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The Tacky, the Shiny, and the Banksy at SCOPE New York 2014

Benjamin Sutton, Friday, March 7, 2014

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Crowds in the aisles at SCOPE's Thursday night preview.
Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

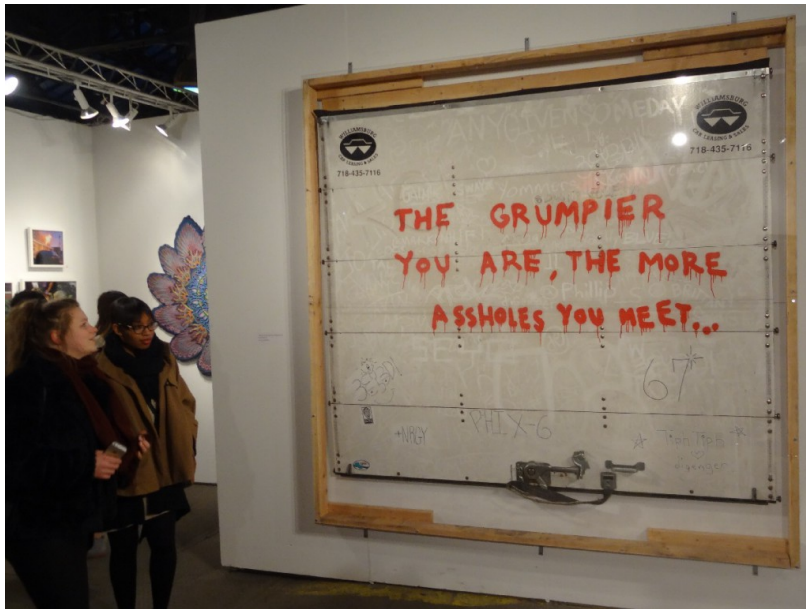
On Thursday night crowds squeezed into the side of the Farley Post Office building on 33rd Street, which is hosting the SCOPE art fair for the second year in a row. The setting is essentially a dressed-up parking lot, and could not be more appropriate for the stripe of street art-focused dealers the fair attracts. While the art on view is extremely uneven, the atmosphere is undeniably fun and upbeat. The cautionary words of a large Banksy piece greeting visitors as they enter—"The Grumpier You Are, the More Assholes You Meet," painted on the rear door of a truck during his October 2013 "residency" in New York, now on sale for around US\$400,000 in Art Now NY's booth (C01)—hardly seem necessary here, where the vibe is resolutely cheerful.

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A Banksy painting in Art Now NY's booth at SCOPE.
Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

Down the hall, the Lower East Side's Krause Gallery (booth C13) has a pair of paintings by Banksy parody artist and pop culture pundit Hanksy. The larger of the two, a hybrid of *Star Wars* robot R2D2 and slain rapper 2Pac titled, naturally, *R2D2pac* (2014), is priced at US\$3,800.



Hanksy, *R2D2pac* (2014).
Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

For better or worse, not all the art on view at SCOPE addresses the viewer with such self-deprecating humor. The most outrageously bad booth by far belongs to London's Halcyon Art International (booth J02). Its array of enormous and enormously tacky sculptures by Lorenzo Quinn is the stuff of nightmares and SkyMall catalogues, although the prices—like US\$250,000 for the largest piece, *Tight Rope II*—are clearly geared at the private jet set. A similarly shiny, though slightly

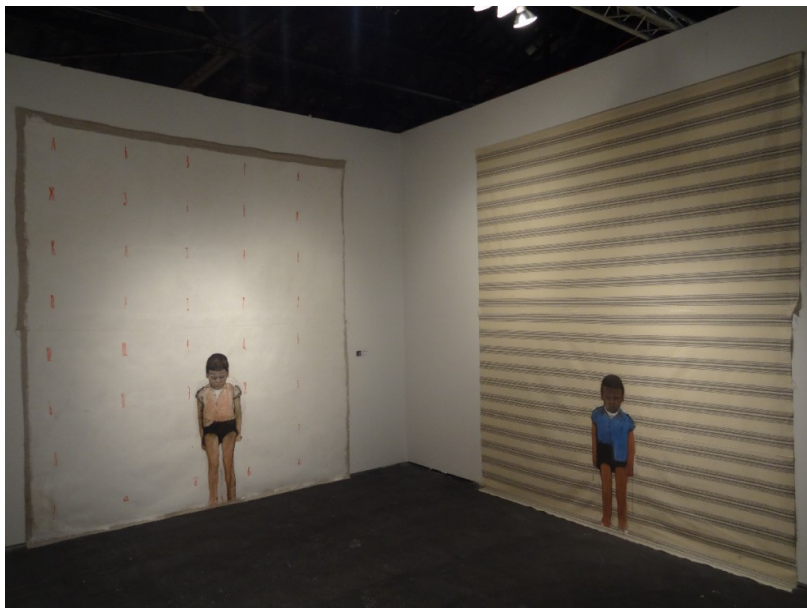


less humorless, and, at US\$17,000, far more reasonable sculpture, Nimai Kesten's *Crucifix* (2012), is a stand-out of Basel gallery Licht Feld's booth (C03). Kesten's sacrilege-teasing crucifix made of bronze guns is emblematic of the type of flashy and quote-unquote edgy art that SCOPE has very successfully made its specialty.



Nimai Kesten, *Crucifix* (2012).
Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

For a more successfully serious presentation, stop by Moscow outfit 11.12 Gallery's booth (E13), where three large paintings on unstretched canvases featuring small children against sparse backdrops by Sasha Birulin anchor a refreshingly austere and somber booth amid all the poppy pomp. The paintings, each priced at US\$25,000, draw on the Moscow-based artist's childhood during the Cold War; one includes a small Soviet-era rocking horse toy placed ominously in front of the painted child.



Sasha Birulin's paintings in the 11.12 Gallery booth.

Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

Beyond the Banksys, a number of large-scale works by some of the biggest names in street art are arrayed around the fair, from the enormous work on paper by Swoon—who is about to have a major solo show at the Brooklyn Museum—in the Natalie Kates Projects booth (J07), priced at US\$20,000, to the towering carved plywood minotaur by Chicago-based artist Tiptoe, available for US\$4,000 from Vertical Gallery (booth E15).



Tiptoe, *Minotaur*.

Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

Between the prevalence of street art, a smattering of site-specific installations, and the occasional robust, carefully curated booth—New York nonprofit Chashama (K01) and Brooklyn gallery Fuchs Projects (booth G07) among them—there's plenty at this year's SCOPE fair to distract from the few spectacularly garish presentations. And, to the fair's credit, even those blunders can be fun, as evidenced by CoproGallery's (booth B07) array of giant, Ron Mueck-esque Andy Warhol heads and imitation Brillo boxes—all the work of Kazuhiro Tsuji—whose Instagram and selfie appeal cannot be denied.

SCOPE New York continues through Sunday, March 9.