

# GARAGE



## Frieze New York Is An Art Fair That Won't Make You Miserable

By SCOTT INDRISEK Apr 26 2019, 2:51pm

Frieze New York, which opens May 2nd on Randall's Island, proves that art fairs aren't always claustrophobic slogs through crowded convention centers. Simply arriving at Frieze has its own chic drama—the easiest way there is via boat. Once on the island, visitors who need a break from the crowds can lounge on the edge of the East River, noshing on food from Foul Witch, a pop-up restaurant concept from the brains behind Brooklyn's Roberta's and Blanca.

Plus, weird and invigorating things happen at Frieze New York! Back in 2017, the artist Roman Ondak was staging a performance piece called *Swap* at Esther Schipper. It involved a sort of rolling barter system where Frieze attendees traded in random items in exchange for new ones (I gave up a Mary Gaitskill paperback and scored a very shady travel case full of a stranger’s prescription medications). While there’s no way of knowing what sort of free drugs will be on offer at Frieze New York this year, there’s plenty of art to take in—as well as public programming and talks with the likes of Sheila Heti, Simone Leigh, and [Whitewalling](#) author Aruna d’Souza.



A still from Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg’s virtual-reality piece *It Will End In Stars*, 2018, presented as part of “Electric.”

Even if it is not as sprawling as the Armory Show, lacking frieze-sized white tent can be daunting — but worth it, if you make the most of your day. “I still feel that fairs are one of the most important hubs of art world activity--not only for sales, but for holistic business opportunities and relationships,” says Loring Randolph, the fair’s artistic director. Her advice? “Think. Listen. Really look. Come more than once, and take your time....There’s certainly something that will ‘spark joy’ (a la Marie Kondo) for everyone.”

Graphic-design nerds might want to gravitate toward Tanya Bonakdar, which is presenting work by [Haim Steinbach](#) that turns Pantone color samples into readymades. Anyone who enjoyed Melissa Broder’s [merman-erotica novel \*The Pisces\*](#) will find a kindred spirit in the absurdist sculptures of [Olivia Erlanger](#), presented by the innovative Dallas-based gallery And Now; they depict mermaid tails flopping out of Speedqueen washing machines, as if the poor creatures had wiggled inside and gotten stuck. If expressive queer painting is more your style, head to Company Gallery, which is spotlighting [Jonathan Lyndon Chase](#) (just don’t expect any of the canvases to be available once you get there; [collectors and institutions have been rabidly interested](#)).



Mirror Image by Charles Mayton, presented at Frieze New York by David Lewis. Courtesy of the artist and David Lewis.

Also worth adding to your itinerary: the epic, collage-style, mixed-media explorations of [Peter Linde Busk](#) at Derek Eller; [Fred Eversley](#)'s sleek, sci-fi minimalism at David Kordansky; and a series of sculptures by Frieze Artist Award winner Lauren Halsey which [promise to disrupt the fair itself in interesting](#)

Varo, was the recent subject of [a stunning show at the Museum of Sex](#) (an institution that, despite its embarrassing branding, has been putting on rigorous exhibitions as of late).

This year, Frieze is trumpeting an “unprecedented number of collaborations with leading museum directors,” a way to underscore that art fairs are more than just a way to move product. That includes “Electric,” curated by Daniel Birnbaum of the virtual-reality production house [Acute Art](#), which poached him from a plum curatorial spot at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Intrepid viewers can queue up to experience virtual-reality worlds created by Anish Kapoor, Rachel Rossin, and others (while you’re waiting for the headset, take some time to ponder [the slippery marketability of VR art itself](#)).



Pit, by Anthony Iacona, presented at the fair by Marinaro. Courtesy of Marinaro and the artist.

Another hotly anticipated special section of the fair, curated by Pérez Art Museum Miami director Franklin Sirmans, honors Just Above Midtown, a cutting-edge New York gallery run by [Linda Goode Byrant](#) that helped kickstart the careers of a generation of black artists. Sirmans, who is 46, was only a teenager when J.A.M.

younger, cooler artists were making the place to be....a place that was different from what I knew from tagging along to an opening with my father....[J.A.M.] was for avant-garde thinking, not just eating eye candy.” At Frieze, Sirmans is presenting work from key artists who showed at J.A.M., most of whom are now household names in the art world, including Lorna Simpson and Lorraine O’Grady.

The Outsider Art Fair is also present at Frieze this year, in the form of a special exhibition, “[The Doors of Perception](#),” curated by Javier Téllez. “Most of my work as an artist has been centered around mental illness, and how disability is perceived by society,” he said, when asked about how his show might address expectations surrounding outsider art itself. “The works in ‘Doors of Perception’ are so strong and powerful that they defy all stereotypes by themselves; they only need to be allowed to manifest their presence. The idea is to make the art world focus on inclusion.” Téllez is especially excited to share the work of New Zealand’s [Susan Te Kahurangi King](#)—which he confidently dubs “some of the best drawings of the 20th and 21st centuries,” cartoon-inspired fantasias in which “everything merges—bodies and landscape, the human and the animal, the animated and the inanimate.”

And if you still have stamina left after leaving Randall’s Island, Frieze’s programming continues off-site, in Manhattan, with the Frieze Sculpture program, organized by Noguchi Museum director Brett Littman. He’s bringing an array of public-facing works to the area around Rockefeller Center, including pieces by Walter de Maria, Kiki Smith, and Hank Willis Thomas. The showstopper (and surefire Instagram bait) is a monumental work by Jaume Plensa: a towering, nearly 25-foot-tall sculpture of a woman covering her own eyes, set to preside over 5th Avenue traffic.