

4 Sensational Painters Who Stole the Show at Independent New York 2020, Where Oil-on-Canvas Is Still the Cutting Edge.

Galleries presented strong work by several new names to keep an eye on.

by Artnet News

5 March 2020.



Jessie Homer French, Emily Carr In The Ross Bay Cemetary (2000).
Courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles / Seoul.

If New York art fairs were like the film industry, the Armory Show would be the big-studio blockbuster and the Independent New York would be the cool indie festival film: where the real critics go for substance and style.

It's also a great place to discover new talent young and old—something that's become nearly impossible at its blue-chip sibling on the piers. With that in mind, here are the best discoveries at this year's Independent, the 12th edition of the fair. A hint: painting stole the show.

Leslie Kerr at The Landing



Leslie Kerr, Untitled (1964). Courtesy of The Landing.

On the Walls: On view at the Landing's booth is a group of bold paintings by Leslie Kerr, a California artist who died in 1992. Though painted in the '60s, Kerr's work traffics in the kind of minimal, graphic pop-symbolism that's everywhere right now, from the likes of Julie Curtiss and Emily Mae Smith.

"They feel so fresh, like they were painted yesterday," says Gerard O'Brien, the LA gallery's owner. "But when you get away from them, you see that there's a lot more there. They're very substantive paintings."

After including Kerr's work in a show dedicated to San Francisco's famous Dilexi Gallery last year, O'Brien came across a "trove of Kerr's work" in an estate. "I freaked out," he recalls.

Price Range: \$30,000-\$35,000

Leigh Ruple at PAGE (NYC)



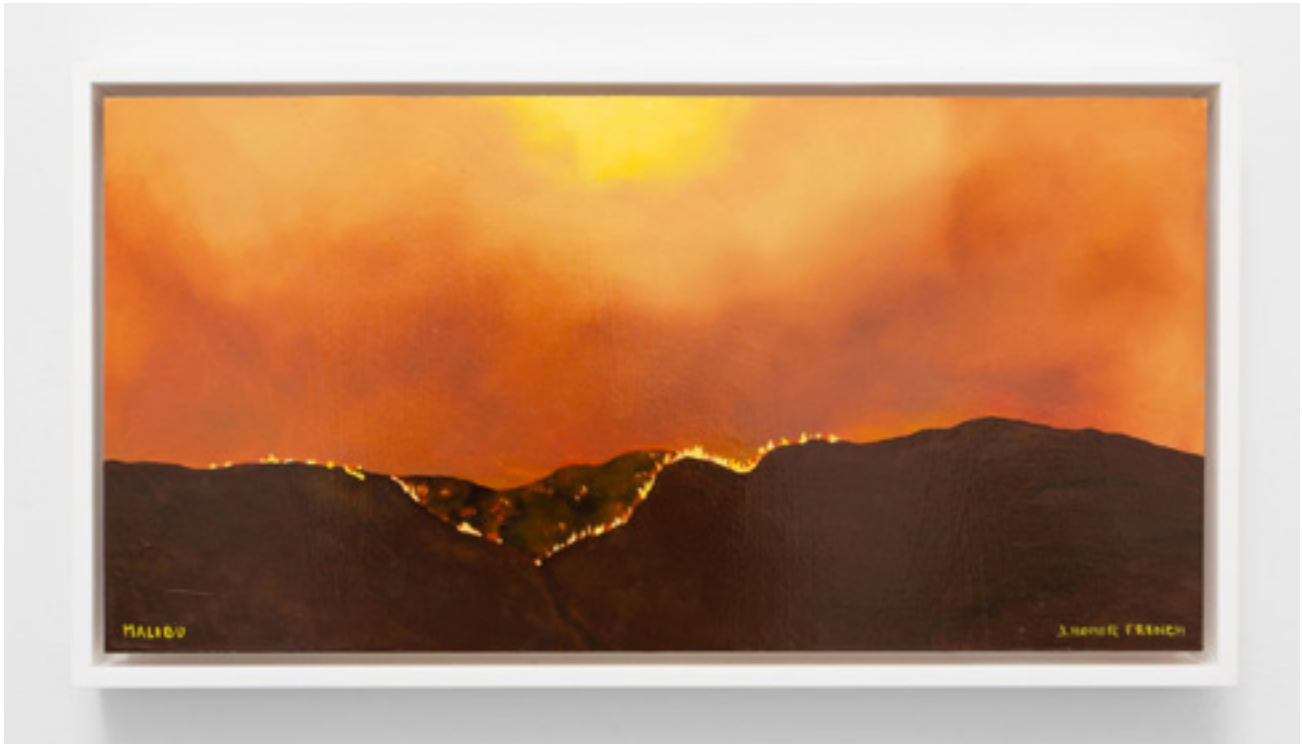
Leigh Ruple, Friendship (2020). Courtesy of the artist and PAGE (NYC).

On the Walls: Color is likely the first thing you'll notice when passing Leigh Ruple's large-scale work on view at PAGE (NYC)'s booth. The New York-based painter's city scenes and strange portraits are saturated in hues bright enough to make you want to wear sunglasses. It keys you into the subtle surrealism at play. In *Friendship* (2020), for instance, three neon-tinted women make animal shadows below the signage of a deli, while in *Trust* (2020) the light from a window falls in paisley patterns on a seated subject.

Lucas Page, the owner of the gallery, started working with Ruple two years ago after a studio visit and mounted a solo show by the artist last spring.

Price Range: \$10,000

Jessie Homer French at Various Small Fires



Jessie Homer French, Malibu (2019). Courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles / Seoul.

On the Walls: With a flattened, omniscient eye, self-taught artist Jessie Homer French hones in on scenes from her rural California town that toe the line between the mundane and the macabre. In *Emily Carr In The Ross Bay Cemetary* (2000), for example, she shows us the way the roots of a tree have wrapped themselves around the bodies buried below a quaint graveyard, while in *Chernobyl Hunt* (2019), bright yellow nuclear signs interrupt an otherwise drab picture of wolves on a gray winter day. In *Malibu* (2019), brush fires line a pair of silhouetted hills below a blood orange sky. It's both beautiful and haunting.

"Jessie's works capture a certain kind of contemporary anomie and black humor that I feel is so hard to do," says Various Small Fires's founder, Esther Kim Varet.

Roughly three years ago, Varet discovered Homer French's paintings hanging in the LA homes and studios of an older generation of artist—"namely the Cool School artists," she explains. "We asked Billy Al Bengston who told us that Jessie has been his friend for over 40 years. 'Go see her, she's in the desert, she's GOOD,' were Billy's precise words."

Price Range: \$12,000-\$20,000

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery



Tunji Adeniyi-Jones. Greeting Gifts (2020). Courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

On the Walls: Tunji Adeniyi-Jones's work has drawn comparisons to that of Henri Matisse in the past. With his spring garden color palette and curving, elongated figures, the reference is particularly apt at Independent, where the 27-year-old painter debuts a series of paintings and works on paper inspired by his time in Dakar, Senegal, at Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock residency program.

In a trio of complementary canvases that evoke West African rituals, scarred figures dance among birds and flowers before a monochromatic backdrop. In *Greeting Gifts* (2020), which depicts a more allegorical scene, a woman is offered a pair of masks by two men.

Price Range: \$3,000 for works on paper; \$25,000 for paintings