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Future Fair Review: Creative Blasts Based on the Past

Kicking off the spring season in New York, the young fair features emerging artists and galleries drawing inventively on art history.

By Brian P. Kelly

May 11, 2023 2:54 pm ET



The opening of Future Fair PHOTO: KEENON PERRY

New York

Past is present at Future Fair. That's not to say that this relative newcomer to the slate of fairs that usher in New York's spring art season is backward-looking, but much of the best work here mines the past for inspiration and transforms it into something contemporary.

Returning for its third in-person edition, Future, once again mounted just below the High Line at Chelsea Industrial, features over 50 exhibitors from around the world. It's among the earliest of at least 10 fairs to open in the city over the course of two weeks, which—along with numerous high-profile gallery shows, museum openings and auctions—means that long-running complaints about “fairtigue” aren't going away.



Rafael Plaisant's 'Rochedo' (2023) PHOTO: HIGH NOON GALLERY

That said, many of these occupy a specific niche within the visitor/collector ecosystem—Frieze, flashily contemporary with a megadealer roster; TEFAF, undeniably tony and upmarket; Spring/Break, wacky and weird with a DIY vibe.

Future, for its part, highlights emerging galleries and artists—as well as price points that don't look like the GDP of some microstate—at booths that often feel more like miniature exhibitions than sales stalls. A unique profit-sharing model and radical transparency among galleries also set it apart and make it an especially attractive option for exhibitors.



Dittmar Viane's 'Senses of Sound' (2023) PHOTO: MICHAEL SMITS/EVERYDAY GALLERY

But can a fair really be forward-looking if the art there seems to keep an eye on the rearview mirror? The paintings of **Dittmar Viane** provide a full-throated yes. These hyper-detailed oils on panels seem like they've just been unearthed in some trove of Northern Renaissance works—until you notice their surreal elements and realize you're seeing something created recently. The Belgian artist, being exhibited by Antwerp's Everyday Gallery, brings a 21st-century

perspective to his 15th-century techniques. His works are luminous, thanks to the layers upon layers of paint he uses to build his scenes, but also humorous: A hawk flies sideways by a birdhouse as a pigeon peers out, safely sheltered from the swooping predator; eyes and an ear float around a miniature piano, lending it a human quality.



Emily Weiner's 'Providence' (2023) PHOTO: JOHN SCHWEIKERT/RED ARROW

Emily Weiner also draws on surreal idioms. For instance, her painting of a white rabbit is overlaid with the black f-holes of a violin in a nod to Man Ray's famous photo of Kiki de Montparnasse. Her work, shown by Nashville's Red Arrow, is happy to flit around art history, pulling from the ancients (a red-figure amphora is the centerpiece of "Providence") and the moderns (the face in "Harlequin" is

overlaid with the colorful diamonds Picasso favored when he depicted the titular subject). Elsewhere, parted curtains reveal various landscapes, a recurring motif for Ms. Weiner. These paintings reframe our perspective on artistic icons quite literally: Housed in frames that the artist crafts herself out of wood, stoneware, terra cotta and porcelain, they remind us that movements and schools, no matter how well defined, have a way of reaching across their borders into the present.



Bryan Rogers's 'Water Wrestling' (2023) PHOTO: MONYA ROWE GALLERY

Bryan Rogers, presented by New York's Monya Rowe Gallery, makes paintings that look like something out of an Alphonse Mucha mushroom trip. Art Nouveau plants and trees vibrate around his multihued male bathers as they plunge into

undulating water. (In an explicit embrace of the past, the artist says his series here was inspired by Duncan Grant’s “Bathing” of 1911.) Even more overtly psychedelic are **Rafael Plaisant**’s works on paper that feature Day-Glo colors, extraterrestrial geometric shapes and central portals that peer into tiny detailed landscapes. His display by New York’s High Noon calls out for a blacklight and a shag carpet.



Karo Kuchar’s ‘Dude With a Fish,’ ‘CEO (Not Yet)’ and ‘Painter Painter’ (all 2023) PHOTO: KEENON PERRY/SUPPAN

But it’s not just artists who work in two dimensions that are looking to history for their inspiration. **Karo Kuchar** includes the past quite literally in her wall sculptures shown by Vienna’s Suppan. She adheres a length of silk to old walls in her hometown then pulls it away, lifting part of the surface in the process. She then sews the fabric into lighthearted works that explore the ways we build public images of ourselves through our digital personas, our fashion choices and more. A trio of pieces that mimic Tinder profiles is particularly funny: “Dude With a Fish” sends up the ubiquity of that kind of photo on the app, while “CEO (Not Yet)” pokes fun at the rise-and-grind mindset that so many project online.



Verdiana Patacchini's 'Figura Bugiarda '3 (Deceitful Figure '3)' PHOTO: ROBERT BANAT/SUPERZOOM

And Paris's Superzoom has one of the best booths in the fair thanks to its pairing of **Ugo Schildge** with **Verdiana Patacchini**. Mr. Schildge's works take an ancient form, relief sculpture, and update it with a modern material, poured concrete. The results are laugh-out-loud scenes of animals: In one, a trio of donkeys seem to blend into a single stubborn braying mass; in another, a crocodile weeps, spewing waterfalls of rainbow tears from its face. Ms. Patacchini's sculptures are more serious, drawing on classical art and questioning its permanence. For instance, her "Figura Bugiarda '3 (Deceitful Figure '3)" riffs on iconic depictions of the reclining female—most clearly "Sleeping Ariadne," but also Michelangelo's "Dawn" and, more recently, Canova's "Venus Victrix." However, instead of being rendered in marble, with all its connotations of strength and longevity, the sculpture is made of India paper colored with charcoal and pigments, hung on a rough wooden frame, and ornamented with ceramic details. While Ms. Patacchini's work might not be able to weather time like its predecessors, it nonetheless shows that artists can still find fertile soil in the oldest of fields.

—*Mr. Kelly is the Journal's associate Arts in Review editor. Follow him on Twitter @bpkelly89.*