

Cherry and Martin

Ripley, Deborah. "Armory Roundup: Contemporary Artists Speak to the History of Abstraction," *Forbes*, March 6, 2015.

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With each passing year a new art fair surreptitiously emerges on the New York scene. Come early March, collectors and dealers find their calendars completely filled, balancing the newer fairs like Independent, Scope, and Pulse, with the older stalwarts like the [Art Dealers Association of America \(ADAA\) Art Show](#) and the [Armory Show](#) at Piers 92 and 94 along the Hudson River.

This year the ADAA Art Show returns to the [Park Avenue Armory](#) in Manhattan's Upper East Side with a curated pairing of modern and contemporary greats as well as emerging talent. The 27th edition of the ADAA's annual fair is perhaps a better place to spot emerging trends than the chaotic sprawl of the Armory Show piers, as dealers shrewdly juxtapose old and new artists to make their point. One of the big conversations across the 55,000 square foot drill hall is the legacy of geometric abstraction. The contemporary artist [Mark Grotjahn](#) is a good example, retooling and invigorating the work of masterful abstract painters like Leon Polk Smith and Kenneth Noland.

Brooke Alexander Gallery offers works by Ellsworth Kelly, Donald Judd, and Barnett Newman, under the umbrella of "Defining Artists of Composition, Color, and Form." Highlights include Josef Albers painting "Homage to the Square: Zwischen Zwei Blau (Between Two Blues)" (1955) and Ken Price's "Peacock" (1988) sculpture. There were also many examples of elegant geometric abstraction at the Washburn Gallery booth, which celebrated earlier, lesser known artists like the pioneering American abstract painter Alice Trumbull Mason. Pushing the bounds of the canvas, [Maxwell Davidson Gallery](#) featured an early experimental collage work by the Israeli artist Yaacov Agam, who would later be known for his lenticular Agamograph prints, but during the 1960s was exploring color and form.

The generational interplay between artists within painting is not the only highlight. The work of women artists is central to the show, a feat that the growing number of art fairs, biennials, and triennials have yet to achieve. [Tibor de Nagy Gallery](#), [CRG Gallery](#), and [Galerie Lelong](#) each mounted comprehensive surveys of women artists in their 90s, featuring the late painter Jane Freilicher, Saloua Raouda Choucair, and Etel Adnan respectively. This emphasis also extends to photography, with Janet Borden, Inc. presenting the first retrospective of Jan Groover's work since her death three years ago.

The ADAA Art Show prides itself on its solo exhibitions, but this year's thematic exhibitions were by no means an afterthought. [Galerie St. Etienne](#) celebrated their 75th anniversary, highlighting the gallery's humanistic scope, from the folk art of Anna Mary Robertson "Grandma" Moses to the expressionist works of Egon Schiele. Jane Kallir, the current co-director and granddaughter of the gallery's founder, Otto Kallir, was on hand, presenting the booth's highlight piece, a 1932 portrait by Otto Dix.

[Paul Kasmin Gallery](#)'s booth also had a historical bent. Entitled "L'Impasse Ronsin," the exhibition explores the fabled studios in the Montparnasse neighborhood of Paris, a site they deem to be "a crucible of postwar culture." A number of important artists had studios in close proximity including Brancusi, Jean Tinguely, William Copley, and Max Ernst, making it one of the most formidable bohemian locales of Parisian history.

Over at the Pier 94, geometric abstraction remained a through line among the Armory Show's contemporary artists. [Galerie Daniel Templon](#) exhibited light sculptures by Chilean artist Iván Navarro, whose piece "Murio la Verdad" (2013) reimagines Albers' "Homage to the Square" with neon and mirrors reflected into infinity. The appeal of Albers work is more than a fascination with form; their personal histories intersect in the realm of abstraction. Although Albers, a Jew, emigrated from Germany to escape the rise of Nazism, he never referred to his persecution in his work.

Navarro, who grew up under Pinochet's dictatorship, has not, until recently, politicized his work. The idea that abstraction could be a political act is clearly compelling for Navarro, who titled the sculpture after a [Goya print](#) from "The Disasters of War" series and embeds the title, which means "truth is dead," into one of the neon squares.

Other artists crisscrossed the bounds of sculpture and painting with lively abstract works that steered clear of the irksome tide of [Zombie Formalism](#). [Galerie Kamel Mennour](#) featured five large monochromatic works by the French conceptual artist Daniel Buren. The rectilinear pieces, produced in various decades, were echoed by Brian Bress' six-channel video "370 Cover" (2015) at [Cherry and Martin](#). Perhaps the most Instagrammed work, Berta Fischer's vibrant amoeba-like plexiglass sculptures at [James Fuentes LLC](#) were clearly a crowd favorite. The pieces give off an exuberant, animated quality, rivaled only by Eddie Martinez's two painterly works at Los Angeles' [Kohn Gallery](#). In stark contrast, the installation at [Alexander and Bonin](#) favored a minimalist approach. Titled "Turbulence (black)" (2014), Mona Hatoum's piece is made of thousands of black opaque marbles arranged in a circle, evoking a bottomless pit when assembled en masse. All in all, the Armory Show piers are pulsing with artwork that reveals the steady draw of the abstract field. What attracts contemporary artists to these calm, structured forms? During a time marred by conflict, economic turbulence, and the degradation of the natural environment, there may be something comforting, even meditative, about a practice that eschews garish extravagance for formal restraint.