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Expo Chicago 2017

An ambitious Expo Chicago showed positive signs of a refined personality, an adventurous pioneering of emerging galleries and artists, as well as an exciting off-site collaboration with Palais de Tokyo

by HARRIET THORPE

When an art fair builds an identity, gallerists, collectors and visitors alike begin to understand how to behave under its roof. A code of conduct is established in the broad space, which essentially brings together many identities and brands, and thus the spirit of the fair becomes more collaborative and cohesive. After an economic and identity crisis, the historic art fair Art Chicago, founded in 1980, rebranded itself in 2012 as Expo Chicago and gained a determined new director, Tony Karman. Now in its sixth year, it is showing signs of forming a new identity rooted in a celebration of modern and contemporary American art and pioneering a journey to discover emerging galleries and artists who celebrate that legacy.

A generation of established US contemporary artists dominated the booths of the leading international galleries, setting a rebellious, experimental and individualistic tone: Gagosian showed Ed Ruscha, Richard Prince and Chris Burden. Galerie Daniel Templon showed Julian Schnabel and Gregory Crewdson, while David Zwirner dedicated half of its large booth to William Eggleston.



Wilmer Wilson IV, detail of Boston Fabric, 2015-2017, at Connersmith, EXPO Chicago 2017. Photograph: Harriet Thorpe.

Across the wider fair, paint was thick, strokes were bold, contrast was high, influences were urban, photography influential and the line between figuration and abstraction seemed more blurred than ever. A younger generation of new US artists could be seen dipping into the past 50 years of American art, with the humorous and slightly dark attitude of the aforementioned established contemporary artists, while adding a whole new set of contemporary influences from the internet, society and the city.



Wilmer Wilson IV, installation view at Connersmith, EXPO Chicago 2017. Photograph: Harriet Thorpe.

A majority of US-based galleries took part in Expo Chicago and consequently ended up stealing the show. Washington DC-based gallery Connersmith presented US artist Wilmer Wilson IV's plywood boards collaged with urban flyers and old lottery tickets, leaning casually against the walls of the booth, a contemplation of the ephemeral nature of an urban existence.