

6 Paintings to Die for at the ADAA's 2016 Edition of The Art Show

In the spirit of not wanting to pit Modern against Contemporary, or group show against solo show, the Observer has decided to select the six paintings at this year's ADAA/The Art Show that stood out among the rest. It was tough deciding, as this year's fair is truly better and more diverse than ever.

We saw brilliant solo booths by Contemporary artists like Barry Le Va, Marilyn Minter, Trenton Doyle Hancock and Carolee Schneemann, among others, and gorgeous paintings by art historical heavyweights like Pablo Picasso, Fairfield Porter, Milton Avery, Willem de Kooning, Donald Judd and Joan Miró. But the following works stood out thanks to their unusual perspectives, unique processes and, of course, their irresistible beauty. Look for them when you're there, and who knows; maybe some of them are still available?



Forrest Bess, *Untitled*. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman and the Observer

Forrest Bess, *Untitled*, No date

The first selection is one of Forrest Bess's twisted Modernist symbolologies, which can be found stealthily nestled in the back of Betty Cunningham's knockout booth. The Texas-born visionary, who was championed by legendary NYC art dealer Betty Parsons, had some interesting theories on alchemy and hermaphroditic evolution—a worldview within which his crusty little abstractions only played a small part. And despite isolating himself in a small fishing shack in the tiny Texan town of Chinquapin, he remained extremely curious until the end of his life, having intense correspondences with figures such as renowned art critic Meyer Schapiro and sexologist John Money. This untitled and undated work by Bess looks like it was made with a trowel and a stick, yet it's nevertheless one of the most delicate and complex abstractions in a hall filled with great Modernists.

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Lee Bontecou, *Untitled*, 1964. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman and the Observer

Lee Bontecou, *Untitled*, 1964

Ok, it's not technically a painting, but this selection was a no-brainer, and it pretty much floored us as we rounded the corner of Acquavella's power-packed booth. At only 25 x 16 inches, *Untitled*, 1964 is one of the tinier Lee Bontecou steel and wire constructions you'll find, but it carries the psychological weight of a massive Rothko or Pollock. Half mollusk, half suit of armor, this cage-like tent of horrors instantly gives you the creeps, but you can't take your eyes off of its seductive forms and patterns. And don't forget, this was made in the early '60s. "Nice sailboat painting, Jimmy... Nice steel death mask Lee!?!?" But this Rhode Island-born sculptor clearly wasn't waiting around for a cotillion. She was one of the first female artists to weld in her work, and she was also famous for withdrawing from the art world completely, despite nearly unanimous critical success. Another beautiful freak—I'm starting to see a pattern here.

McArthur Binion, *History: of: Application: One*, 1978. Photo: Courtesy of Galerie Lelong and McArthur Binion

McArthur Binion, *History: of: Application: One*, 1978, Galerie Lelong

McArthur Binion paid tremendous dues to finally get the recognition he deserves, first with the great Chicago Gallery Kavi Gupta in 2013, and then with a powerful show of new work at Galerie Lelong last year. After an avalanche of critical acclaim, Lelong decided to feature Mr. Binion's early abstractions from the 1970s at this year's fair—a series that's a gorgeous blend of unique marks and seductive surfaces. The effect mixes the religiosity of tantric or aboriginal paintings with the subtle inflections of work by international modernists from around the world, such as Brice Marden or Nasreen Mohamedi. Mr. Binion's *History: of: Application: One*, 1978, is the best of the best here; a large oil stick and wax on aluminum work that hovers in the booth like an alien form. The interplay of adjacent graphic blobs of color combined with a highly unusual technique that gives certain areas of the painting a splotchy "melted wax" look makes *Application: One* a particularly hypnotic item that is sure to suck you in.

Catherine Murphy, *Helium Balloon*, 1992. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman and the Observer

Catherine Murphy, *Helium Balloon*, 1992

One of the few painters that have managed to revive realist painting over the years, Catherine Murphy has been awfully influential to legions of young painters during her twenty years of teaching graduate painting at the esteemed Yale School of Art. Ms. Murphy is an artist who introduces abstract patterns into her realistic paintings of complex scenarios. In a typical Murphy, a simple cropped image of a lawn chair, for instance, becomes a crucifix, a color field painting and an idyllic Fragonard painting-in-a-painting, all in one. The oil painting "Helium Balloon" from 1992, which radiates from the back of the Peter Freeman Inc. booth, depicts a pink and metallic helium-filled balloon (emblazoned with cartoon ballet girls) that sits delicately at the top of a ceiling. The pink balloon, with its curling plastic ribbon and wrinkled face, is enjoyably rendered with breathtaking detail, yet its push-pull balance against a corner of robin's egg blue wall offers a completely different sense of delight. It's a powerful canvas, bursting with talent and energy, but only one lucky collector gets to take it home.

Hernan Bas, *The imagined atelier of Bruno Hat*, 2016. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong Photo: Daniel Portnoy

Hernan Bas, *The imagined atelier of Bruno Hat*, 2016, Lehmann Maupin

One artist that we've had our eyes on and who seems to have recently taken his craft to the next level is the 36-year-old Miami Native Hernan Bas, who has been painting "throwback" scenes of storybook artisan lifestyles for years. While his elaborately painted folding screen titled *The Fourth of June (Eton)* is the centerpiece of Lehmann Maupin's fair booth, the real prize of this show is a five by four-foot painting titled *The imagined atelier of Bruno Hat*, 2016, which features an invented steely eyed young sculptor inside his decadent studio, encircled by a grouping of his sculptural busts. Bas' work clearly borrows from early 20th century painters like Schiele and Matisse, but he somehow blends his slew of influences together into a singular pastiche style that's all his own. Much like Ms. Murphy, Mr. Bas wins the day by balancing shapely compositions of bold color while simultaneously forging scrupulous details in his painting, as in the miniature brushstrokes in the still life painting within his painting, or the pungent smears of red clay layered upon this idealized artist's work apron. Mr. Bas should be applauded for the unrelenting intensity he brings to his work, and *Bruno Hat* could be one of his greatest works to date.

Bob Thompson, *The Good Samaritan*, 1965. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman and the Observer

Bob Thompson, *The Good Samaritan*, 1965, Donald Morris Gallery

Another art historical enigma, the late African-American painter Bob Thompson gets a tremendous spotlight at the fair with a solo booth, courtesy of the Michigan-based gallery Donald Morris. Thompson was a remarkable painter who appropriated religious paintings by old masters, transforming them into radiant studies of pure color and form. This painting, titled *The Good Samaritan*, was based on a parable told by Jesus in the Bible and was a popular theme in art, finding its way into the oeuvres of a variety of artists from Ingres to van Gogh. Though each work in this booth is magnificent in its own way, this painting stuck out as a masterpiece of twisting diagonals, intertwined brushstrokes and shifting planes. A budding painter could sit in this booth for weeks and glean a lifetime of learning from this master, whose life was tragically cut short because of a heroin overdose. But the 1,000 or so paintings he left us are a gift; go enjoy them.

'Marvel's Agent Carter' Season 2 Finale Recap: Hollywood Ending

Or is that series finale?

L-R: James D'Arcy, Hayley Atwell, Chad Michael Murray, Dominic Cooper, and Reggie Austin in *Marvel's Agent Carter*. (photo: Kelsey McNeal/ABC)

This was likely the last episode of *Agent Carter*, which would have been upsetting even if this hadn't been a weak finale. It didn't wrap up a lot of the thematic elements in a satisfying way, even if the plot

ultimately came together. My disappointment is less with how things ended than with the execution — mostly devoid of tension and with very slow pacing.

The episode starts where last week's ended. Peggy pulls a gun on Thompson, threatening to shoot if he tries to detonate his bomb. Instead, something explodes in the factory, and the three agents rush in to investigate. Zero matter lies all over the floor in convenient blobs so our heroes can avoid it. They find Dr. Wilkes, still alive and cured of his zero matter affliction, which he simply expelled from his body. I'm not sure this logic checks out, because how could it have given him his body back without being inside him, but whatever. Whitney is also alive, so only evil Vernon was the victim of the blast. Whitney absorbs all the zero matter into herself and it is really cool and villainous and it seemed to be going somewhere cool.

And then the magic evaporates into the slowest foot chase ever. Jarvis ends it when he hits Whitney with his car, Howard Stark in the back seat. Samberly rolls up in his car, and they bolt. Howard is a shining light of inappropriate jokes and I can only hope that someone at Marvel is working on a Howard and Jarvis web series where they raise Tony. Call me Marvel. I've got ideas.

Meanwhile, L.A.'s most romantic mobster, Joseph Manfredi, worries that Whitney is losing her mind. She spends all day locked in her room, writing on the wall. He tells his grandmother that she's not acting like the girl he fell for because of the zero matter, which shows he's just another man who doesn't understand her. This is the real Whitney — vindictive, intelligent, power-obsessed. I thought this would build into some encounter between the two, but the episode veers out of this territory.

Instead, Manfredi goes to Howard's house to enlist their help in saving Whitney from the zero matter. Apparently he and Howard go way back, which is hilarious but weird. Wilkes points out that Whitney has an "innate lust for power," which Manfredi shrugs off. Love is blind, I guess. Manfredi will lure Whitney out of her room while they take photos of what she's been inventing, a device to reopen the gap so she can pull more zero matter. Instead, they'll build the device and open the rift, separate Whitney from the zero matter, and knock it back in.

Manfredi asks Whitney to help him intimidate one of his crew while Peggy and Sousa sneak into her room. Again, the pacing here is odd. Peggy and Sousa leisurely take photos and banter until they hear Whitney outside and run, but not before Sousa changes one of her diagrams to slow her down. This never comes up again.

Instead, our three scientists — Stark, Wilkes, and Samberly — fight over what to name the machine. Peggy uses flattery to move it along because she is the only competent person on this show. Except for Jarvis. Cut all our heroes working together to finish the machine, including Howard hitting on Rose, which is amazing. I'm just going to pretend that Rose is Tony's mother. Sousa and Wilkes work together, and Wilkes apologizes for being the worst. Peggy and Jarvis work together and she asks about Ana because she's a nice person. Thompson interrupts to ask how he can help, and Peggy tells him to

collect dinner orders. YES.

They decide to open the rift on Howard's studio lot, out of harm's way. Wilkes warns everyone that if they get too close, they'll get sucked in, an indelicate foreshadowing. Incidentally, the rift looks a lot like the eye of Sauron.

While they wait for Whitney, Thompson and Peggy have a sexually charged exchange where she promises she won't turn him in for working with Masters. Thompson is the worst, but their chemistry cannot be denied. He gives Peggy Vernon's not-Hydra pin, which is really a key. and then Whitney arrives. She looks really great. What a fun villain!

Alas, she does no fun villain stuff. Instead, they perfectly execute their plan What a boring, simple demise for a character that was anything but. Peggy didn't even have a showdown with Whitney! Maybe that's the danger of making a villain whose powers are "kills everything with super goo," but you have to work with what you've got, right?

Instead, complications arise with the rift itself, because Howard's device stops working. The backup device is too close to the rift — anyone who goes for it will get sucked in. They volunteer to do it in quick succession, only to realize that Sousa has already tied himself to a pole and is halfway there. The cord is clearly slipping as he cranks it closed, but no one jumps to grab it until it breaks, when Peggy tries to pull him down. The tension here felt manufactured.

The gamma ray gun that could close the gap isn't charged yet, but Jarvis has an idea. He gets Howard's hover car, puts the gamma core in it, and remotely flies it into the rift. Boom. The day is saved, without any sacrifices or emotional reveals or drama. This is the climax of a whole season?

Then everything wraps up. Howard gives Wilkes a job, and Peggy lets Wilkes down easy. She apologizes for getting Ana hurt, but Ana doesn't accept that she did anything wrong and simply hugs her. It's a nice moment.

Whitney is in a mental asylum, lost in her mind where she imagines her dead husband telling her she can rise again. Manfredi visits with flowers, though an orderly warns that she'll just use them to rip open her face. Ouch.

Jarvis drives Peggy to the S.S.R. office, where he tries to convince her to stay in L.A. She tells him she has a lot of reasons to go back to New York, including her roommate Angie. But there is one reason to stay: Sousa.

In his office, Sousa tells her that her actions at the studio were "ill-advised and reckless." According to her very own code of conduct, she should have let him die. It's cute and they're just oozing chemistry and if I wasn't on board already this would have worked. Instead of responding, Peggy kisses him. Many fans complained on social media that the first season of this show was devoid of a romantic subplot, and

this season heavily featured one, but I'm not bothered by the change. That's life — even female super spies fall in love.

Thompson, meanwhile, is packing for New York when Sousa calls to let him know Peggy's going to take some more vacation time. A knock on the door makes Thompson hang up, where he's shot by a masked, gloved assassin. They take Peggy's file and leave. The end.

Despite the lackluster finale, I hope the show returns. We know Peggy makes it until at least 2014 — don't you want to see what happens in those sixty-seven years? I want Peggy in 1955 and 1968 and 1974 and in Washington and London and Moscow. I want to know what happens to Dottie and Whitney and Angie and Sousa. There are so few stories about female superheroes, and I don't want to lose one of the only one's we've got.

But maybe if ABC doesn't bring it back, maybe it will become a cult favorite and Netflix will give us four ninety-minute episodes in eight years. Stranger things have happened.