

Independent to Uncover New 20th Century Stories in Inaugural Fair

By **Abby Schultz** July 21, 2022 4:11 pm ET



Joe Ray, *US*, 1993, Acrylic on canvas and cotton fabric on panel, 72 x 96 inches
Courtesy Los Angeles County Museum of Art © Joe Ray

Independent will hold its first 20th century art fair this fall in a presentation that promises to give visitors a new perspective on art of the era.

Exhibitions from 32 galleries will reimagine recognized artists such as Joan Miró and Giorgio di Chirico as it spotlights artists who may not have gotten their due at the time, including Black abstractionists such as Gerald Jackson and feminist artists such as Juanita McNeely.

The intention is to offer a historical presentation that reexamines the role of women, artists of color, and those of different sexual orientations who may not have been represented in the past. These are artists recognized by their contemporary peers “as part of the zeitgeist”

even as they were ignored by the market, says Elizabeth Dee, co-founder and director of the Independent.

“We wanted a show devoted to things we’ve been supporting over the years, whether it’s women artists, or indigenous work and outsider art,” Dee says. “We thought about that and Independent’s purpose to bring canonical conversations [together] with new rediscoveries and bring those worlds into one place where they can coexist.”

Independent 20th Century is also the first art fair to be developed since the onset of the pandemic, and in that role is attempting to address issues of social and racial justice, and gender equality that have erupted as central issues in the following months and years. The 12-year-old Independent always focuses on “discovery and context” at its annual fairs, but this will be its first event to focus on art of the previous century.

“We’re trying to sort that out from a generational, geographic, cultural perspective—those things mean different things to different people in terms of the art space,” Dee says.

As is evident at the current Venice Biennale—the exhibition in Italy that runs through the end of November—there has been a generational shift merging historical and contemporary themes “in collector’s mindsets and in museum curation and practices,” Dee says.

The curator of the biennale, Cecilia Alemani, looked to British-Mexican surrealist artist Leonora Carrington as inspiration, titling the exhibition *The Milk of Dreams* for a book by Carrington of that name. Rising female artists of today are looking back to artists such as these and finding precedent for their own work, Dee says. “There’s been a pendulum swing and a shift in the market as a result of Venice—it put a flag on things people were observing anecdotally.”

Within the Independent 20th Century’s artistic program, which was selected by Matthew Higgs —the fair’s founding curatorial advisor—will be dueling versions of feminism.

McNeely was a pioneer of the movement in the 1970s, but her narrative paintings didn’t get recognized then “because her work was so deeply personal,” Dee says. “She was talking about the physical trauma of female-hood in all its explicit forms,” but at a time when feminism was more of a political movement driven by the academic elite.

Today, McNeely’s work, being presented by New York’s James Fuentes gallery, feels urgent and necessary and museums are taking an interest, Dee says.

Also at the fair, New York’s Salon 94 Design will show the sculptural furniture and design of Kate Millet, who wrote the classic radical feminist text *Sexual Politics* in 1970. Millet, who was part of the Fluxus art movement, created a “fantasy furniture” series in the mid-1960s of anthropomorphic wooden sculptures that Independent described as “a playful take on coupling and domestic life.”

Several galleries will highlight Black abstract painters, from New York's Garth Greenan Gallery's presentation of the well-known artist Al Loving —who was the first African American artist to have a solo exhibition in 1969 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York—to Joe Ray, a little known Black conceptual artist who Dee says “will be a huge discovery at the fair.”

Although Ray, who studied at CalArts and still lives in Los Angeles, was connected to many great artists of the 1970s, and was mentored by the artists Nam June Paik and John Baldessari, he wasn't widely known. The Los Angeles gallery Diane Rosenstein will present Ray's work, which takes wide-ranging forms in sculpture, painting, photography, and performance documentation.

Gordon Robichaux gallery in New York and Parker Gallery in Los Angeles are bringing a joint exhibition of works by Gerald Jackson, who Dee describes as “one of the most significant members of Black abstraction in the downtown New York scene of the 1960s.”

The gallerists, Dee notes, are among many young dealers who are bringing forward artists who haven't been well known, and are backing up their findings with scholarship.

“It will be interesting to see these abstract painting positions really play off each other,” at the fair, Dee says.

In the “center of the center” of the upcoming fair, London's Luxembourg + Co. will show a group of Miró paintings from the 1930s executed with tar and sand on Masonite boards by placing them on easels. They will be presented alongside Swiss artist Peter Fischli's painted cardboard sculptures that the Independent said “resemble humble cans of house paint or food.” Displaying the works together is intended to show “a juxtaposition that questions the historical division of art into traditional media.”

New York's Nahmad Contemporary also will reveal another side of a well-known artist in their presentation of earlier works by Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico known as the Gladiators. Dee describes the paintings as having a kind of “operative narrative” to them depicted through a “kind of Roman storytelling interaction of figures.” “We're trying to play with these canonical artists in ways that aren't typically seen,” Dee says.

Independent 20th Century will be presented at the Battery Maritime Building at Cipriani South Street in New York. The fair opens to invitation-only guests on Thursday, Sept. 8 and to the general public from Sept. 9-11.