



The Outsider Art Fair Gets a Makeover

by [CORINNA KIRSCH](#) on JANUARY 16, 2013 · 0 COMMENTS



Interior view from the 2012 Outsider Art Fair. Courtesy, I Like Green, Flickr.

"It's singular. It's the only one," Andrew Edlin told me about the Outsider Art Fair. Edlin's been running the twenty-year-old art fair since his newly formed company Wide Open Arts purchased it back in August. It opens in the former Dia building, now Center 548, over the weekend of January 31st, and according to Edlin we'll see some deep changes. Edlin mentioned that the fair had reduced the number of booths, widened the aisles, and instituted a jury for approving applicants. "With this fair," he told AFC, "We're expanding the bill."

Now, with the lure of a new venue, and new dealers—Vito Schnabel, Laurel Gitlen, and Feature, Inc. among them—there's hopes that Edlin can breathe new life into the fair and expand the clientele for outsider art.

"The original fair was scrappy," Kerry Schuss, one of the Outside Art Fair's original exhibitors, told me over the phone. "It was in the Puck building," a chandelier-laden, Romanesque building doesn't scream "contemporary art." Neither did the fair's most recent location at 7 West 34th Street, a Midtown showroom, also home to The Armory Show's offices.

Center 548, on the other hand, is a welcome place to view art, with wide spaces, tall ceilings, and a bit of natural lighting. "7 West wasn't exactly an art world venue," Andrew Edlin mentioned, as we chatted about the new direction he wants the fair to take. "But [Center 548] was a lucky break."

"We instituted a fair vetting committee," Edlin added, to ensure that, with a little bit of curation, the fair as a whole will look darn good.

All in all, this new energy has helped bring new dealers on board. Vito Schnabel, Laurel Gitlen, and Feature, Inc. will all bring artists to the fair this year, though those galleries aren't often associated with the outsider art market. Of course, with these galleries on board, the definition of outsider art becomes tricky. Vito Schnabel's entry to the fair is Vahakn Arslanian, a deaf, "[mostly self-taught](#)" artist who has attended the New School and SVA. When Arslanian was just five years old, he started making work with Julian Schnabel; [his dad, the art collector and diamond dealer Ara Arslanian](#), brought him round to Schnabel's studio in the Hamptons.

"We've never been involved with the outsider art world before, but last year, I was invited to give a talk on work by Michael Patterson-Carver at the Folk Art Museum," Laurel Gitlen told me. She's bringing Patterson-Carver's work to the fair.

As for why she's adding a new fair to her gallery's schedule? "We thought we'd try it out, and bring new work to a new community." Like any go-getter dealer should.

Feature, Inc., too, is new to the world of outsider art, but like Gitlen includes work by those artists in their roster. They're bringing a series of anonymous Tantra paintings to their booth, works the gallery has been showing since 1998.

Overall, the expectations for this year's fair appear high. Even members of the old guard are hopeful about the new steps taken by the fair, Kerry Schuss among them.

"Sometimes having an all-outsider art fair is mixed quality," Kerry Schuss reminded me during our phone conversation. "But [Andrew] gives a chance to breathe new life into it...What he's doing is great. He understands [the fair] so well—that's why he had to move it."