

M A R G A R E T
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P R O J E C T S

Lobster & Canary

Tegene Kunbi: Making Colors Speak

By Daniel A. Rabuzzi
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Knucklehead, 2014
Oil on canvas, 39 x 34 inches (100 x 87 cm)

Contemporary art and design flooded NYC this week, with Frieze and a dozen-odd smaller art fairs now rivaling the Armory Show week in March. The lobster and the canary visited two of the fairs-- PULSE and the New Art Dealers Alliance (NADA)--and have this to report.

PULSE and NADA were each gems of thoughtful curation, possessing a warmth and intimacy that invited genuine interaction with the works, the gallerists and the artists. Booth after booth called us in with playful (but not precious or cartoonish) pieces, work that demanded attention without being shrill or bombastic, wielding instead a quiet authority. If one can speak of a sensibility common to a hundred artists working in a wide variety of media and styles it would be a striving to highlight the physicality of the work-- perhaps a response to the digital and the virtual.

The artists at these fairs emphasized the gesture with kneaded impasto, splotches, drips, bold painterly approaches. They highlighted the textures of their materials, crumpling, dimpling and pebbling their surfaces, streaking india ink on canvas, embedding bb pellets in resin, braiding and taping, using nails, bits of glass, wood, ripped paper within the painting.

PULSE and NADA feature smaller, younger galleries who in turn discover new talent. I encountered several artists for the first time whose work I look forward to following for years to come, but the "whoa! stop-me-in-my-tracks" moment was seeing from a distance the luminous color-field paintings by **Tegene Kunbi** in the Margaret Thatcher Projects booth at PULSE. Call it the instantaneous seduction of artwork, the hunger to throw oneself into the art-- I cast fair decorum aside and nearly jogged into the Thatcher booth to see Kunbi's paintings.

The images here do not convey the richness of Kunbi's color schemes, how the colors jump into the eye, how he sets one block in conversation with another and with the viewer. Kunbi layers and articulates, and unabashedly shows us the artist's hand with his brushwork. He evokes worlds--he is an alchemist like Klee, Rothko, Mitchell, Diebenkorn, Frankenthaler. Kunbi had me thinking of Kandinsky on the spirituality of art. Kunbi reminds us how powerful painting can be in the hands of a confident practitioner. And, in an age wedded to irony and pusillanimous when it comes to any talk of artistic verities, Kunbi unironically presents us with Beauty-- surely still one of the main points of Art.