

Art in America

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F R O N T
P A G E

Art Chicago Comeback

Art Chicago, the annual international fair of modern and contemporary art (on view Apr. 25-28 at the Merchandise Mart), promises to reclaim a place among prominent competitors. Building on the success of last year's fair and the expertise of its enthusiastic new owner, Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc. (MMPI), Art Chicago appears to be gathering momentum as well as renewed attention and support.

MMPI bought Art Chicago from the troubled Thomas Blackman Associates (the show's producer from 1983) in 2006, when financial problems, a declining reputation and aggressive initiatives in New York, Miami and elsewhere threatened the fair's future. MMPI also owns New York's Armory Show, the Toronto International Art Fair, VOLTA Basel and VOLTA NY. Despite a wait-and-see attitude on the part of many observers, Art Chicago 2007 proved to be an ambitious fair. It also created a solid foundation for Art Chicago 2008, which will host 181 galleries, compared to 132 in 2007. International representation, with some 60 galleries, is up 36 percent over last year and includes Galerie Hans Mayer of Düsseldorf, Timothy Taylor of London, Galerie Caprice Horn of Berlin and Bodhi Art, based in Delhi, Mumbai, Singapore and New York. Almost 60 New York galleries are represented, among them CRG, Jack Shainman, Leo Castelli, Magnan Projects, P.P.O.W., Galerie Lelong, and Zwirner and Wirth. Among the 26 galleries from Chicago are Carl Hammer, Donald Young, Monique Meloche, Rhona Hoffman and Tony Wight.

Occupying the entire 12th floor of recently renovated gallery space at the Merchandise Mart, Art Chicago is the largest of four concurrent fairs being held there, including the 11th installment of the International Antiques Fair, the Intuit Show of Folk and Outsider Art, and NEXT, a new international invitational of 160 galleries focusing on emerging trends in contemporary art. NEXT, co-owned by MMPI, is organized by critic/curator Christian Viveros-Fauné and Chicago dealer Kavi Gupta, the latter of whom also co-founded the VOLTA fairs. (NEXT replaces last year's Bridge Art Fair.)

Also of note is a series of panel discussions with an impressive roster of participants, sponsored by Art Chicago Speaks/NEXT Talk Shop.

A showcase of unrepresented artists, titled the Artist Project, returns this year with the addition of a video lounge. So does NewInsight, a selection of work by graduate students from 12 of the country's leading MFA programs, curated by the Renaissance Society's Susanne Ghez. These and other related events are part of the citywide arts and culture celebration Artropolis.

—Susan Snodgrass