

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013



A Frieze New York Trend Report

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May 19, 2015

Once upon a time trend forecasting was very trendy in the art world, which is where trend-forecasting collective K-HOLE sprung from, and also their invented term "normcore". Contemporary art is complicated, and often hard to access, to make any sense of. Art fair art, not so much so.

Like fashion, art fair art - the sort of artworks that are sold at art fairs - congeals into trends every season: what it looks like, what it is made of, what, if anything, its subject matter might be.

As of late a much-derided trend is zombie abstraction; which is to say soulless, lifeless abstract paintings often painted in order to be sold to morons at art fairs. Paintings that look like a zombie-full-of-rainbows has been shot and splattered across a canvas. Other obvious trends are mirrors; similarly shiny metal surfaces; garish colour gradients; tapestries; any excuse to show a really attractive babe.

But following is a report on a few of the more illuminating trends from Frieze New York, May 2015. Some of the artists are amazing, some are absolute charlatans, but together they are materialising themes and aesthetics that will likely trickle through fashion, design, advertising, and other unexpected places.

Cheap Clothing

Clothing-as-art was everywhere. Mexican artist Pia Camil made hundreds of colourful patchwork ponchos, or "wearable paintings", and these were handed out to fair visitors for free. Just around the corner Ed Fornieles was selling T-shirts printed with his Instagram cartoon characters, such as the tie-dye, disembowelled platypus print that the author is modelling here.

In these cases clothing is used to exhibit artwork, and hopefully move it around the fair and the world, but elsewhere it fulfilled other roles. Sculptures wore clothes; paintings were of clothes; found objects such as running shoes and hats just sat on gallery floors without explanation. Martha Araújo - who won the prize for the best stand in the fair - installed a felt skate ramp and a Velcro suit for trying to run up it.

Acid Denim

Also lots of art was constructed out of clothing, the sorts of things that artists would wear, and treated denim was the popular trend. Korakrit Arunanondchai, a very sweet Thai artist who often organises rap-and-painting performances with a posse of young Asian boys dressed in double denim, installed a series of robotic massage chairs upholstered in cut-up Manchester United kits and acid-washed, paint-splashed denim.

Elsewhere Kevin Beasley showed a pair of worn-out jeans stitched together into one leg - as if intended for a mermaid - and decorated with foam, while Mike Bouchet stretched acid-washed denim over frames and exhibited them as paintings, as psychedelic zombie abstractions.

At this year's fair a lot of artwork was just made out of other commodities, as if all the objects that one might wish to shop are slowly melting into one another. And they probably are.

Furs and Interiors

The most impressive work on the island was Ian Cheng's computer-generated video that changes with every viewing according to chance. It depicts a boy-shaman wearing a wolf skin whilst attempting to climb an exploding volcano, with a Snowy Owl for a companion, and though he is only a digital hallucination his choice of attire has echoes throughout the tent.

Firstly Nicole Wermers - who has just been nominated for the Turner Prize - hung a series of Arctic Fox fur coats on the back of office chairs, as a comment on how art and design are turning into one another; although possibly her work is all fur coat and no office chair. Secondly David Nolan Gallery showed audacious chairs of deep cowhide and swooping wood. Not as artworks, just for sitting on.

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Thirdly Eddie Peake showed a shelving sculpture which was upholstered in horsehide somewhat like a sofa.

The reason that these materials, these furs and skins, work well in fairs is that whilst they are luxurious and desirable, also they speak to the shamanic, Beuysian urges of the artist; they suit the yacht-dwelling Russian supermodel just as well as the cave-dwelling soothsayer of yore. Furthermore they come from majestic animals that have been murdered, they are trophies of power and privilege.

Plastic Monsters

Big game was also a big subject. Paola Pivi - who once rented a live leopard and placed it in a room full of 3,000 cups of carefully dusted cappuccino - is showing a bear, a walloping blue polar bear with bright blue feathers rather than fur.

Oddly this was not the only massive blue bear on show. Eddie Peake also exhibited a cut-out of a bear in blue acrylic, with a preppy pink sweater tied loosely over its shoulders as if it was an Ivy League bear on the lacrosse team; likely it would attend Brown University. Likewise Matthew Derbyshire made a lion out of layers of lime-green acrylics, and Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla - rather fantastically - dismantled some see-through plastic lecterns and rearranged them into plinths for some hulking, actual dinosaur bones. Trophy monsters made out of plastic are very popular. Perhaps like ancient cave paintings, they are a sort of tribute to the ancient animal gods; perhaps only the spoils of a hunting trip with some curators and art advisors. Also there were all sorts of human body parts lying around everywhere, as if artists had just cut them off and left them behind.

Under The Sea

Beasts from the ocean deep were lurking too. Kris Lemsalu had a girl, a real girl with locks of strawberry-blonde hair, sleeping under a bejewelled tortoiseshell on a waterbed - art fairs adore installations that are actually just sleeping girls - surrounded by cartons of eggs and smaller shells. Next door Eric Sidner was exhibiting large ceramic oysters filled with wobbling resins and jellies, like pearls of art, and farther along the corridor Joanna Malinowska was offering bloated grey cushions with walrus tusks.

Fine Dining

So there was a bounty of food at Frieze, not only the turtle eggs (?) deposited by the sleeping girl. For instance Anna-Sophie Berger - a young Viennese artist who is also a fashion designer, whose work leaps from world to world - printed phone snaps of cracked egg shells onto tablecloth, rice porridges onto fabric rolls, and also stacked loafs of freshly baked oat breads on top of one another as sculptures. A fascinating and strange installation.

But, because this is New York there was more of a focus on Italian cooking. Together Zak Kitnick and D'ette Nogle exhibited a large, luxury olive oil shot bar - all tastefully anodised metal, extra-extra-virgin-tinted fluorescents, alcohol-pouring apparatus - accompanied by a musical playlist borrowed from a Manhattan restaurant. Also Italian artist Pietro Roccasalva showed a sculpture of a dinosaur (more dinosaurs!) proffering us a single arancini, or deep-fried risotto ball. A little boy was biting its tail. Children, this work appears to say, would rather eat a dinosaur than an arancini. Oh what has happened to our childlike innocence? This feast of edible art takes pleasure in indulgence, in gluttony, just as much as the expensive restaurants that line the periphery of the fair.

Emotional Ceramics

But - having asked around - the dominant trend at Frieze was one of anthropomorphic ceramics. Of pots with people's faces. The apogee of this trend was Dan McCarthy's smiley clay pots and plates, a sort of art designed for art selfies, and actually the language of emoji was everywhere, with dozens of smiling faces drilled into the walls around the place.

Elsewhere Ken Tisa had sculpted ceramics with open mouths and other mystery orifices, with pointy tits and painted bums, all looking like they wanted to be fucked by their owners. These were great. Alongside he showed small pillows with slogans such as "swelling thighs so friendly" and little paintings of most imaginative sex acts.

Finally, in the most comforting booth, Travesia Quatro opened a wonderful, joyful flower shop of artist-and-musician Milena Muzquiz's ceramic pots and a local florist's blooms; however up above, on one of its high walls, a crying clown-face pot pouted down at us. All these emotional ceramics, they are like gargoyles on cathedrals. Grotesque, grinning faces protruding from the white walls of the art fair, scaring off evil spirits whilst beaming at the bored visitor, as if to whisper lovingly, "Don't worry! Everything is ok!"