

## Independent Brussels 2018: what to see at the Belgian fair

ART / BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH



Independent Brussels 2018 sees 60 galleries, museums and non-profit institutions take over the Vanderborght building. *Photography: Hugard & Vanoverschelde*

New York's Independent Art Fair is making another return to bustling Brussels for a weekend of radical art overseen by guest curator Vincent Honoré. Shaking up the compartmentalised fair model, Independent favours a fluid blend of traditional work, live arts and a bounteous dose of design. Sixty galleries, museums, and non-profit organisations will congregate in the 50,000 sq ft, five-storey Vanderborght building with an emphasis on a communal 'visitor experience'. Blue-chip and emerging galleries sit side by side, dissolving art market airs to garner unconstrained and authentic dialogues. In anticipation of this weekend of showstopping art and performances, we've curated our own top tips for fairgoers to see between 8-11 November.

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### **Solo booths by emerging artists**

Independent has a track record of bringing the talent of tomorrow to the fore. This year, a number of galleries are emphasis on their catalogue of promising young creatives. The paintings, drawings and collages of Belgian artist Nel Aerts seem whimsical and witty, yet under their vibrant, cartooned façade, her figures – many of them self-portraits – harbour feelings of helplessness, immobility and introspection. Carl Freedman Gallery presents a line up of new work by the artist involving crudely executed cut out forms – an illusion of naivety not to be taken at surface value.

Over in Joseph Tang's territory, French artist Julie Béna will grip spectators with her literature, theatre and popular culture-infused practice. A series of obscure objects in the gallery's space will entice visitors down to the ground floor where Béna will stage an impassioned recital, which subsumes audiences in an obscure fictional realm. Through an intricate, tenacious embroidery technique, f.marquespenteado's work combines clothing, accessories, books and found objects. For the artist's solo show for Mendes Wood DM gallery, the booth is converted into an alpine lodge for *Men in Trouble*. Portraits of fictional male characters (each with their own backstory) are hand-embroidered on tennis rackets.

### **Collectible design, furniture by artists, and functional artworks**

This year, the fair inaugurates a fresh design-led section. This will straddle the boundaries between craft, collectible design and furniture to add another unconventional dimension to the format. New York gallery Friedman Benda has opted to show two starkly juxtaposed artists under its 'international and multi-generational' programme. Lebanese designer Najla El Zein's minimalist *Distortion* collection comprises a cluster of concrete seating configurations. These soft, seamless mounds obstruct functionality while alluding to anthropomorphism and femininity.

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*Distortion Bench 06, 2017, by Najla El Zein, fiber and resin reinforced concrete. Photography: Damien Arlettaz. Courtesy of Friedman Benda*

Andile Dyalvane's complex ceramic work is the antidote to minimalism. The South African artist draws on his roots in the Xhosa culture and rural Eastern Cape, combining this with tales of everyday urban experiences in Cape Town. As collaborative partners this year, Nottingham Contemporary and Whitechapel Gallery exclusively debut an array of new work at the fair. This includes vivacious woven blankets by Francis Upritchard and whimsical 'ceramic sandwiches' by Jesse Wine. Whitechapel Gallery will separately present a range of leading contemporary artists including Elmgreen & Dragset, Emma Hart, Huma Bhabha and Ulla von Brandenburg.

### **Performances**

With performance art expert Vincent Honoré at the helm, the entire ground floor or 'nerve centre' of the Vanderborght building will be in the hands of a diverse spread of conversation, film, music and live, time-based work. At Independent, visitors are not longer merely idle spectators, but active partakers. On the brink of premiering Vessel Orchestra for The Met Breuer next year, Oliver Beer is unveiling another new performance work at Independent. Here, two performers recount their earliest

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musical memories using their bodies, creating radical musical timbres. Locking mouths, they sing through each other's facial cavities, fused in a single 'hybrid voice.'

Adam Christensen – or 'Madam' as he's otherwise known during his cabaret-esque performances – will serenade visitors with fragmented biographical love stories, all accompanied by an accordion. This is a performance that's bound to induce an emotive response, not least due to Christensen's silvery vocal capabilities. Other live artwork will be performed by Mathilde Fernandez, Ola Maciejewska, Cecilia Bengolea, David Sherry and Naama Tsabar.

### **Historical mavericks**

The kingpins of 20th-century art will jostle for centre stage in a timely discourse between American and European art. Listening beyond the deafening cacophony of the market, a collection of galleries hail quality over quantity to provide a critical footing for the wider fair. Hervé Bize will emphasise the divergent voices of the 1980s in Europe and the US, including a Jean-Michel Basquiat's *Item* (1987), a painting aired for the first time in an exhibition context since its recent release from a private collection. 'We put forward precisely our identity, our constant focus on art beyond categorisation,' Bize reflects.

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