

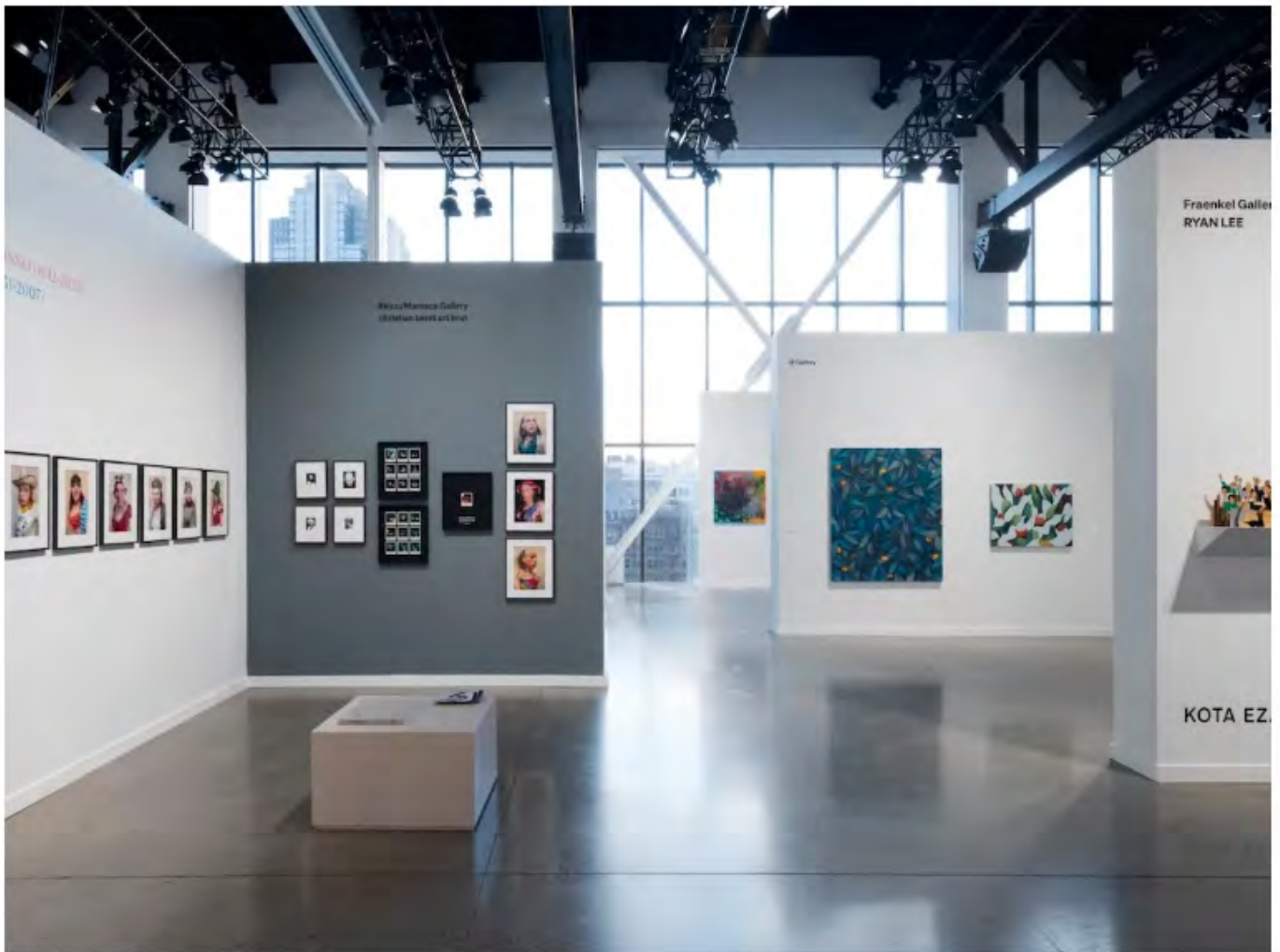
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The Best Booths at Independent New York, Where Muted Art Commands Maximal Attention



BY ALEX GREENBERGER  May 10, 2024 8:00am



The scene at the 2024 edition of Independent New York.
COURTESY INDEPENDENT NEW YORK

At art fairs, gallerists sometimes heed the not-so-invisible hand of the attention economy, mounting big, gauche presentations that seem designed to be photographed first and appreciated second. But spare, unflashy art can thrive at a fair, too, and the newly opened edition of Independent New York offers solid proof of that.

This year's Independent, which opened its preview at Spring Studios in Tribeca on Thursday, is alive with energy in more than a few of its booths, but the jolts that the fair offers are largely gentle. That's a good thing.

There are no artistic stunts and no mega-galleries at this fair, whose 77 exhibitors are predominantly mid-size operations. As has been the case in the past at Independent, which this year turns 15, the emphasis is on glossy, sleek art with an international flavor.

The fair is guilty of aesthetic conservatism—the vast majority of the work on view is painting, and much of it is fairly apolitical this time around. Then again, that's the case for every art fair. This one, at least, has its pleasures. There's a plethora of pieces by under-recognized and dead artists, and generally, there are few stars or market phenomena among the living, which means that there is new talent waiting to be noticed.

Below are eight of the best artists on view at Independent, which runs through Sunday.



Works by Tomasz Machciński.
Photo : Alex Greenberger/ARTnews

Tomasz Machciński at Ricco/Maresca and Christian Berst Art Brut

The big discovery of this Independent is Tomasz Machciński, a Polish photographer who died in 2022, leaving behind thousands of photographs of himself. Machciński's biography is so rich that it threatens to trump his art. He was born in 1942 and became an orphan early in his life, overcoming bone tuberculosis all the while. During the postwar years, when Americans abroad tried to raise awareness for orphans in Europe, the actress Joan Tompkins got in contact with him, and he began to feel a deep tie to her. He didn't realize she wasn't his mother until he was an adult, and then used his art to contend with this troubling revelation.

The photographs Machciński produced suggest that he accepted his identity as being mutable. Personae abound in these pictures: one depicts a balding Machciński in a tie-dye tube top, a cigarette tucked behind an ear; another is a lipstick-wearing glam shot in which Machciński wears a military officer's hat; yet another features the bare-chested artist as a gladiator, sword in one hand and shield in the other. It is never possible to tell which of these characters are authentically Machciński and which are fabricated for the camera. If these can really be called self-portraits, they are ones in which Machciński has fractured into thousands of different selves. This was an artist who contained multitudes.

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