

Art in America

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Elegance and Flamboyance at the Armory: Walking SOFA

by *Janet Koplos* 04/20/12

Much of the buzz at the opening night of the 15th edition of the SOFA (Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art) fair on Thursday, April 19, was in praise of the exhibition design by New York architect David Ling. Giving the historic Park Avenue Armory an interior sheathing of gallery-white walls that start in the lobby, Ling created a processional entrance that brings visitors into a lounge space with white benches on the floor and huge white boxes of light clustered overhead.



VIEW SLIDESHOW Photo by Annie Watt; Juha Koskela Bracelet, 2011 Sterling silver mokume gane bracelet 3In x 1 1/2In x 2 1/4In Aaron Faber Gallery;

The center aisle seems wider and the whole fair looks exceptionally cohesive and elegant. SOFA founder Mark Lyman, now operating as The Art Fair Company, based in Chicago, conceded that the gallery space was about 1000 square feet smaller this year, at about 15,000 square feet, which may be where some of the spaciousness throughout comes from. But what seems to be missing is the gimcrack and garish crafts that often mar the back precincts of the fair. Instead the tone was set by the midcentury modernist ceramic vessels of Hans Coper and Lucie Rie in the giant poster on the Armory exterior and represented in the show by Erskine, Hall & Coe of London.

In the past, glass objects have sometimes dominated the SOFA displays (here the most spectacular is Berengo Studio 1989 of Murano & Venice and Heller of New York). But this year the quantity of studio jewelry is striking, with Sienna Gallery (Lenox, MA) grabbing attention with the display of Lola Brooks's reticulated pendants and heart- or bow-shaped brooches of such disparate materials as stainless steel, ivory and rhinestones, displayed on framed needlepoint reproductions of the Mona Lisa and on a stuffed fawn, among other unorthodox backdrops.

There are the jewelry specialists—Charon Kransen and Aaron Faber (NYC), Gallery Loupe (Montclair, NJ) and Ornamentum (Hudson, NY) in addition to Sienna. Beyond that, Next20 (Dallas) shows 20th-century jewelry by artists including Pol Bury, Claire Falkenstein and Harry Bertoia, and jewelry shows up in unexpected places, such as the booth of Asian ceramics experts Dai Ichi Gallery (NYC) and in the mix presented by Flow (London) and Urban Glass (NYC). Flow also shows hand-built porcelain vessels by the Dutch ceramist Henk Wolvers: large flat-bottom forms with translucent and sometimes perforated walls so thin it seems amazing that they stand. As typical of crafts, much of the work on display at SOFA requires close attention, such as the embroidered atmospheric scenes by Carol Shinn at Jane Sauer Gallery (Santa Fe).

Highlights of studio furniture include the offerings at the booth of William Zimmer (Mendocino, CA) and Scott Jacobson (NYC). The former offers David Ebner's subtle and restrained three-person bench, while the latter presents flamboyant oversize sculptural objects by Yves Boucard.

Among the SOFA special offerings are "Covet," an exhibition and series of projects involving works inspired by museum collections, organized by Ferrin Gallery (Pittsfield, MA) and its neighbor Sienna. The Museum of Arts and Design, in conjunction with its current exhibition, "Swept Away: Dust, Ashes, and Dirt in Contemporary Art and Design," is presenting a sand-painting performance by Joe Mangrum.

SOFA, at the Park Avenue Armory at 67 Street, closes Monday, April 23, at 5 p.m. A lecture series is included in the admission.