

TMI Arts Page

Exploring The Armory Show of 2013

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A wise man once said that it would take perhaps an entire year to discuss everything on display at Armory Arts Week. Since we don't have the luxury of devoting such a large amount of time to the discussion, I am just going to salute a few galleries that stood out for the consistent quality of the work they selected. While most galleries showed one or two pieces of interest, Leila Heller Gallery and Rokeby managed to capture the attention of visitors for more than a few moments. At Leila Heller's, Rachel Lee Hovnanian's piece "Dinner for Two" featured a digital mouse nibbling at a wedding cake, while a digital man and woman, seated at the table looked on. Visitors enjoyed the piece and gave it more than a passing glance. It was also nice to see something on display that was very non-commercial. Afterall, even if one were to buy the piece, how would the wedding cake be preserved?



Heller also chose to showcase the work of Reza Aramesh, a London-based artist whose sculpture of one man holding another, in a pieta position was riveting.



The work was created in a smaller than human scale, making the act of viewing it feel somewhat intrusive. It is hard enough to look at life-sized depictions of suffering, but when they are slightly smaller than you are, it feels voyeuristic or cruel. Also, the eye contact that the two men are making with viewers is particularly evocative. Though there was nothing explicit about this image—blood or anything else, it seemed to somehow be about terrorism. Maybe this is because the man lying in the prone position seems to be aware of an unwanted audience, maybe because the other man holding him seems to be asking with his eyes for viewers to put an end to his suffering, but maybe this piece has nothing to do with terrorism at all. Either way, it's amazing.



Also on display at Heller's booth were photos by Aramesh. Behind the statue is a painting by Ayad Alkadhi. The gallery also featured art by Farideh Lashai, a famous female Iranian artist who died at 68, just weeks before the show. While the strength of Heller's showing stemmed from its diversity of works of art and artists, Rokeby managed to achieve a similar effect with just one artist: Mathew Sawyer.



Sawyer paints, he takes photos, does collages, creates sculptures and seems to work with any and all mediums. The fact that all the work on display at Rokeby was by the same person was not immediately apparent until I read the labels. Sawyer is incredibly talented and versatile. His work is at times personal, and at other times overarching social commentary and occasionally there is no discernable message.



However, taking the cake as perhaps the most interesting booth at the Armory Show was Liz Magic Laser's Armory publicity material. Laser was commissioned by the Armory show to design the show's t-shirts and merchandise and "brand" the event. As a result, she conducted focus groups which she then drew in the style of court illustrations. Video of the groups was also broadcast in her booth.



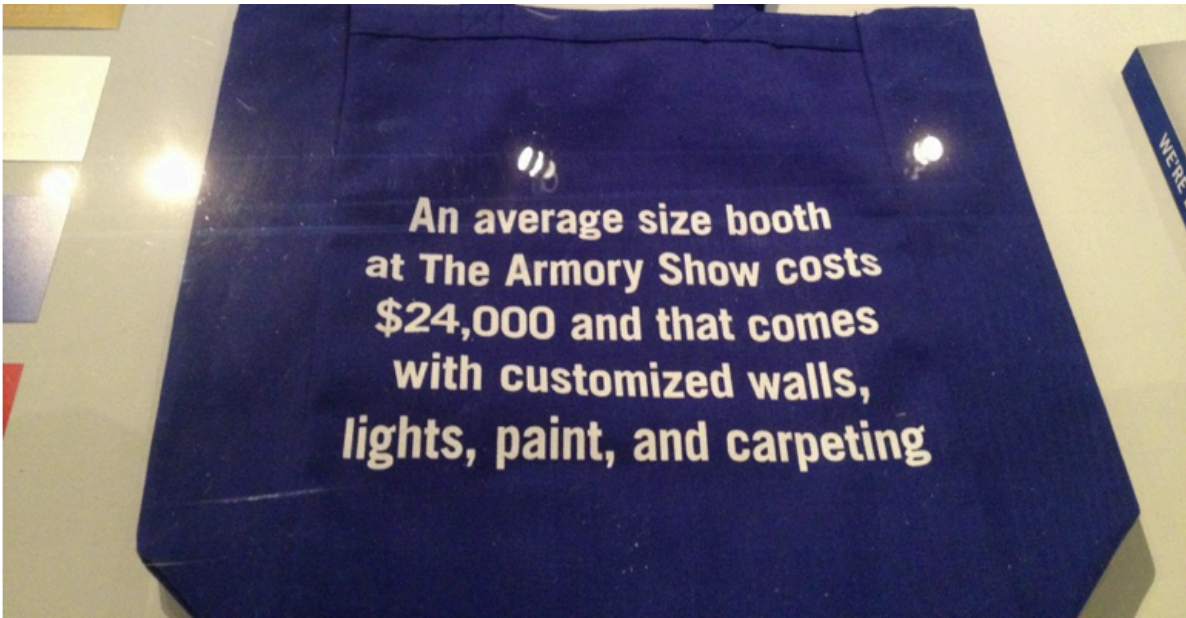


The T-shirts she designed were worn by all the employees working for the Armory, and they presented a very interesting (and rich) portrait of the art show's attendees.



In addition to the shirts, Laser designed tote bags where she publicized just exactly how much each gallery pays to participate in the Armory Show.





With prices like that, it's not surprising that most galleries focus their attention on selling. Laser's publicity materials aimed at stripping the art show of its veneer and reminding visitors that even art has a business side. While it is at times sad or harsh to view art through the lens of consumerism, ultimately that is what the Armory Art Show is about. It's a place for dealers and collectors to purchase the next big thing. A place for artists and gallery owners to see what sells, and a place for the rest of us to be both disgusted and encouraged that someone would pay a hefty sum for a sculpture made with sculpee, a material sold at most craft stores.