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Paul Laster: A Night at New York's Outsider Art Fair

5:49 pm Friday Jan 9, 2009

by [Caroline Stanley](#)



Drawing Center curator João Ribas with photo of Janet Sobel at Gary Snyder Project Space

New York's 17th annual [Outsider Art Fair](#) kicked off last night with a lively crowd of collectors, critics, curators, and enthusiasts gathering at a new venue, the Mart. For the past 16 years the fair held court at the Puck Building in Soho. Some of the spectators and exhibitors missed the funky nature of the Puck space — an odd mix of rooms connected by a corridor that always reminded me of scenes from [Being John Malkovich](#).

This year's fair boasts 34 international dealers and the variety of work by self-taught artists is impressive. Upon entry, the first gallery I encountered was the venerable [Phyllis Kind Gallery](#), where director Ron Jagger was holding down the fort for the missing Ms. Kind, who I interviewed for a

piece in the January 2008 issue of [Artkrush](#) covering last year's fair. The gallery had some compelling works on paper by Adolf Wolfi and Carlo Zanelli, as well as a number of pieces by Japanese artists, including Hiroyuki Doi, who was present — a rare situation at an outsider fair as most self-taught artists are either unable or unwilling to travel. Doi and his wife are visiting New York for his solo show at the gallery, which opens tomorrow night.

Venturing down the first aisle, I was taken by a large black-and-white pencil drawing by [Chris Hipkiss](#), which captures nature and technology fighting one another, at Cavin-Morris Gallery. Androgynous women, representing both sides of nature, share ground in a visionary world. I next ran into Brooke Davis Anderson, director and curator of [The Contemporary Center of the American Folk Art Museum](#), admiring the imaginary drawings of Martin Ramirez, who the museum is currently showing, at Ricco/Maresca Gallery. Anderson said that she loved the new venue for the show, as did artists Chris Martin and Tamara Gonzales, who told me all artists should visit this fair.

Marion Harris Gallery is offering a nice selection of works by [Morton Bartlett](#). A favorite of both outsider and contemporary collectors, Bartlett was a recluse who made eerie, life-size sculptures of children and a remarkable series of photographs of the finished works. Grey Carter-Objects of Art also displays the surreal and psychological drawings of [J.J. Cromer](#) while Louise Ross Gallery shows a great group of mixed media (crayon, watercolor, and metallic paint) drawings of grand dames from the 1920s by [Violetta Raditz](#), the daughter of a Russian émigré. Another artist of Russian descent, [Janet Sobel](#), occupies Gary Snyder Project Space. According to the gallery, Sobel's work inspired Jackson Pollock's groundbreaking drip paintings. Pollock and critic Clement Greenberg saw her work in a Guggenheim show in 1944 and Greenberg later noted that Sobel was one of the first artists to use an all-over painting technique, which can be seen in a couple of works on view.

Other noteworthy pieces include [Aloise Corbaz'](#) double-sided, colored crayon drawings from the '50s of wild women with flowers at Jennifer Pinto Safian; [Gregory Blackstock's](#) marker on paper drawings of Tasmanian devils, wolverines, and airplanes at Garde Rail Gallery; [Bill Traylor's](#) pencil on shirt-board drawings of people and animals at Carl Hammer Gallery; Jean-Pierre Nadeau's detailed, 20-foot-long pen on canvas cityscape, as well as crayon on butcher paper panoramas of agricultural scenes and trains by Frank Calloway, who is said to be 112 years old, at [Edlin Gallery](#); and [Reverend Howard Finster's](#) handwritten sermon cards, which were recently shown in the New Museum exhibition *After Nature*, at Tanner Hill Gallery.

No outsider fair would be complete without exhibiting non-profit organizations that support living self-taught and mentally troubled artists. New York's [Fountain Gallery](#) and Oakland's Creative Growth Art Center are two excellent examples and are displaying imaginative works. [Creative Growth](#), which has been continuously championed by White Column's director [Matthew Higgs](#), presents some marvelous Dwight Mackintosh drawings of multi-layered people with prominent hands and feet and an array of stylish products, including tote bags and watches, made in collaboration with their artists and designer [Matt Murphy](#). And of course, every outsider fair needs some funky quilts, which several galleries provide, and some cool African hair signs, which are in abundance at the Pardee Collection.

The Outsider Fair continues at the Mart in New York through Sunday. See the [Web site](#) for hours and directions.



Art dealer Judy A. Saslow in costume in her booth



Ricco/Maresca Gallery's Elinore Weber and Brooke Davis Anderson, director and curator of The Contemporary Center of the American Folk Art Museum with Martin Ramirez drawings at Ricco/Maresca Gallery



Yoshiko and Hiroyuki Doi with Doi's black-and-white drawings at Phyllis Kind Gallery



Art dealer Elizabeth Fiore with works by Keith Pavia and Seth Butler at Fountain Gallery



Artists Chris Martin and Tamara Gonzales with works on paper by Stephen Palmer at Ricco/Maresca Gallery

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Gary Snyder

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Thanks for the coverage - for the record it is "Janet" Sobel (not Jenny).

» 2 weeks ago

POST REPLY



Paul Laster

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Mea culpa! When I first saw the work was by Janet Sobel, the name made me think of the contemporary artist Jenny Scobel; and when writing, the two names somehow merged. Thanks for pointing out the mistake, we've made the change.

» 2 weeks ago

POST REPLY

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amazon27

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Glad to hear you were taken by the Hipkiss! (He's my husband, so...). Just one thing; we've worked long and hard (very hard) to have Chris referred to as 'self-taught', as opposed to 'Outsider', since - despite a certain, coincidental, stylistic common ground - he does