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Sunday, March 11th, 2018

War of Independence

[print](#)

by David Cohen

The Independent Art Fair

March 8–11, 2018

Spring Studios, 50 Varick Street

New York City, independenthq.com

no caption is offered with this image – read article to find out why

Unless they make some changes in the way they do business I'll likely skip the Independent art fair in future years. It is a shame because the fair is close by where I live and attracts galleries I like to follow. But there is at least one fair too many to do justice to them all in Armory week. Sheer irritation places the Independent on my black list.



A work by Harold Ancart on view with Clearing, New York/Brussels, at the Independent Art Fair, New York, 2018

First off, the labels! Or, rather, the pretentious and insulting lack thereof. While some galleries are professional enough to identify the relevant details with the work, or at least, when it is a solo presentation, to emblazon the artist's name somewhere and then have a readily accessible checklist to hand, way too many leave visitors in the lurch.

The other problem with Independent is the sunlight. Some works were simply impossible to look at, it was so bright. I love natural light, but the choice at the fair was between blackout shades or no shades, and for art you need shades that diffuse natural light. 50 Varick Street is a beautiful venue, but for an art fair effective blinds need to be installed.

There's old-fashioned logic to not publishing prices: Dealers want a conversation with potential collectors. Plus they want to see what shoes they are wearing before quoting a price. (That's a joke, by the way, although not necessarily so far from the truth.) But withholding the artist's NAME is just bad manners.

Some of us have limited time and patience, going around so many fairs in one week. You see something by an artist who is new to you and you want to start the learning process straight away, text and image hand in hand. You see something you half think you know: You have to humiliate yourself by asking who it is? Whether the driving factor among gallerists is laziness or elitism, such coyness is self-destructive.

fortunate to have his name scribbled by a five year old on the wall. I didn't notice if Elisabeth Kley had a label with her stunning installation at CANADA. I did notice the sunlight, however.

I can't be bothered to start lecturing gallerists on how to do their job, but they sure made it frustrating trying to do mine.



This afternoon things (almost) came to blows with the handsome brute pictured here. The name of the young LA-based artist this Berlin/Cologne dealer was showing with an LA partner being absent, I went to the desk in search of the checklist, photographing a relevant page—and, I'll admit, leaving the page open quite deliberately as a way of saying “put a fucking label on the wall, losers”. Looking more closely at the work I was intrigued by one in particular and wondered after its title. Returning to the table I found that the checklist had been closed up and a book emphatically placed on top of it by a dealer whose expression was one of exasperated housekeeping. “May I look at the checklist please.” “Certainly, just leave it neatly when you are finished with it.” “Are you trying to keep the artist's name a secret?” Checklist snatched violently from visitor's hands and replaced under book,. Raised voices and snapshots ensue.

I guess that unfiltered sunlight was starting to get to people!

Regarding the mystery artist at the top of this page, do a reverse image search if you are curious. Googling “Harold,” “Belgium” and “Independent,” meanwhile, yields Harold Ancart, showing at Clearing, a gallery in New York and Brussels, as detailed in the caption, above. But seriously, people, *LABELS!*



[Installation of work by Elisabeth Kley with CANADA at Independent Art Fair, New York, 2018](#)

Installation of work by Elisabeth Kley with CANADA at Independent Art Fair, New York, 2018

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Independent labeling

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Name



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Hear, hear! The lack of wall labels is very annoying. Perhaps these galleries are too important (ahem) to need any press, but I'm guessing their artists would appreciate it.

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