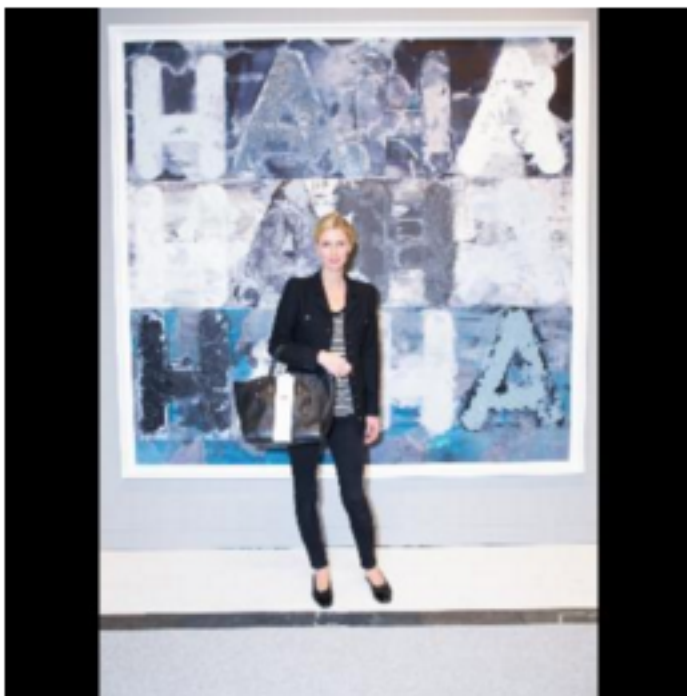


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**Forbes**

## Armory Show 2017 Opens With A Major Redesign, Brisk Sales

**Bettina Zilkha** , CONTRIBUTOR



Gallery- The Armory Show VIP Preview 2017

The Armory Show held its VIP preview Wednesday at Pier 92 and 94. Since taking the job over a year ago, Executive Director Benjamin Genocchio's major focus has been to overhaul the fair, knocking through walls to create more windows and more light, widening the aisles, and making the booths more spacious.

The response to the changes was overwhelmingly positive among both dealers and collectors alike.

"I really love it - it's much more airy than the past years, and much more manageable," said legendary collector Beth De Woody. "I don't feel frenetic. I can go through it leisurely, and as a result, I've seen some great works."

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Sotheby's Eric Shiner, the former director of the Andy Warhol Museum, is responsible for curating Platform, a collection of site-specific pieces commissioned expressly for the sprawling space.

"This year we've concentrated on the quality of the exhibits, and we've incorporated spectacular exhibits," said Genocchio. "As part of Platform, we have an 11 piece installation that Yayoi Kusama designed on a napkin for us and faxed over, a garden of biomorphic phalluses. It's 60 by 50 feet, and it's at the center of the fair. We also have a floating concrete block the size of a car that floats in mid-air, a piano suspended by a rope above the bar in the entrance, and many more."

The Kusama piece, *Guidepost To The New World*, sits on Astroturf in the "town square" of the fair. Presented by Victoria Miro, few people dared walk inside the space, though that may change as the week progresses.

Nearby, Jeffrey Deitch recreated his original booth from the first Armory Show at the Gramercy Park hotel, complete with pink walls, cellophane curtains, and art inspired by Florine Stettheimer, whom he originally showcased. Stettheimer has since become a huge influence on many young artists.

"The show started in 1995 as the Gramercy Park Art Fair," said Deitch. "It was a very different art world. There wasn't as much money around in the Contemporary sector. All the big dealers rented a hotel room and slept there at night."

John Waters, Amanda Ross, Rachel Feinstein, Jennifer Creel, Nathalie and Charles de Gunzburg, Marlies Verhoeven and Yvonne Force Villareal were spotted early on, wisely beating the crowds. The general feeling on the state of the Contemporary Art market is that quality works are selling well. Sales were strong the first day of the fair, further proving the point.

Many fairgoers, including Shiner and Genocchio, interacted with Rachel Lee Hovnanian's work at the Leila Heller Gallery, a recharging booth equipped with a phone so one could text the artist.

"I keep my phones with me at all times," said Hovnanian, whose second phone had a live camera feed on the booth. "That way I can text back, and see who I'm texting, even if I'm not at the fair."

How very 2017.