

ARTWORLD • ARMORY WEEK 2012

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The Independent: Calm Joy Amidst Art Fair Claustrophobia

by Ellie Bronson

INDEPENDENT

March 8 to 11, 2012

548 West 22nd Street, between 10th and 11th avenues

New York City – Sunday hours: 11am to 4pm



Andrea Bowers, *Tree sits - Canopy Camping*, earth First! Direct Action Manual with Dream Platform, 2011. Recycled wood, rope, carabiners, miscellaneous equipment and supplies. Courtesy of Andrew Kreps Gallery

Strolling through Independent with its open, airy installation one feels something akin to calm – an emotional state alien to the usual art fair experience of cluttered booths and madding crowds. Architect Christian Wassmann designed the layout, in the former Dia Center for the Arts building along with a “site-specific environment” on the roof intended, in the words of the press release, to “align with the true North-South axis of the earth.” Whether or not visitors buy into this ambitious concept – or even notice it – the fair is a delight. There are few dividing walls, allowing one gallery area to flow seamlessly into the next, a joyful antidote to ubiquitous, claustrophobic cubicles.

On each of Independent’s three floors there are moments of surprise and aesthetic reward. At *The Approach* on the second floor, three achingly beautiful white-on-white works by Sam Windett represent the best paintings in a fair diversely populated by installation, sculpture, work on paper, photography, and film. Daria Martin’s 16mm film projection, *Closeup Gallery*, at Maureen Paley is a mesmerizing depiction of smiling performers shuffling multicolored decks of cards as they slowly twirl on a kaleidoscopic table. The colors are bright and nostalgic – the palette of a children’s TV show in the 1980s – though the film’s content is determinedly inscrutable. It is 10 minutes long, and looped, and it is nearly impossible to walk away. Mac Adams’s sinister 1976 installation at gb agency, *Black Mail* consists of a half-eaten meal on a table in disarray, an overturned chair, and dripping candles burned down to their nubs. An act of violence has taken place, and the title hints at the cause, but with no victim or suspect, we are left to make up our own narrative: a do-it-yourself murder mystery.

On the third floor at Andrew Kreps Gallery, Andrea Bowers’ *Tree sits – Canopy Camping*, *earth First! Direct Action Manual with Dream Platform*, an ode to environmentalist civil disobedience, presents a fully functional tree sitter’s platform complete with instructions for residence (dedicating one side as kitchen, the other as bathroom because one “wouldn’t want to do both in the same area”). Bowers has explored many activist tropes (Feminism, Immigration reform) but her gallerist explained to me that while the work is about activism, it is not actual activism. This neat semantic hat trick in no way detracts from the sincerity and idealistic appeal of the work. In fact, given Dia’s treacherously steep staircases, the ropes and carabiners might prove extremely useful to fairgoers. Other works not to miss on the third floor are Moyra Davey’s grainy close ups of the back of a ten dollar bill from 1989 at Murray Guy and Michel François’s exuberant bronze splatter evoking Jackson Pollock at Bortolami.



Rob Pruitt's silver-tape covered chairs, *The Congregation* (2010-12) at Gavin Brown's Enterprise almost steal the show on the fourth floor, but it is well worth lingering around the corner at Creative Growth Art Center where Dan Miller has created spellbinding odes to the power of language in pen, paint, and typewritten words on paper. The works are both confounding and compelling – alluring, indefinably sad, and creepy. Their poignancy is almost overwhelming when one learns that the artist has Autism, and can hardly speak at all. His words are all in his art.

Sam Windett, *Under The Sun (White on White)*, 2012. Oil on canvas, 62 x 43cm. Courtesy The Approach



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