

Discovering Surprises Among the Familiar at the Independent 20th Century

[nytimes.com/2025/09/04/arts/design/independent-20th-century-art-fair-battery-cipriani-review.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/04/arts/design/independent-20th-century-art-fair-battery-cipriani-review.html)

Martha Schwendener

September 4, 2025

Art Fair Review



Opening to the public on Friday, the Independent 20th Century fair, with more than 50 artists, is held in a historical setting — the 1908 Battery Maritime Building at South Ferry, on the southern tip of Manhattan. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Updated 11:53 a.m. ET

Can you shape the narrative of art history — which is what museums generally do — at an art fair? And do we need any more of these pop-up enterprises in our lives? Haven't we had enough of art fairs?

The [Independent 20th Century](#), held at Battery Maritime Building at South Ferry, with its hulking steel and iron Beaux-Arts facade, makes a pretty good case on both counts. In its fourth edition, and the New York fair that focuses on 20th-century art, the usual modern-art stars turn up here and there (hello, Picasso), but I made several thrilling discoveries among the 53 artists presented by 31 exhibitors. I'm inclined to think you'll find some new favorites too.

Image



At the Independent, view of Michael Hoppen gallery from London, featuring a solo presentation of the work of the Japanese photographer Ishiuchi Miyako, who represented Japan at the Venice Biennale in 2005. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Painting is heavily represented at most art fairs — the current one included — but photography is making a comeback. [Ishiuchi Miyako](#)'s presentation at [Michael Hoppen](#), a London gallery, is an exceptional way to get reacquainted. Already an acclaimed photographer in the late 1970s, Ishiuchi was commissioned to photograph the Tokyo Dental College in the Suidobashi district of Tokyo and the series was published in 1981. The high-contrast, grainy black-and-white photographs here are gorgeously unsettling, with anatomical and dental models sitting alongside noirish architectural interiors.



Addison Rowe Gallery's booth features oil paintings by Raymond Jonson. From left, "Rising Figuration" (1935) and "Composition Eight" (1929). Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

You've heard of spiritualist painters like [Hilma af Klint](#) and [Agnes Pelton](#), but how about [Raymond Jonson](#)? I had seen his work while paging through the excellent catalog for the traveling exhibition "[Another World: The Transcendental Painting Group](#)" (2021) — which sadly didn't come to New York. At the Santa Fe gallery Addison Rowe you can see Jonson's abstract paintings, which turned the landscape of New Mexico into something luminous and, hopefully, transporting beyond the physical world.



Leonor Fini stars at the Weinstein Gallery's booth from San Francisco. Pictured here from left are "L'Élue de la nuit," from 1986, and "Leonor Fini, Rasch, Rasch, Rasch, meine Puppen Warten (Hurry, Hurry, Hurry... My Dolls are Waiting)," from 1975. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Female Surrealists are one of the ascendant narratives in 20th-century art and [Leonor Fini](#), on view at San Francisco's [Weinstein Gallery](#), is a fine example. Painting sinuous women and otherworldly creatures, Fini's work is seductive and curiously uncanny. Mythical creatures and characters like witches and werewolves appear and there is always a theatrical quality — hence the elaborate masks she made as part of her practice, several of which are on view here.

Image



Salon 94, the New York gallery, celebrates three important Lebanese female artists: Dorothy Salhab Kazemi, Huguette Caland, and Afaf Zurayk. Clockwise from bottom left, stoneware pieces with natural Lebanese glaze by Salhab Kazemi; on the back wall, "Bribes de corps" by Caland; foreground, "Accroupie" from 1979, oil on linen by Caland. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

I've admittedly been obsessed with the Lebanese artist Huguette Caland's sensuous, quasi-abstract paintings and beautiful caftans for a while. (Her [first European retrospective just closed in Madrid](#).) However, I'm only now learning about the extraordinary ceramics of [Dorothy Salhab Kazemi](#), made with natural glazes from Lebanon, and the moody canvases

of the Lebanese American poet and painter [Afaf Zurayk](#). The presentation of these three artists at the New York gallery Salon 94 reminds viewers of when Beirut was a major creative hub and the contributions its artists have made.

Image



The Hollis Taggart booth includes Ralph Iwamoto's "Wild Growth" (1955), oil on canvas Taggart)," center. At right is Dusti Bongé's "Untitled (Surrealist Composition with Mask and Fish Skeleton)," c. 1950. Mixed media on paper. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Closer to home, the paintings of [Dusti Bongé](#) and [Ralph Iwamoto](#) at Hollis Taggart fill in yet another aspect of New York's development as an art world in the 20th century. Both painters' works shift between abstraction and representation — showing that there was no easy divide between the binary that was hotly contested in New York art circles. Where Bongé's paintings are more whimsical, though (one from around 1950 is even titled "The Whimsical Pigeon"), Iwamoto's are bold and colorful, perhaps reflecting his native Hawaii. Later he would move into minimalism — but these canvases, with their semiabstract archetypes and vegetation are a revelation.

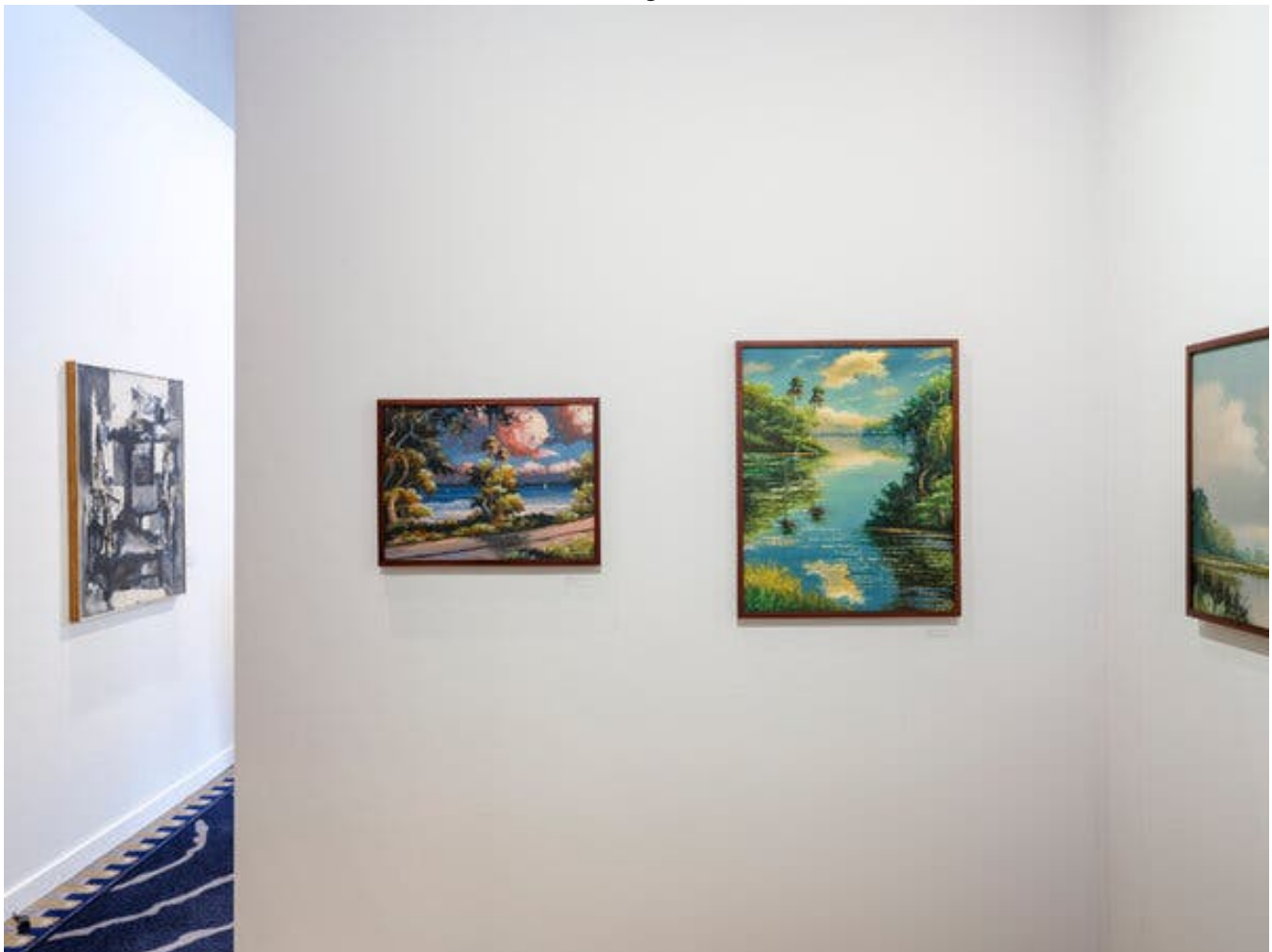
Image



The booth of Galerie Gmurzynska, New York and Switzerland, is showing the undersung artist Dan Basen, including “The One!,” from 1967, a big assemblage with painting, wood and found objects; right, “Abraham Lincoln,” from 1968, oil on canvas. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Another New York School character is Dan Basen, who showed with the influential art dealer Betty Parsons (as Dusti Bongé did) and was on course to making a big contribution, with his Pop-like constructions (he was actually experimenting with film, Happenings, and other 1960s incursions) until he died at the age of 30 in 1970. At [Galerie Gmurzynska](#), you can see his approach to collaging and crafting with found materials, but also a sly sense of humor as he observed advertisements, politics and the slowly-becoming-star-studded art world around him.

Image

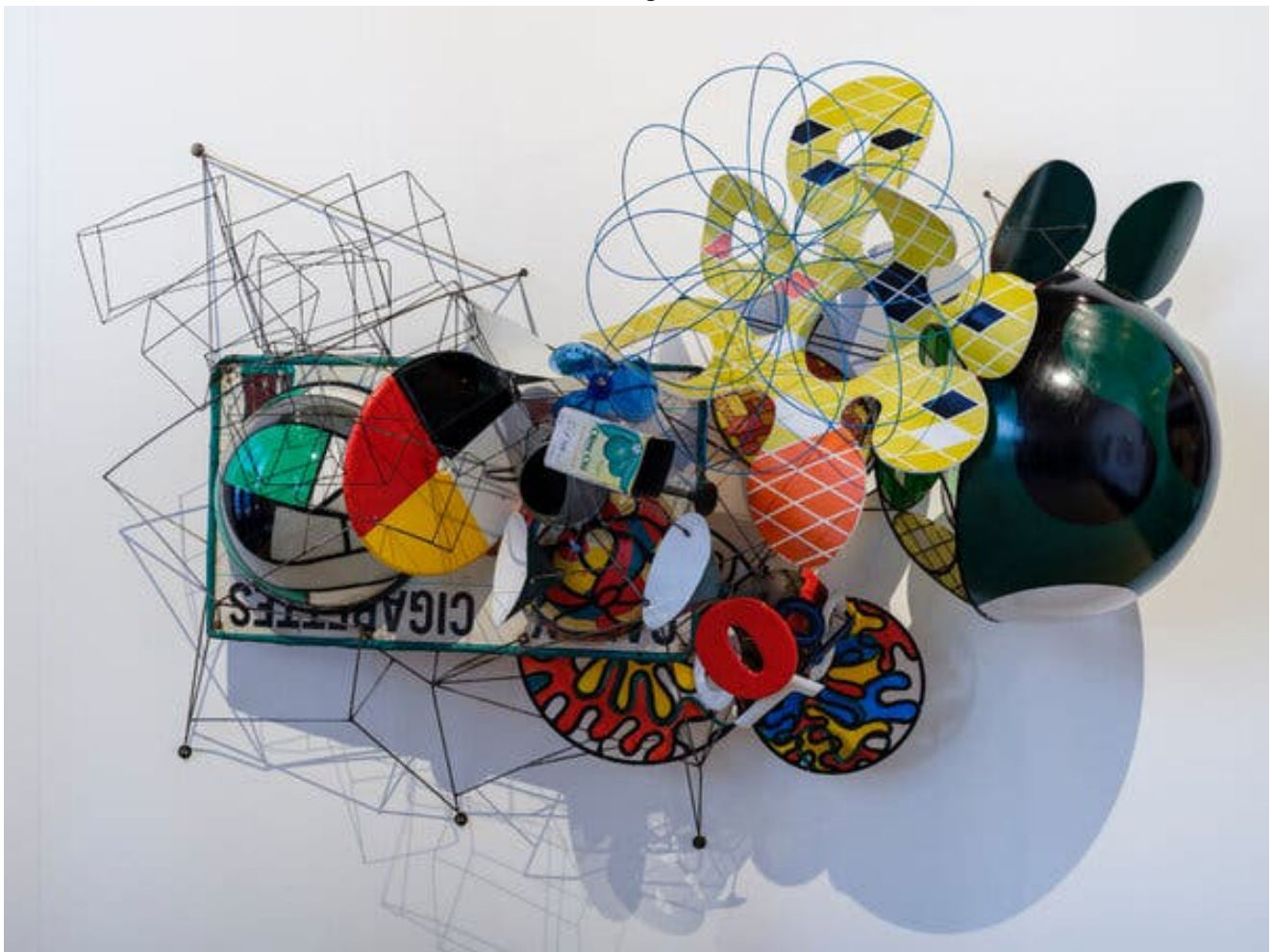


Jeremy Scholar, the London gallery, presents work by the African American artists known as The Florida Highwaymen. Pictured here are Willie Daniels’ “Puffy Clouds on River Road,” c. 1985-1990, oil on Masonite, center left, and S. Newton’s “Looking Down the Lazy River,” c. 1970-1975, center right. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

From the 1950s to the 1980s, a collective of Black painters banded together to sell their bright, colorful landscape paintings along the roadways in the American South, later earning the name of [the Florida Highwaymen](#). The London dealer [Jeremy Scholar](#) is showing a handful of their landscapes, which range from the moody and Impressionistic to the more

cheery Bob Ross-style evocation of sea and land. One thing is certain: if you could buy a Florida Highwayman painting for \$25 back in the day, it will cost you much more at the Independent.

Image



installation view of work by Judy Pfaff at Cristin Tierney Gallery in New York. Here, "La Calle, La Calle Vieja," 1990, enamel paint on plywood and steel, found objects. Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Finally, there is Judy Pfaff, the protean sculptor whose large, buoyant-and-bulging wall-relief pieces greet you at the entrance to the fair. Pfaff's work bridges multiple worlds, from the wire-twisting of Alexander Calder to the maximalism of Frank Stella. Her work is intricate, colorful, funny and smart. Leading with Judy Pfaff is a wise move for the fair, which suggests 20th-century art as a rich cast of characters and trove of objects that we are only truly beginning to know.

Independent 20th Century

Friday through Sunday, Casa Cipriani, 10 South Street, Lower Manhattan;
independenthq.com. General admission, \$45. Thursday is V.I.P. Preview Day, with admission at \$120 and re-entry permitted on public days.