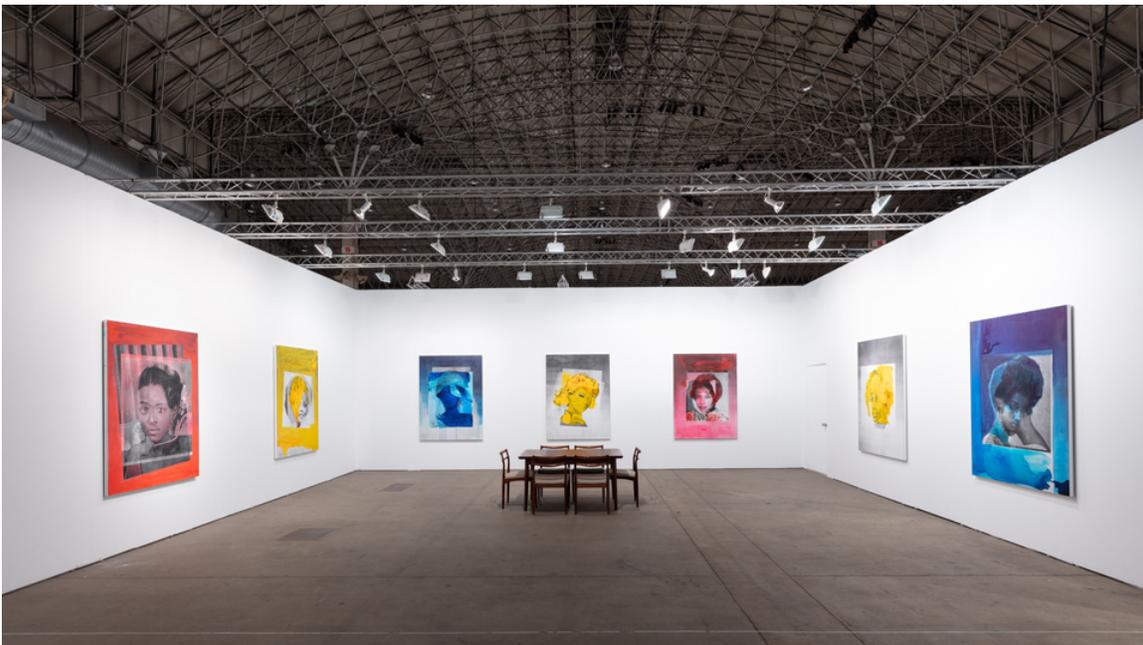


Harper's BAZAAR

African American Art And A Ship Of Tolerance: Highlights Of EXPO Chicago



Installation view of Hauser & Wirth's booth at EXPO Chicago featuring a solo presentation of works by Lorna Simpson

September 22, 2019

REBECCA ANNE PROCTOR

The fair returns for its eighth edition at Chicago's Navy Pier with an increased global focus

The delicate white sails of a [ship](#) move with the wind. They are covered in colourful drawings and statements professing “peace”, “love”, and “tolerance.” Artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's *The Ship of Tolerance* has finally made its way to Chicago's Navy Pier. Simultaneously showing on London's River Thames, the boat provides a space in each city for the public to reflect and discuss themes of peace and tolerance.

“We live at a time when all utopias have failed: communism, socialism, capitalism,” says Emilia Kabakov. “We were hoping that finally we would develop a system that makes people’s lives and situations better, but it didn’t work out. Utopia itself is unattainable but what we decided we would do is go through culture – because culture is the only thing that makes us human. Communication through culture, friendship through culture and that’s what we did with *The Ship of Tolerance*.”



*An installation view of Mariane Ibrahim's booth at EXPO Chicago
Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim Gallery*

The Ship of Tolerance was launched in 2011 during the [Sharjah Biennial](#). Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, President and founding director of the Sharjah Art Foundation, attended EXPO Chicago for a second time this year participating in the Dialogue section in a panel titled On Utopia with Emilia Kabakov.

Artist Ilya Kabakov, a main figure of the Moscow Conceptualists, began working with Emilia upon relocating to America during the late 1930s. Over the course of 30 years the Kabakovs have produced work – spanning painting to what they call “total installation” exploring universal themes such as history, memory and utopia.



An installation view of The Ship of Tolerance by artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. Presented by The Ilya & Emilia Kabakov Foundation

Photography by Rebecca Anne Proctor

As topics regarding climate change, gender and racial issues resurface with a steadfast desire for change around the globe - artwork on display at this year's EXPO Chicago echoed an international cry to discuss such concerns.

More than 135 international exhibitors representing 24 countries and 68 cities packed into the red-bricked Navy Pier hall this weekend in Chicago catering this time not just to the Midwest art scene but to an increasingly international audience. All eyes are on Chicago - a fact affirmed also by a new art fair player: Chicago Invitational, organised by the New Art Dealers Alliance (Nada). The fair cancelled its New York fair last August due to the city's pricey real estate. Chicago offered an affordable solution as well as booming art scene. For its inaugural edition the new fair presented 35 exhibitors from 11 countries at the Chicago Athletic Association hotel.



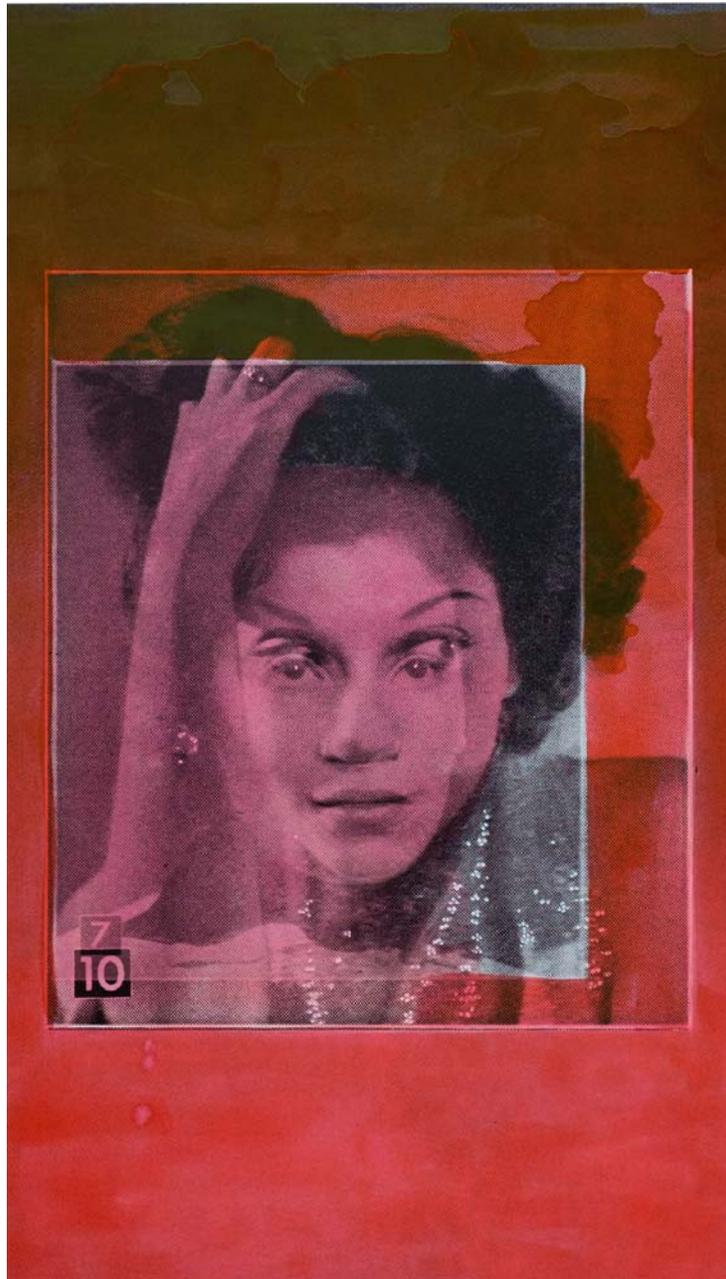
Lorna Simpson. Mind Reader. 2019. Ink and screenprint on gessoed fiberglass. 170.2x127x3.5cm

© Lorna Simpson. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

“From the outset we have focused hard on the international programming to make sure that EXPO Chicago focused on what was happening globally,” said Tony Karman, President and Director of the fair. Karman began his tenure at the fair working as a security guard in the early 1980s at the original fair - the Chicago International Art Exposition, which back was second after Art Basel in Switzerland on the art world fair circuit.

“Many of the dealers have had great traction with African American and African diaspora work because there is a large collecting community that supports these genres in Chicago,” adds Karman. “This is one of the reasons why Mariane Ibrahim has opened up a space here.” Ibrahim,

previously located in Seattle, inaugurated her 5,000 square-foot space in the city's West Town neighborhood with a solo show of works by African-American photographer and filmmaker Ayana V Jackson.

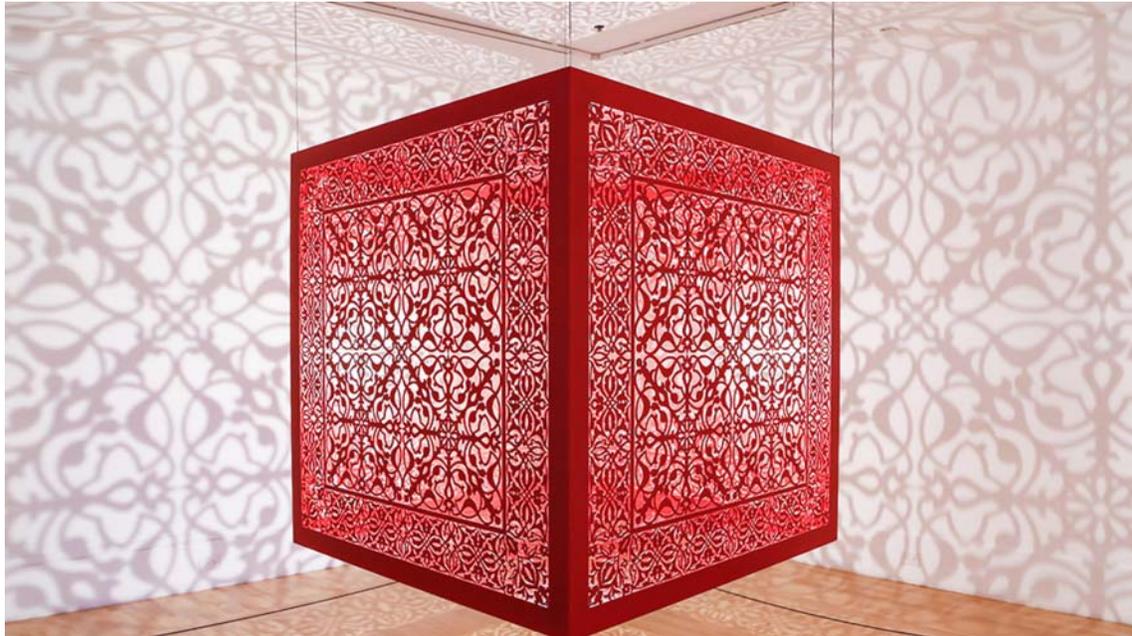


*Lorna Simpson. Special Character #5. 2019. Ink and screenprint on gessoed fiberglass.
170.2x127x3.5cm*

Photo: James Wang © Lorna Simpson. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

“We are a very programme-driven fair,” says Stephanie Cristello, Director of EXPO Chicago. “This art fair doesn’t happen in a vacuum – you can feel it throughout the city.” An example of this would be OVERRIDE | A Billboard Project in the form of a takeover of advertising billboards around the city showing works by 13 artists, including Hayv Kahraman and Ayana V Jackson.

By the end of the [fair’s](#) preview day on Thursday, inaugural participant Hauser & Wirth, sold out its booth of 10 works of new paintings by African-American artist Lorna Simpson, each priced between \$295,000 and \$425,000. Sales included acquisitions by five museums, including outright or promised gifts to MCA Chicago and Indianapolis Museum of Art.



*Anila Quayyum Agha. Shimmering Mirage [red]. 2019. Lacquered steel and halogen bulb.
121.9x121.9x121.9cm*

Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

First time participant from Johannesburg, South African MOMO Gallery presented a booth of works by Sudanese Cairo-based artist Salah El Mur, selling the artist’s acrylic on canvas painting *First Date* (2018) to The Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It marked the artist’s first showing in North America.



Roberto Lugo. Melting Pot (II). 2018. Porcelain, china paint, luster. 23x11x11in. \$16,000

Courtesy of Wexler Gallery

Ibrahim sold out works by emerging African American painter and newly represented artist, Jerrell Gibbs. “We have started a waiting list for his work,” stated Ibrahim. Additionally, the gallery sold Steve Mekoudja by Amoako Bofo to the Hessel Museum of Art, three works by Clotilde Jiménez, a bronze sculpture and two collages, and work by Lina Iris Viktor from her Constellation series. Viktor recently opened her solo show at London’s Autograph, *Some Are Born To Endless Night – Dark Matter*, on until 25 January 2020.

Another popular booth was that of the Wexler Gallery, a Philadelphia and [New York](#)-based space, which showcased works by American artist of Puerto Rican descent Robert Lugo. A display of the American potter, social activist, and educator’s ceramic works could be seen combined with gun parts and decorated with portraits of civil rights leaders and cultural figures from Latino and black culture. “The teapot wall was made as a reaction against gun violence in Chicago,” said gallery owner Lewis Wexler. “Art saved Lugo’s life.”



Amoako Bofo. Steve Mekoudja. 2019

Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim Gallery

"He grew up in a really rough neighborhood in Philadelphia," continued Wexler. "His parents pulled him off the streets and sent him to [school](#) and after taking an art class his whole life changed. He's now the head of the ceramic department at Tyler University." The teapots reflect the complexity of America's shared history and its relationship with race and gun violence. The entire wall of teapots, price at around \$60,000, sold to an undisclosed collector.

"There is a strong showing of American artists of colour at this year's fair," added Wexler. "It's a statement of what is taking place now in the US and also of Chicago's relationship with its African American past."

Singing a Far Eastern tune was the work of [Pakistani](#)-born artist Anila Quayyum Agha's intricate light installation – an edition of which has also been shown at Art Dubai over the years. Shown at the booth of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, rays of light emanated from its elaborately patterned laser-cut red frame acting, in the artist's words, like a "shimmering mirage."

Expo Chicago runs from 19-22 September at Navy Pier, Festival Halls A&B, 600 E