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Noah Horowitz on What to Expect at The Armory Show this Year



This week’s “In The Mag” is an excerpt of an interview with Noah Horowitz – executive director of The Armory Show – that appears in our forthcoming spring 2013 Art Issue. We spoke to him about the founding vision of The Armory Show, their collaboration with Liz Magic Laser, and what visitors and expect this year.

WHITEWALL: The Armory Show has been going through quite a few changes since you arrived last year. What will we notice this year?

NOAH HOROWITZ: The changes we made last year were quite radical. We reduced the number of galleries on Pier 94 by 25 percent. It will be a bit smaller this year, which is part of a strategic focus for us to make The Armory more boutique, a more highly curated program. So we’ve gone back to a lot of galleries to clean up booths, bring fewer artists, and bring more curated booths. That addresses the bigger question of what it means to be a fair today and in New York City. It’s obviously very different from when the fair started. We see The Armory as a really great destination to see new things, which was always its founding vision. It’s about recouping and recovering that.

WW: This year’s Armory Artist is Liz Magic Laser. How is she representative of this

new Armory Show?

NH: Working with Liz Magic Laser has also been amazing. Liz has approached this project super-intellectually, asking questions about what it means to be a commissioned artist in a commercial art fair. She has guided that through focused groups she has created. Groups looked at what some of the visuals and the materials are that she is producing and creating for us. The commissioned artist has created the visual identity of the fair: the website, the catalogue, VIP cards, all the collateral. Her critical response was to open that up as a question addressed in those focused groups. It makes the whole process a performance in itself, which is totally integral into Liz's practice, which spills over to the editions she creates to benefit the Pat Hearn and Colin de Land Cancer Foundation and MoMA.

WW: The Armory Show will also celebrate the centennial of the 1913 Armory Show, as will many other institutions this year. How will you bring that into the fair?

NH: It's a fake history for us in that our Armory Show is named in homage to that exhibition in the early 1900s. At the same time, it provides a lens to reimagine or ask questions about the status of the avant-garde in America today.

WW: A question that I think will be directly addressed by Eric Shiner, the director of the Any Warhol Museum, who will curate this year's Focus section, right?

NH: Eric is representative of a really great generation of younger directors and curators. He brings a tremendous amount of integrity and charisma. He is approaching it on an artist-by-artist basis, looking at artists all over America. Eric's project is not afraid of introducing artists and galleries that would not appear in the conventional fair circuit and being more creative with what that Focus section means.

WW: Prior to working with The Armory Show you were the director of the online-only VIP Art Fair. What online component will the Armory Show have this year?

NH: We've partnered with Art.sy. It's about sales, but it's also about making introductions. What I learned from VIP art fair is that the sales are part of it, but it's also about getting eyeballs. So if we as an art fair can bring an added-value component to being seen and further promoting galleries we work with, that's a strength.

WW: What is your take on collectors' current feeling about purchasing art online?

NH: People are warming to it more and more. There is a larger and larger willingness to pay online. At the same time at the very high end of the market it will take some time to get there, and we might not get there. The art world is fundamentally a relationship business.

WW: What is the role of a fair now versus what it was even a few years ago?

NH: You need to think more strategically and critically about what your strengths and weaknesses are. Not all fairs are for all people so you need to pick your focus and do it well. For us it's about becoming smaller, more focused, and a platform in New York for American and international galleries.