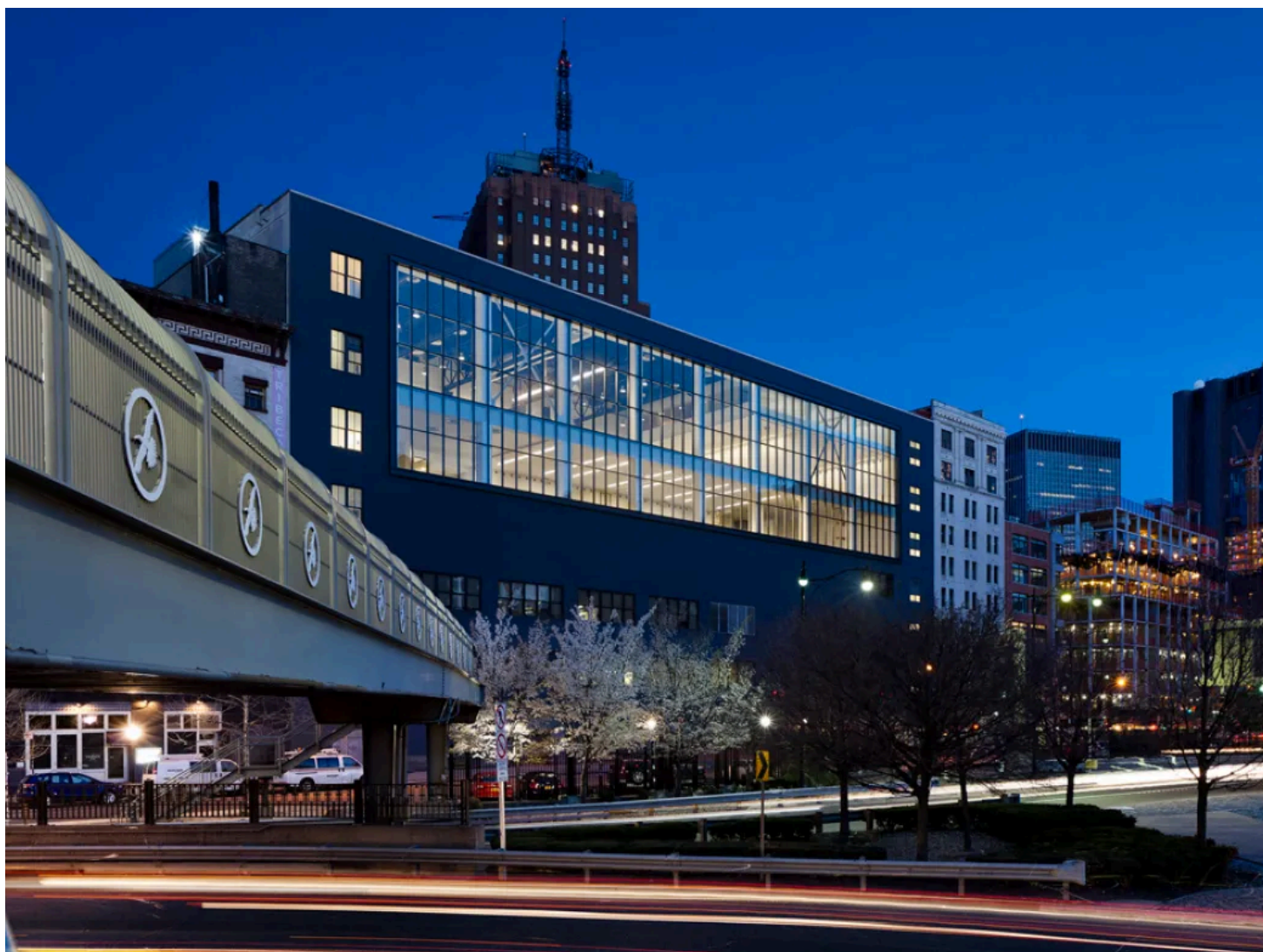


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The Best Booths at Independent Art Fair, From a Porcelain Janitor's Cart to Abstract Ledger Drawings

BY **MAXIMILIANO DURÓN**

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Spring Studios in Tribeca is the home of Independent's main New York fair.

COURTESY INDEPENDENT AND SPRING STUDIOS

Independent opened its 2025 edition on a bright and sunny New York morning, with natural light pouring into the upper levels of Spring Studios, the fair's longtime home.

From 11 a.m., the aisles and various nooks and crannies hosting exhibitors buzzed with collectors.

Opening the day after Frieze New York and at the same time as TEFAF uptown, Independent offers an alternative to the more blue-chip offerings of Frieze and a more contemporary and on-the-pulse take than TEFAF. With 82 exhibitors, it's also one of the smaller fairs this week and manageable in less than two hours. (NADA, which moved to a new location, is the largest of the week's fairs with over 120, while TEFAF is around 90 and Frieze has around 65.)

Independent, which is invitation-only, features strong curation, thanks to a collaboration between founder and director Elizabeth Dee and Matthew Higgs, the executive director of White Columns and the fair's curatorial adviser. This year's fair is no exception, presenting a wide array of quality art. As with years past, several artists are making their New York debuts through presentations here. (A wall near the entrance identifies those artists, helping visitors know who to watch.)

Below, a look at the best booths at Independent, which runs through Sunday, May 11, at Spring Studios in Tribeca.

Pope.L at Mitchell-Innes & Nash



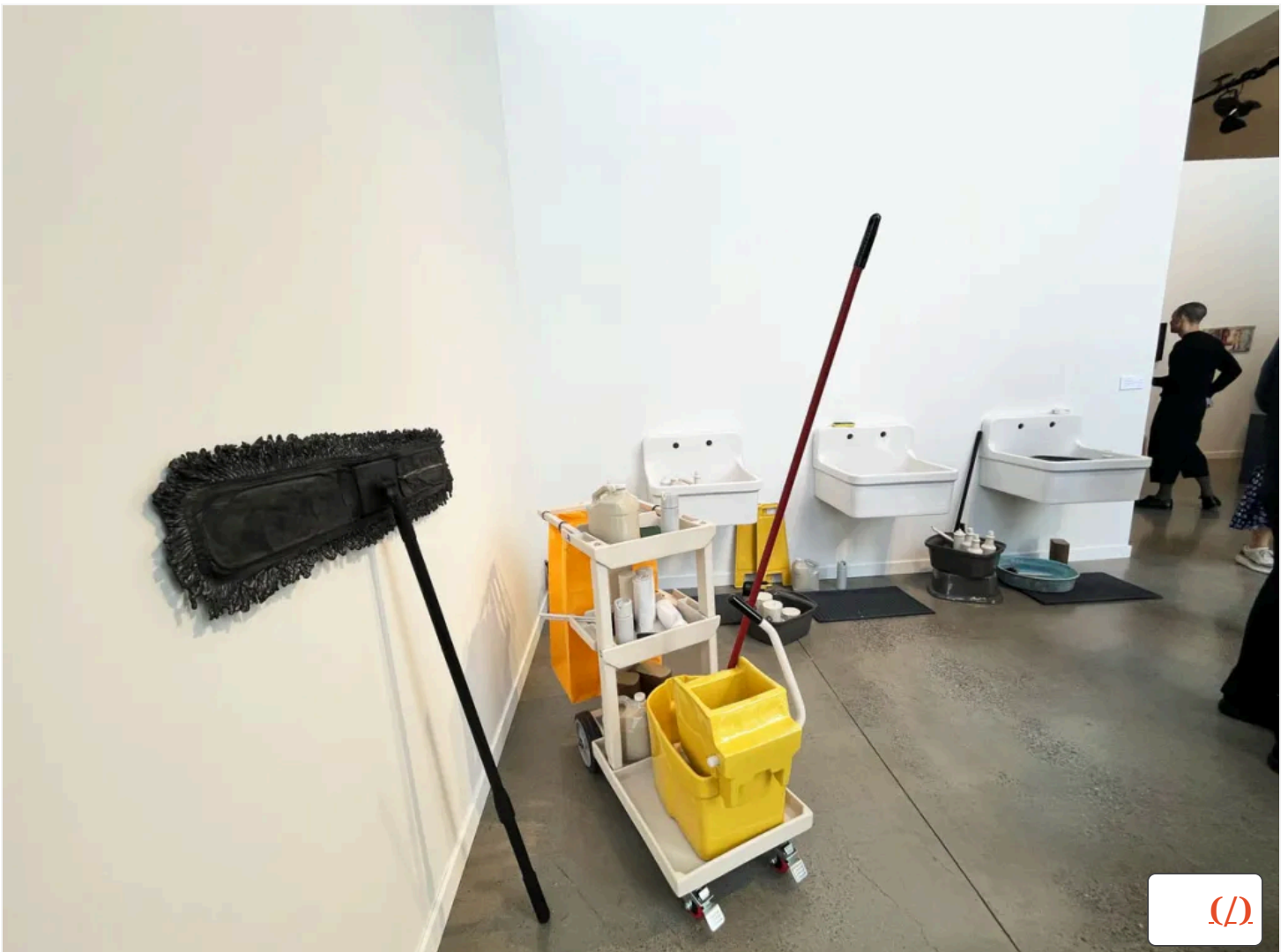
Pope.L, *In the Mist of Winter*, 2023.

Photo : Maximiliano Durón/ARTnews

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, which **closed its Chelsea space** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/mitchell-innes-and-nash-gallery-closes-chelsea-space-transitions-advisory-1234710468/>) last year to become a project-based advisory, devotes nearly every inch of its booth to a tribute to Pope.L, the visionary artist who died in 2023. The gallery, which represented Pope.L for 17 years, presents a group of works engaging with iconic Black figures across history. In one corner hangs *Harriet Tubman Spins the Universe* (1998–2017), a mixed-media abstraction tied to a 1992 performance at Horodner Romley Gallery. Nearby are smaller drawings that quite literally show Tubman turning the world. A series of sculptures reimagine O. J. Simpson's

literally show Tubman turning the world. A series of sculptures reimagine O.J. Simpson's infamous white Ford Bronco as giant popsicles—one rendered bright red instead of white. Two works incorporate masks of Barack Obama and Condoleezza Rice, while a small drawing plainly illustrates its caption: "Maya Angelou's car breaks down on the way to the White House reception." My favorite, however, is a painting on a pair of boxer shorts, scrawled with the line: "In the midst of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer."

Michelle Grabner at Abattoir Gallery



Michelle Grabner's installation at Independent.

Photo : Maximiliano Durón/ARTnews

Another well-established artist making a strong showing at Independent is Michelle Grabner. Since her 2017 Arts/Industry residency at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, Grabner has built a close relationship with the program, which gives artists access to Kohler's production lines. At Cleveland gallery Abattoir's booth, she presents a charming display of porcelain objects: sinks pulled straight from the line, a janitor's cart stocked with a yellow mop bucket, toilet paper, and cleaning supplies. There are also several bronze brooms, oil-painted in black.

Gallery founder Lisa Kurzner told *ARTnews* that she likely has the fair's most affordable work: a porcelain toilet paper roll priced at just \$80. She even brought tote bags so buyers can carry them home. The gesture, she said, is meant to "undercut the masterpiece system."

Jean-Claude Silbermann at Galerie Sator



Works by Jean-Claude Silbermann.

Photo : Maximiliano Durón/ARTnews

On the flip side, Paris-based Galerie Sator has brought a solo presentation by an woefully underknown artist. Born in 1935, 11 years after André Breton penned the *Surrealist Manifesto*, Jean-Claude Silbermann is considered the last living French Surrealist. In his twenties, he sought out Breton and declared himself a Surrealist; Breton embraced the young artist. (A 1955 photograph **republished by the New York Times** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/05/arts/design/the-last-surrealist.html>) this week, shows him strolling through Saint-Cirq La Popie with Breton, Meret Oppenheim, and others.)

Despite appearing in the Centre Pompidou's blockbuster Surrealism show last year, Silbermann remains of rather modest fame. The presentation at Independent aims to change that. Rather than show historical works, dealer Vincent Sator chose recent pieces completed between 2022 and 2024. These shaped canvases, carved to show the figures sans background, pulse with the same Surrealist dynamism that has long defined Silbermann's work. In one, a figure with a yellow-green mushroom for a head stands beside a man in a blue suit cradling his head in his arms; to their left a monster-like figure sprouts a tree from its skull. The man's trousers transform into the long neck of a peacock, who holds them all up. It's pure wonderful whimsy.

Terran Last Gun at Diane Rosenstein Gallery





A ledger drawing by Terran Last Gun.

Photo : Maximiliano Durón/ARTnews

Ledger drawings have a long history among Native American artists, dating back to the 1860s. Traditionally, they depicted figurative scenes from everyday Indigenous life. Since 2020, however, Terran Last Gun (Piikani/Blackfeet) has worked to revitalize the form. It began out of necessity: known primarily as a printmaker, Last Gun lost access to a print studio during the pandemic and needed another outlet. He turned to ledger books—more accessible materials at the time. (His father, also a ledger artist, provided some of the first books.) For this body of work, he draws on ledgers from Blaine County, Montana, roughly three hours from Browning, the seat of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation where he was born.

Last Gun, however, approaches his ledger drawings via abstraction. At first glance this might evoke high Minimalism, but his reference point is an Indigenous art tradition that predates that movement by centuries. The works on view feature trapezoids, grids of circles, and squares. Last Gun's color choice is alluring, opting for pale blues, sea greens, mellow yellows, and other soft hues rendered in colored pencil. It gives these works a delicateness that Minimalism often lacks.

Last Gun has said he is less concerned with the content of the ledgers than in their formal qualities, paying close attention to variations in the handwritten cursives. Some are more legible than others. But through it all, there's intention in each work; he's thinking deeply

about when each ledger was written and what was going on in the US at the time, especially to the Piikani.

Anna Betbeze at Nina Johnson



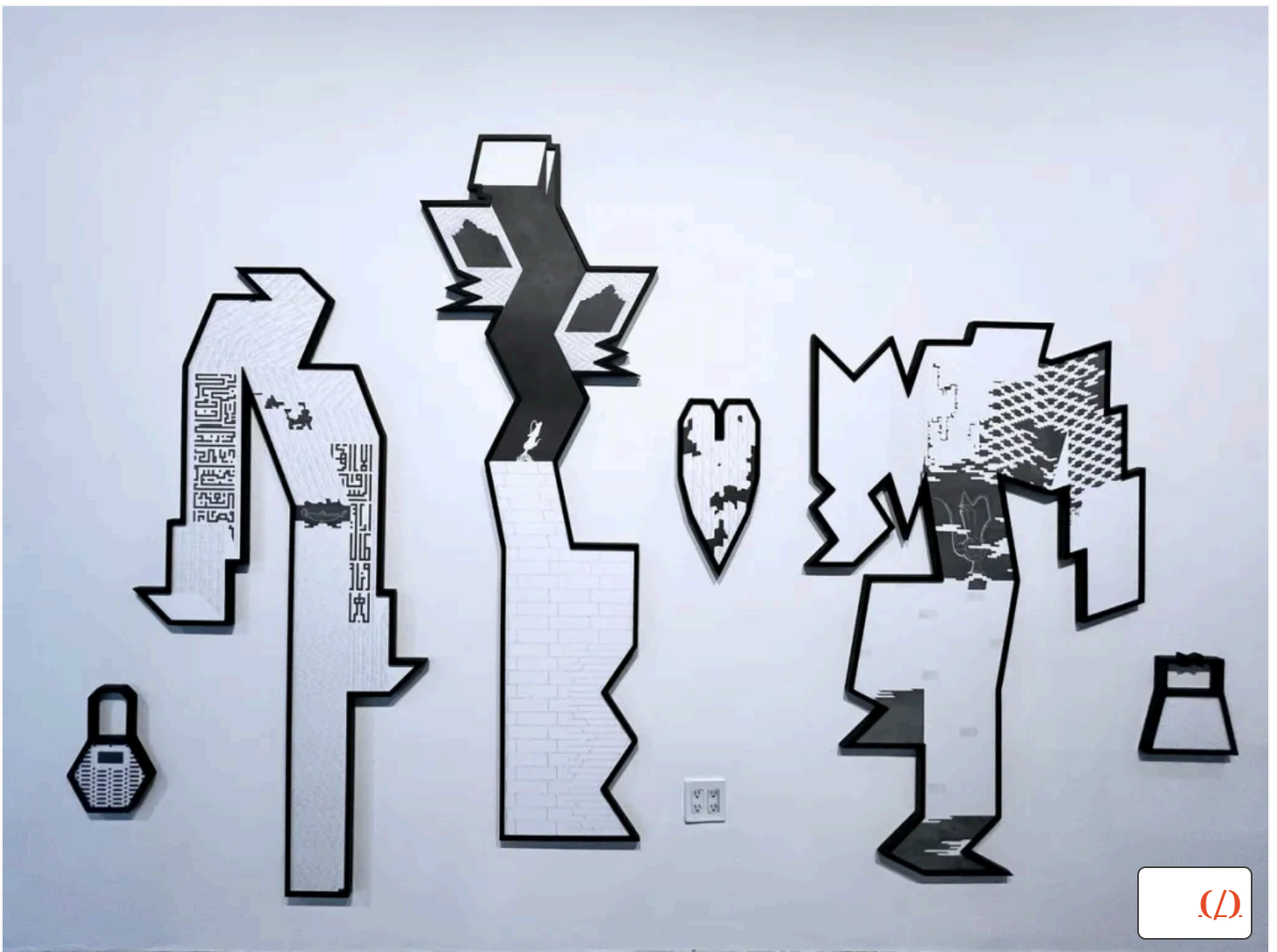
Two sculptures by Anna Betbeze.

Photo : Maximiliano Durón/ARTnews

As part of a two-person presentation with Rochelle Feinstein, Anna Betbeze presents a new body of work. In her latest foray into three-dimensional sculpture, Betbeze has created two totemic pieces marked by a dynamic use of color. To create them, she dips different swaths of silk or velvet—in blacks, red, yellow, magenta, blue—into an acid bath, producing a wet-on-wet, almost gluey texture. (At times, she applies resin to preserve the same.) She wraps some fabrics around boxes of varying sizes, while others hang freely from the sculpture.

The resulting forms possess an enigmatic presence and beauty, drawing you in, while never fully revealing themselves.

Nooshin Askami at Cibrián



View of Nooshin Askami's presentation at Independent.

Photo : Maximiliano Durón/ARTnews

On one wall on the ground floor of the fair hangs a solo presentation by Noonshin Askami,

featuring six works on paper. The largest three take the form of many-sided polygons that resemble bodies or even a fluid script. Each contain delicate abstract pencil drawings. For this series, Askami draws on a trope from Persian literature called *Shahrashoub*, which translates to “city-chaos/a beauty who turns the city into chaos.” Typically, it serves as a guidebook to cruising sites in a given city. These angular drawings, then, act as roadmaps for cruising—sprawling like a city and illegible to outsiders. The maze-like marks or ornate lamps perhaps represent what you might encounter along the way.

Amel Bashier at Addis Fine Art



Two paintings by Amel Bashier.

Photo : Maximiliano Durón/ARTnews

Paris-based artist Amel Bashier’s new suite of paintings explores the complex romantic relationships between women and men. Her canvases feature strong female figures

relationships between women and men. Her canvases feature strong female figures navigating various stages of romance. In one, a green vine climbs her body, entangling and entrapping her. Nearby, a painting depicts three women surrounding a sleeping baby; two watch over the infant, while the third sleeps, a dream bubble rising from her head. The vine is still present here, though it seems less threatening.

Another work shows the end of a relationship: seated at a table, she holds a mask in front of her face, an indication of the self she hides within the relationship perhaps. Both she and the man opposite her hold a rose: his droops downward, while hers points upward. On the table is a vase containing a heart from which three roses spring. To the left is a pair of scissors that no doubt was used to sever the couple's roses from this beating heart. In the act of uncoupling, she has found freedom.

