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From Hair-Based Performance Art to a Miniature Gowanus, 13 Highlights of Volta New York



Photo © Chloe Wyma
"I Voted" by Wilmer Wilson IV, Conner Contemporary Art, Washington, DC

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Art fairs: Heart 'em or hate 'em, you'll probably like **Volta**. Convivially located a stone's throw from the Empire State building on the eleventh floor at 7 West 34th Street, the invitational solo project show, now in its eighth edition, has earned a reputation as the most accessible and pleasant stop on New York's [Armory Week fair circuit](#).

Volta may be the viewer's art fair, but dealers seemed to be having a good time too. **Jimi Dams**, director of New York's **Envoy Enterprises**, quoted Flaubert in his appraisal of the ubiquitous multi-artist booths at other fairs: "too much of a good thing... is a bad thing." At Volta, however, "every gallery has only one artist, so as a viewer you get a sense of the artist's vision."

Although no collectors were available for comment, **ARTINFO** did overhear one buyer lament, "my eight-year old has expensive tastes, it's draining my art budget." Costly foie gras-devouring fifth graders aside, Volta's VIP preview saw plenty of prime collector action. The overall mood was bustling and positive. Most gallerists reported "major interest" within the first two hours; and Copenhagen's **Larmgalleri** had sold out all but one monumental painting by Biennale alum **Nicola Samori**.

Save for **Sanja Ivekovic**, who currently has a solo show at **MoMA**, there were few truly familiar names attached to the 80 galleries that have booths here. After all, Volta is a go-to fair for discovering emerging talent, not for gobbling up known quantities. Despite a few inevitable schlocky moments (paintings of dollar signs, mopy emo girls, and hyperbolically endowed cattle) and some so-so finish-fetish throwbacks, Volta's lineup was full of happy surprises. Portraiture emerged as a discernable trend. At Volta — [as at fashion week](#) — “the Lady” is back (see **Francesco Merletti's** eccentric grand-dames or **Timotheus Tomicke's** pseudo-baroque allegorical photo portraits). Alas, the Lady makes her entrance only to be put into post-**Cindy Sherman** quotation marks by **Oreet Ashery**, **Christa Joo**, and **Zackary Drucker**, who navigate the terrain of sexuality, identity, and advertising with aplomb.

From portraits to performance, here are our favorite works of VOLTA 2012:

1) "Voted," Wilmer Wilson IV, Conner Contemporary Art, Washington D.C.

For her maiden voyage to Volta NY, D.C. gallerist **Leigh Conner** was excited to bring performance art. Unlike other fairs, “Volta is the right platform for endurance performance,” she says, “because people are actually contemplating the work.” Throughout the day, **Wilmer Wilson** painstakingly covered his body in “I Voted” stickers, commenting on the lack of representative government in his hometown of Washington D.C. Though he was mute, his actions spoke louder than words.

2) "American Flags," Erika Keck, Envoy Enterprises, New York

Keck's tattered and frayed canvases were some of the most exciting abstract work at Volta this year. I see faint echoes of Jasper John's "Flag" somewhere in this hot mess.

3) "Two Sugars Would be Great (not exactly Bar Italia but will do)," Lisa Lounila, Kalmama & Pippo Gallery, Helsinki

This year, Volta and the Armory alike (both owned by **Merchandise Mart**) put the spotlight on galleries hailing from the Nordic countries. Gallerist **Pilvi Kalhama** said the attention paid to Nordic galleries “made it an easier decision to come here.” We're glad she did. Otherwise we wouldn't have seen Finish artist **Lisa Lounila's** delightfully low-key palladium sculptures cast from mundane objects. (We also love her oh-so-mundane title.)

4) "Wo ist Schneewittchen?," Carl Emmanuel Wolff, Schuebbe Projects, Dusseldorf

Carl Emmanuel Woff usually places his sculptures in obscure wooded areas in rural Germany, but they looked pretty great at Volta. “Wo ist Schneewittchen?,” incorporating a phalanx of formidable, faceless figures made from firecrackers — evokes **Niki de Saint Phalle's** “Bride” statues, but he seems to have another woman in mind. The title translates to “Where is Snow White?” [Maybe he's got the fairytale fever...](#)

5) Christa Joo Hyun D'Angelo, Galerie Suvi Lehtinen, Berlin

Christa Joo Hyun D'Angelo's frenetic collage wallpaper of supermodels and kitty cats critiques commodity fetishism by mimicking the brainwashing strategies of advertising. It must be working, because I want it...

6) Zackary Drucker, Luis de Jesus, Los Angeles

Installed next door to Sanja Ivekovic, Los Angeles artist **Zackary Drucker's** LED light box portraits of transfemale nudes pack serious punch. While they initially recall the oversexed fetishism of **Helmut Newton**, Drucker's portraits relay a gender queer stance on sexuality and identity. The booth — which was augmented with intimate recordings of pillow talk — was one of the most provocative in the fair.

7) Mindaugas Lukošaitis, Galerija Vartai, Vilnius

Drawings of any kind were a rare sight in this year's Volta Fair. Lithuanian draughtsman **Mindaugas Lukošaitis's** quirky little figurative drawings were charmers.

8) "Asgar/Gabriel," Brotkunsthalle, Vienna

According to artist/critic **Marc Quinn**, "**Asgar/Gabriel** are the Poussin of the rave generation." I would have said the Delacroix for the mescaline and Smirnoff Ice generation, but whatever. Their hyper-kitsch orgiastic paintings have irresistible "so bad its good" clusterfuck appeal.

9) "Hairoism," Oreet Ashery, Pristine Galerie, Monterrey

This bizarre photograph is a document of an interactive live performance where artist **Oreet Ashery** used hair donated by audience members to impersonate public figures including **Moshe Dayan**, **Abu Marzook**, **Avigdor Lieberman**, **Yasser Arafat**, and **Ringo Starr**. The photos show the last stage of the performance, where she is fully covered in patchy grafts of other people's hair and looks so weird she no longer resembles anyone.

10) "Window with a View of Gowanus Heights," Patrick Jacobs, The Pool NYC, New York

Easy to miss, but hard to forget, **Patrick Jacob's** diminutive trompe l'oeil dioramas are hidden gems in Volta's crown. Viewed through circular glass lenses, Jacob's interiors of Brooklyn railroad apartments create a striking illusion of a seemingly infinite regress within a tiny space (if only I had that effect in my apartment!).

11) "Ball and Chain," James Clar, Blythe Projects, Los Angeles

The title might suggest "the ol' ball and chain," but **James Clar's** futuristic light sculpture is anything but. This incandescent sphere of white and purple lights stood out in a show largely dominated by painting. Clar holds a patent (and has two pending) for technologies he developed while creating this unusual work, which looks like something out of "Minority Report."

12) "Terms of Endearment," Trevor Guthrie, Barbarian Art Gallery, Zurich

Best. Bathroom. Art. Ever.

13) "The Right One (the Pearls of the Revolution)," Sanja Ivekovic, Espaivisor, Visor Gallery, Valencia

Juxtapositions of Yugoslav partisans and pearl-toting fashion models aren't exactly your standard 'fair art' cuisine. But that's why we love Croatian artist **Sanja Ivekovic**, whose current solo show at MoMA will likely make her an art star. Modest-sounding dealer **Mira Bernabea** said he expects to sell at least two of her works by the end of the week. Agitprop never looked this good!

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