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An American Tail

NEW YORK 10.08.09



Left: MoMA associate director Kathy Halbreich with MoMA curator Klaus Biesenbach. Right: Artist Paul Mpagi Sepuya, architect Mark Krayenhoff, Printed Matter director AA Bronson, and artist Scott Hug. (Except where noted, all photos courtesy Printed Matter)

"YES! SAVE SOME TREES!" A gallery assistant's response to my offer to share a map at the Thursday-evening preview of the 2009 New York Art Book Fair was unarguably commendable, but her enthusiasm seemed a little incongruous given the amount of paper pushed at this annual event. Now in its fourth installment and relocated from Phillips de Pury in Chelsea to P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City, Printed Matter's publishing jamboree was bigger and better than ever. Expanding on last year's list by some seventy exhibitors to top two hundred, it sprawled throughout the institution and made a visit to your local Barnes & Noble—if such still exists—seem like a tedious proposition indeed.

Front and center on the first floor was a small but absorbing exhibition of publications by, about, and belonging to noted bibliophile Richard Prince. In the wake of controversy surrounding the recent removal of his iconic *Spiritual America* from "Pop Life" at Tate Modern in London, I couldn't resist hunting for some reference to the artist's rephotographed image of a naked, prepubescent Brooke Shields. I was unsuccessful, the artist's *Naked Nurses* collection perhaps coming closest. But moving into the fair proper, it was noticeable that the institutional setting seemed to have encouraged some other stallholders to take a distinctly exhibition-like approach to showing off their wares.



Left: P.S. 1's April Hunt with Antoine Guerrero, P.S. 1 director of operations and exhibitions, and MoMA's Margaret Doyle. Right: A view of Richard Prince's exhibition at the NY Art Book Fair.

The book fair has become as overwhelming as any art fair—perhaps more so given the sheer number of things to be pored over, handled, flipped through, and deciphered, as well as simply looked at. White gloves were thankfully kept to a minimum this time, but the event remained one for which a generous allotment of time and a sturdy bag were essential accessories. A few things that caught my eye included Jim Skuld's cheeky print of a future *Artforum* cover trumpeting the magazine's expansion into a perfect cube at 2nd Cannons Publications, while nearby, a wall of Josh Smith's rough-and-ready posters made a striking backdrop for the 38th Street Publishers stand. Also rough-and-ready, or rather picturesquely battered, was a vintage catalogue titled *Conceptual Art, Land Art, and Arte Povera* at Marcus Campbell Art Books. Condition, however, had scarcely compromised the modest-looking paperback's value. Asking price? Just shy of two grand. Werkplaats Typografie, by contrast, offered visitors the opportunity to produce their own books on site with a copy machine, which assistants would then bind. The fee? Just a buck.

Chucking-out time at P.S. 1 saw the younger and better insulated of the crowd (it was turning into a distinctly chilly night) head the few blocks to Deitch Studios for a benefit featuring "industrial punk-and-dub duo" IUD (Lizzi Bougatsos of Gang Gang Dance with Sadie Laska of Growing) and DJs Tim Lokiec and Gary Murphy. Outside the waterfront gallery, mobile Pizza Moto Brooklyn and Wafels and Dinges outlets immediately drew hungry mobs, while the beer line inside was quick to appear and very slow to end. The sleepy restaurant and function room across the street would have been a more comfortable option, but hardly in the same spirit.

That said, by the time Bougatsos and Laska took the stage, the crowd was beginning to thin, and their abrasive and glitch-plagued set finished off all but the most committed partygoers.



Mark Leckey's *In a Long Tail*. (Photo: Amy C. Elliott)

"I haven't started yet, I'm just testing the technology." Mark Leckey's apology, delivered the following evening from the stage of the Abrons Arts Center, was somehow hard to believe, his projected display of a *Blade Runner*-like zoom around an interior too polished to be a mere try-out. Seated in the front row next to critic Paul Laster and curator Renee Riccardo, I settled in for the second night of the Turner Prize-winning British artist's *In the Long Tail*. Taking as its starting point a photograph of a prototypical television transmission featuring Felix the Cat, Leckey's performance-lecture folded a history of broadcasting into a suitably labyrinthine explication of the "long tail" theory of Internet-based economics. If it sounds dry, you've never attended one of this soft-spoken Brummie's events.

Veering from practical demonstrations to convoluted rants in tandem with a battery of aural and visual effects, Leckey's presentation took in everyone from Hungarian Dimensionalist Tamkó Sirató Károly to the (genuine? invented?) "Bear Negligee Collective" en route to a digital Theory of Everything that got at once more introspective and more cosmic as it thundered toward its denouement. Some griped about the well-worn Chris Anderson-isms, though it was perhaps enlightening to those in the audience not familiar with the finer points of stigmergy and cybernetics. Leckey has a turn of phrase that veers from the pseudo-theoretically verbose to the out-and-out poetic, leaving much of the audience stroking their chins in bafflement one minute and laughing out loud the next.

Screening a video of the affect of sound on liquid, for example, he waxed lyrical about "a self-organizing yogurt, a voluptuous living custard," that somehow mimicked the behavior of the stock market. Finally, postulating a fusion of his own consciousness with the collective mind of the Web, he roared, "I am the swarm, and the swarm is me!" A furry mechanical "tail" thrashed around center stage, a smoke machine did its thing, and a giant Felix ("a radiant messenger, an angel hesitating near") rose to assume dominion.

— Michael Wilson



Left: Paula Cooper Gallery's Jeffrey Rowledge with dealer Paula Cooper. Right: Printed Matter's Peter Russo and Catherine Krudy.



Left: Dispatch's Gabrielle Giattano and artist Andrea Merx. Right: White Column's Amie Scally and Matthew Higgs.





Left: Artist Michelle Hailey, dealer Leo Koenig, and Leo Koenig Gallery's Nicole Russo. Right: Artists Slava Mogutin and Paul Mpagi Sepuya making manpurses.



Left: A view of the NY Art Book Fair. Right: Primary Information's Miriam Katzeff, UMMA curator Jacob Proctor, and MoMA's Gretchen Wagner.



Left: Writer Lindsay Pollock with artist Josh Smith. Right: Artists Wolfy and Jocko Weyland.

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