks ("[What Nerve!](#)") and Maccarone ([Roger Brown](#)), plus new shows from [Karl Wirsum at Derek Eller](#) and [Barbara Rossi at the New Museum](#).

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“The fair is off to an active start,” said Christopher D’Amelio, a partner at [David Zwirner](#) in New York. “It seems like we’re seeing more people traveling from other states in the U.S. that overseas galleries wouldn’t meet otherwise. Their attendance can make this into the truly international fair it always was.”

This year’s roster of exhibitors is weighted to coastal U.S. and international dealers, with fewer galleries from mid-sized U.S. cities participating than in past years. There are no spaces from Baltimore, Charlotte, Detroit, St. Louis, San Antonio, or Santa Fe—all cities that have been represented here previously.

The continued focus to develop Expo as an international hub has also been marked by considerable turnover in exhibitors: more than fifty galleries (nearly a third) who exhibited last year didn’t return, including [James Cohan](#), [Elizabeth Dee](#), [Marlborough Chelsea](#), and [Marlborough Gallery](#). Several galleries with critically well-received booths in 2014, such as [Marc Foxx](#), [Lisa Cooley](#), and [London’s Cabinet](#), also opted not to come back to Chicago this year.

“If we were in Miami,” one passerby in the crowd said during the opening, “you wouldn’t be able to move through the crowds at all.” It was unclear whether this was meant as a complaint or a compliment about the comparatively relaxed pace of Expo’s opening night vernissage. Organizers estimated 7,000 people attended on the opening day of the fair, which runs through Sunday. Curators from all of Chicago’s major institutions were on site, as well as Eric Shiner from Pittsburgh’s Warhol Museum and art advisors from around the country, including Sue Stoffel, Simone Joseph, and Veronica Fernandez. Not as many celebrity sightings as there have been at previous fairs (last year Shaq was on hand, wearing [his curator hat](#)), but Solange Knowles visited yesterday with Mickalene Thomas.

Robyn Siegel, a Dallas-based art advisor, said that the smaller galleries at the fair reported slow sales on Thursday, but that many dealers presold half of their booths’ inventory as a safe bet for the weekend. Works that would sell quickly in New York, Siegel ventured, remained available—a rare opportunity to acquire pieces usually in high demand. Los Angeles dealer [Luis De Jesus](#) said that most of the pieces he brought were either sold or on hold by the end of the first day. He is presenting work by Michigan-born Kate Bonner and Chicago-trained Josh Reames. “I don’t want to take any of this work home with me,” said De Jesus, with an optimistic shine that this would be the case.

The majority of the fair’s price points sit below \$100,000, but several galleries have included big-ticket centerpieces in their displays. Chicago’s [Rhona Hoffman Gallery](#) brought works priced up to \$650,000, and at the center of Zwirner’s handsome show is a large triptych by Isa Genzken, reportedly priced at \$750,000. Genzken’s appearance hearkens back to [her retrospective](#) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago last year, and serves as a lynchpin in the gallery’s selection of works that deal conceptually with issues of painting by Blinky Palermo, Sherrie Levine, Carol Bove, Donald Judd, and others.

Some of the best-looking and more daring booths were organized by newcomers to the fair. Tokyo’s MA2 Gallery has situated objets d’art by a group of artists into a moody, cohesive installation. And while the fair is packed with bold abstract paintings—Daniel Buren looms large in several major installations throughout the fair as part of the Expo-organized In/Situ program curated by the Contemporary Austin’s director, Louis Grachos (Buren is also a speaker on Saturday afternoon)—New York dealer Rachel Uffner distinguished her booth with a selection of geometric complexities in casein on panel by Gianna Commito and wall works by Sara Greenberger Rafferty that combine printed textiles and splooshy acrylic polymers onto sheets of Plexiglas and acetate. Amid a fair of largely safe-bet artwork, which opt for the spectacular over the obtuse, both of Uffner’s artists produce irreducibly strange work that is visually engrossing and conceptually befuddling.



Sara Greenberger Rafferty's *Untitled* acrylic-, polymer-, and inkjet prints are being shown by New York's Rachel Uffner. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND RACHEL UFFNER, NEW YORK

Travesia Cuatro, based in Madrid and Guadalajara, presented a clean, smartly curated set of artists working with appropriation strategies and a twang of Arte Povera style, including two small panels by Adam Pendleton and Jose Dávila's gold-leafed cardboard imitation of a wall installation of Judd boxes. Jorge Méndez Blake's grid of multicolored monochromes bested an overused form seen too frequently throughout the fair.

Another highlight: the booth of Chicago's Bad at Sports gang (celebrating ten years of podcasting, art blogging, and community engagement) who were showing Claire Ashley's outrageously sensuous Lumpy Morsels, which overwhelmed its narrow space. A softer palette of sprayed color than is typical of Ashley's recent work, these curvaceous inflatable abstractions are an amusing and gratifying counterpart to the aforementioned on-site inflatable. In addition, the loony crocheted acrobats by Caroline Wells Chandler at Roberto Paradise live up to their growing popularity as endearingly crass, sexually celebratory glyphs.

The best work to be seen in Chicago this weekend probably won't be at the fair. While Scott Reeder and Jessica Stockholder are both represented by works in Kavi Gupta's booth, their concurrent exhibitions at Gupta's two West Loop locations are real achievements in their practices.

Out in Chicago's suburbs at the Riverside Arts Center (which is most easily reached by a quick trip on the Metra train, and which with gallery hours on Friday and Saturday afternoon), Paola Cabal has exquisitely transformed the space by painting on every surface to conjure the glow of a full moon through ethereal trompe l'oeil.

And if Expo visitors wish to temper the Navy Pier showmanship with the grit of alternative spaces, this evening Brooklyn-based artist Shana Moulton opens a solo exhibition at Julius Caesar in East Garfield Park, while a new project space called Boyfriends is being inaugurated by directors Ben Foch of New Capital and Leonardo Kaplan, formerly of the Hills Esthetic Center. Both Julius Caesar and Boyfriends are located at 3311 West Carroll. So come for Expo, but stay for the healthy experimentation and risk taking being exhibited by Chicago's commercial and alternative venues alike.