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The roughly two hundred global art fairs competing to populate the art-world calendar, many of them less than five years old, have permanently changed how art is bought and sold. And for those who prefer their art for-sale, the fairs promise the ultimate insider experience, namely haggling for a ten-percent discount with your favorite dealer by day and watching Peaches fake an orgasm onstage at a South Beach loft space by night. As new fairs catering to every collecting persuasion enter the fray each year, so too have veteran fairs competed for sustained relevance.

With this year's iteration of the Outsider Art Fair, Andrew Edlin—a New York dealer exhibiting several artists filed under “outsider” and representing the estate of widely-exhibited outsider artist Henry Darger—makes a convincing case that this fair is here to stay. Having purchased the fair and rescued it from an awkward office-building space on 34th Street, Edlin and company presented a more polished event at the former Dia Foundation site in Chelsea, complete with artist and curator talks during its run from January 31 through February 3.

The forty exhibitors ranged from familiar New York names (Edlin, Feature Inc., Vito Schnabel) to out-of-state and international participants whose programs might otherwise be unknown to New Yorkers (including St. Louis' Galerie Bonheur, Galerie Bourbon-Lally of Haiti, and Gilley's Gallery from Baton Rouge). Throughout the fair, and sometimes within one booth, works ran the gamut from prime examples of outsider mainstays—including Bill Traylor, the self-taught artist born into slavery in 1854, and the reclusive and intensely imaginative Darger—to new and exciting voices.

Highlights included the drawings of Günther Schützenhöfer, who lives and works at Haus der Künstler, a facility near Vienna established by psychiatrist Leo Navratil for select artist-patients. Schützenhöfer's drawings, showcased and successfully sold here by New York's Ricco/Maresca Gallery, depict simply-defined, almost-familiar creatures: a possible centipede rendered in pencil consisted of a long, rounded form with dozens of amoeba-like legs. Another drawing featured a black rectangle with tiny yellow circles at either end and what might be three legs on one side, but only two on the other. At Cavin-Morris, self-taught Iowa artist Timothy Wehrle's intricately-rendered, kaleidoscopic scenes in colored pencil cast the artist's own likeness into uncomfortable musical scenarios: waking to a naked accordionist standing over him, or in the bathtub with a drummer presiding.

A number of contemporary works dealt with calendrical themes, including obsessively layered Japanese text penned on calendar pages by Kunizo Matsumoto, shown by Yukiko Koide Presents, and George Widener's weather-documenting ink drawing *No Rain Five Days* at Ricco/Maresca. At a fair that was relatively short on blatant borrowing, Charles Steffen's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, depicting a ghastly smurf-like figure leaning on a cane, stood out.

The generally earnest nature of the works on display was both refreshing and, in reflecting on the current season of New York exhibitions, somewhat familiar. We saw the political drive and anger often associated with outsider works in “Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980” as well as Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's dazzling sexual-religious constructions, both on view at MoMA PS1, and will draw comparisons between these shows and the survey of Jean-Michel Basquiat, that insider's outsider, set to open at Gagosian Gallery on February 7. The influence of outsiders can be seen in other well-known gallery programs like Zach Feuer's, especially in the work of Sister Corita Kent, a nun and art professor who achieved notoriety in her lifetime but maintained outsider status with her religious and politically-charged silkscreen prints. Self-taught and outsider works already have a place in our galleries and museums—especially in the hands of the specialists exhibiting here—though the relative affordability of works at the Outsider Art Fair would indicate that collectors and market-makers have been slow to catch on. But the revitalized fair provided a chance to see a wide range of work that shows little interest in the market or current trends. At a time when irony is all but expected in new art, what could be more jolting than work that isn't in on the joke and doesn't care to be?