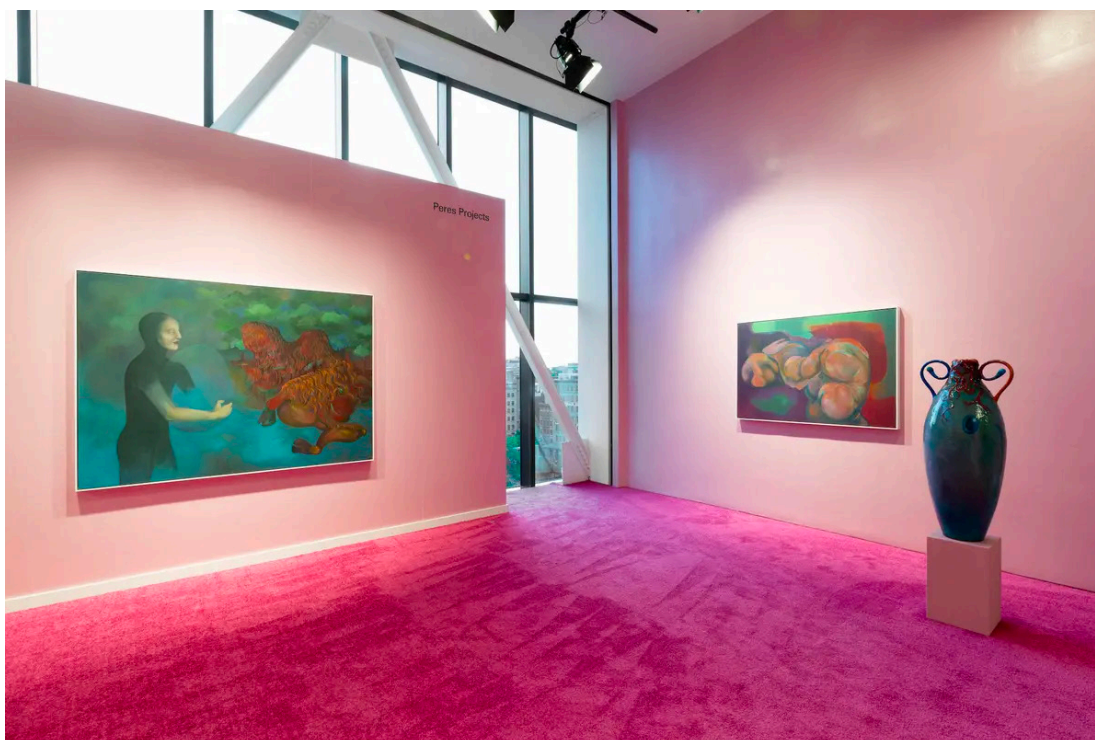


New York // News

Dreams and nightmares abound at New York's Independent art fair

The latest spring edition of the fair places an emphasis on phantasmagorical figuration



Installation of paintings and sculpture by Jeremy in the Peres Projects stand at Independent New York

Courtesy Peres Projects. © Jeremy

Torey Akers

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Some may be anticipating a shift toward abstraction in the contemporary art market at large, but figuration is still front and centre at the Independent art fair this year. Featuring 69 gallery exhibitors from around the world across several floors of Tribeca's Spring Studios, the fair held its VIP preview on Thursday (11 May), and by day's end 15 galleries had sold every work on their stands, a sign that buyer interest in identity-forward, chimerical paintings and sculptures isn't waning yet.

The grotesque, moribund aspects of mid-2000s surrealist imagery are largely absent at the fair, replaced by gentler explorations of the psychic weight of embodiment, like Jessica Stoller's arresting, small-scale sculptures of eerie feminine figures on view with New York's PPOW Gallery.

"With this body of work, she was thinking about the history of knowledge as it relates to the female body", says Ella Blanchon, an associate director at PPOW. "She's considering how this knowledge was lost, or controlled, or inhibited, and women haven't been able to take care of themselves as a result."



Jessica Stoller, *Untitled (Eve's herbs)*, 2022

Jessica Stoller and PPOW, New York

Stoller's delightfully odd tabletop porcelain, *Untitled (Eve's herbs)* (2022), which depicts an old woman attending to a pile of abortifacient herbs, was sold by the end of the VIP day—as was everything else in PPOW's two-artist stand, including a collection of warm, corporeal paintings by Grace Carney.

This emphasis on depicting inner life or hypnagogic alternate worlds abounds throughout the fair, which, now in its 14th year, maintains a cool, boutique atmosphere and historically informed bent (Independent 20th Century, the fair's September edition, focuses specifically on re-contextualising 20th century art).

That abiding interest in women's narratives across time is especially clear in the inclusion of Gina Litherland, a 68-year old Wisconsinite whose detailed, psychologically charged oil paintings of wanton witches and glowing wolves are on view at Chicago gallery Corbett vs. Dempsey's stand.



Gina Litherland, *Beautiful Wolf Lady*, 2018
Robert Chase Heishman

“Gina has quietly, and without any interest in the movement of art fashion, been doing what she’s been doing for forty years,” says John Corbett, one of the gallery’s co-founders. “We absolutely love her for it.” Litherland’s available works are priced between \$16,000 and \$35,000.

This edition of Independent boasts 20 solo or two-artist stands featuring Bipoc (Black, Indigenous and people of colour artists), including the show-stopping D’angelo Lovell Williams presentation from New York gallery Higher Pictures. Williams’s poignant, haunting photographs and weavings use dynamic, performative compositions to track the arc of Black queer intimacy—the artist’s sold-out stand featured pieces ranging from \$2,500 to \$3,500.

Nowhere is Independent’s adventurous spirit more self-evident than in artist Will Thornton’s presentation in the Ricco Maresca Gallery stand on the fair’s first floor.

“Will used to be a hairdresser, completely self-taught”, says gallery co-founder Frank Maresca, a long-time champion of art that challenges orthodoxies. “The first time I looked at his work, it hit me instantly. He’s very much about the past and the classics, and also about the future. He sees them as portraits, and they are—I love them because I’ve been looking at art all of my life, and with Will’s work, I’m completely transported; of the countless paintings I’ve seen in my life, I can’t reference anyone else when I look at his pieces”.

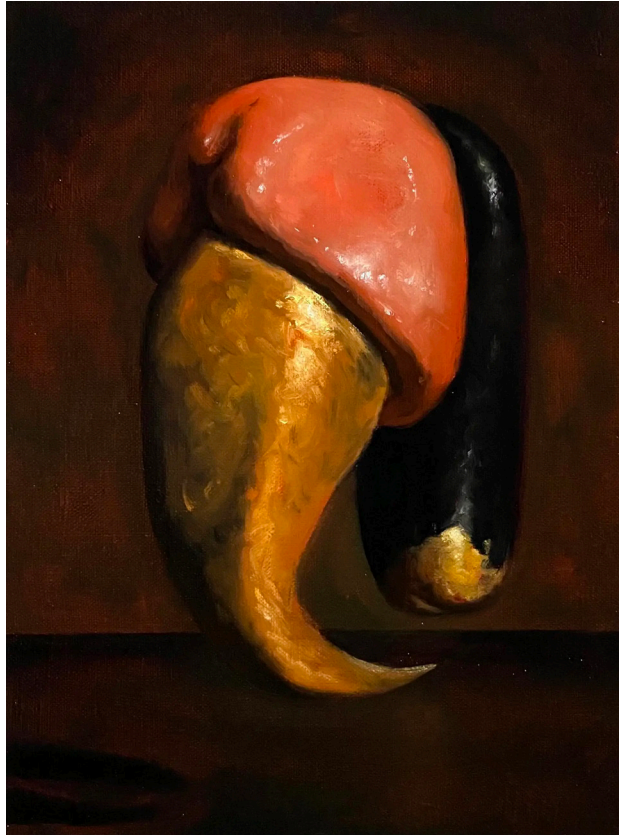


D'angelo Lovell Williams, *Family Tree*, 2021
D'angelo Lovell Williams and Higher Pictures

The pieces in question—dark, gnarled depictions of glistening viscera—are rendered from life, thanks to the palm-sized maquettes, reminiscent of old-world worry dolls, that Thornton fashions as the first step in his artistic process. Thornton's largest oil-on-linen compositions are priced at \$6,000.

The charming, millennial flatness of Wendy Park's larger-than-life still lifes on the stand of Los Angeles-based gallery Various Small Fires shows viewers that dreams, however modest, can set the groundwork for a different kind of belonging.

"This specific body of work is about the family picnics her family had; they didn't have the means to go on larger vacations, so they would do these family barbecues," says Adrian Zuniga, the director of the gallery's Dallas outpost. "You see all these visual references to Korean elements of a very American experience. It was a source of embarrassment for the artist growing up, but now she looks back on them endearingly, through the lens of her childhood, so it's a very graphic aesthetic." Park's bright, thoughtful works were sold out by the end of Thursday's preview.



Will Thornton, *Needle and Thread*, 2022
Will Thornton and Ricco Maresca Gallery

If nightmares can be differentiated from dreams by virtue of waking the sleeper, then artist Michelle Uckotter's furious, voyeuristic oil pastels of a girl alone in an empty house function like artistic espresso.

"She's inspired by the interstitial spaces in a home, really informed by a sense of American horror," says Alec Petty, founder of New York gallery King's Leap, which is offering Uckotter's uncanny compositions for prices in the \$13,000 to \$18,500 range. "A lot of the figures are less self-portraits than dolls or mannequins that she can put gestures on top of, that she can control at her will. She's playing with ideas of prescription femininity and the way in which these figures might be the ones being pursued or the ones in pursuit."

All the inventive and surprising figuration gives the fair an undeniable visual punch that, based on sales from the opening day, was connecting with collectors. As one snarky VIP, overheard in the aisles, put it: "It's felt a little unfinished in the past, but for 2023, they absolutely got it together."



Michelle Uckotter
Frightened fish girl Mid-chase, 2023
Oil pastel on panel
\$ 14,000
Michelle Uckotter and King's Leap

- [Independent](#) [↗](#), until 14 May, Spring Studios, New York