

Buyer's Guide [partner](#)

'It's an Elastic Idea of What Constitutes the Contemporary': Independent Art Fair's First Fall Edition Will Focus on 20th-Century Art

The programming will showcase under-known talents like Joe Ray, one of the few Black artists tied to Light and Space.

Artnet Gallery Network, July 14, 2022



Joe Ray, *Second Fantasy #1 (Bikers) Market Street Project* (1971).
Courtesy of the artist, Diane Rosenstein Gallery, and Independent New York.

How do we tell the story of 20th-century art, and when does contemporary art really begin?

This September, Independent Art Fair will launch Independent 20th Century, a new annual fair exclusively for works made between 1900 and 1999, in the hopes of offering fresh and perhaps unexpected perspectives on the past—and thereby, the present.

The inaugural edition, organized with the fair’s longtime curatorial advisor, artist and Director of White Columns Matthew Higgs, is shaping up to be promisingly kaleidoscopic, with 32 galleries featuring 70 artists, including 22 focused, solo- or dual-artist presentations, plus special projects commissioned especially for the fair.

So why narrow the gaze to the 20th century? Higgs thinks the reconsideration of the recent past is one of the major curatorial developments of our moment, noting both the sizable number of deceased artists chosen by curator Cecilia Alemani for the current Venice Biennale, as well as in MoMA PS1’s most recent edition of its “Greater New York” survey, which is “typically ultracontemporary,” he said.

“It’s an elastic idea of what constitutes the contemporary that’s very compelling,” Higgs continued, who believes this reconsideration of what makes the past began with Documenta 10 in 1997. “It was pivotal in introducing the idea of ‘retro-perspectives’ in place of retrospectives,” he said.

...

He’s also excited for Diane Rosenstein’s solo presentation devoted to the Los Angeles-based artist Joe Ray (b. 1944). The African American artist began his career in the 1960s, after serving in the Vietnam War, and dove into the emergent Los Angeles art scene. “He was in the inaugural graduating class of CalArts in 1973, mentored by Nam June Paik and John Baldessari,” Higgs noted. Ray was also a founding member of Studio Z, a collective of Black artists engaged in performative actions around Los Angeles. Ray’s early works include translucent sculptures that incorporate plastics and cast resin as part of Southern California’s Light and Space movement, but Ray never limited his practice to one medium, exploring photography, sculpture, painting, and performance.

...

“We have a real opportunity to set in motion conversations between works from the earlier part of the 20th century, works from the postwar era, and then works from the recent past. This collapsing of the idea of the historical and the porous nature of what constitutes the contemporary are very exciting,” concluded Higgs. For those who might not be able to visit the fair in person, Independent 20th Century is continuing the fair’s embrace of a hybrid model and will open online on September 1, a week before the physical fair. The content-rich digital platform will also feature 15 new editorials offering in-depth historical and research perspectives on the works on view.

Independent 20th Century will take place September 8–11, 2022, at the Battery Maritime Building at Cipriani, South Street, New York.