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5 Must-See Booths at the Dallas Art Fair

Perhaps it's just the result of one too many trips to various New York City locations of Dallas BBQ, but as a newcomer to the actual city of Dallas, I arrived with many preconceptions of what an art week in this North Texas metropolis would look like. Obviously, my Yankee imagination had gotten the better of me: Dallas is home to an established, thriving, and notably congenial contemporary art scene, its major institutions (the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Contemporary, Nasher Sculpture Center) offset by collector-run kunsthalls and private collections (the Power Station, and new additions like Site 131 and the Karpidas Family Collection).

The centerpiece of Dallas Arts Week — which includes openings at most of the aforementioned institutions, as well as a number of satellite events — is the Dallas Art Fair, which kicked off its eighth edition Thursday. Housed in two stories of the Fashion Industry Gallery, with a labyrinthine layout I found weirdly pleasant to navigate, the fair is, as one dealer pointed out to me, unusually laid back. Among the 97 galleries participating this year, there's a healthy mix of fair standards, international galleries, and locals. Offerings did feel, to an extent, tailored to a certain taste. Particularly on the fair's first floor, it was hard to ignore a general sense of feel-good decorativeness about the work dealers had chosen to bring — big, bright, occasionally less-than-tasteful geometric shapes (I particularly enjoyed watching an older bottle-blond woman tote her glass of champagne around the Honor Fraser booth; her magenta chenille jacket was a perfect match for the Sarah Cain canvases on view there).

That's not to say there's not variety to be had, however. I think of the Thursday night opening at the Power Station, which included a noisy and rather long set by Karl Holmqvist and musician Stefan Tcherepnin, during which a suit-clad Holmqvist complimented Tcherepnin's fuzzy guitar loops by banging on a stool with a drumstick and smoking a cigarette. On some other end of the spectrum, a show at Site 131 inspired by Lee Lozano's art-world-dropout career arc, curated by **Callicoon Fine Arts'** Photios Giovanis, included a lovely and rigorous selection of work by the likes of **Ulrike Müller, Bracha Ettinger, and Sadie Benning**.

In closing, I would like to note that Dallas mayor Mike Rawlings *did* open his introductory remarks at the fair by stating that he had gathered us all "to talk about my football career." So, if I may: Texas forever.

Ragna Bley at Hester

For its first year at Dallas Art Fair, this always-solid Chinatown gallery brought a gorgeous sort-of triptych — whose three large panels were painted together, but are certainly substantial as individual works — by recent Royal College of Art graduate Ragna Bley. This marks the artist's first showing in the US, and she'll soon have a proper solo at Hester. Fellow downtown New York gallery Tomorrow shares the booth, with a pair of works by Carlos Reyes.

Mernet Larsen at Various Small Fires

There's something quietly persistent about 76-year-old Larsen's style. Her everyday scenes are rendered with strange perspectives and a graphic blockiness; for all their pictorial quirks, the works also have a satisfying melancholy about them. A pair of paintings at the entrance to VSF's booth are characteristic of this style, notes in the margin and guiding pencil lines underscoring the precision of Larsen's geometric approach.

Jerónimo Elespe at Labor

Labor brought a strong set of offerings, with works by Pedro Reyes and Santiago Sierra. I was particularly drawn to a tiny (think: postcard-sized), enigmatic painting by Spanish artist Jerónimo Elespe, in which a room is littered with what look like symbol-covered pieces of paper, its windows opening into a black expanse.

Martina Sauter at Van Der Miden

Düsseldorf-based Sauter uses film stills and collage techniques to examine how a scene is constructed. Among the handful of works of hers on view here are a pair of images drawing from a Wong Kar-wai film — moody, but also revealing the mechanisms by which such moodiness is achieved.

Barbara Kasten at Bortolami

Kasten's "Transposition 17" is an excellent antidote to that tendency here I mentioned towards the loud and (dare I say) insubstantial: a black, white, and red image of sharp panes of glass. That's not to suggest the conceptualist isn't a good match for Dallas: Last night, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra presented her site-specific film installation "Sideways / Corner."

Dallas Arts Week and the Dallas Art Fair run through Sunday, April 17.