

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

- [About](#)
- [Store](#)
- [Contact](#)

At Seattle's First Art Fair, Dealers Chase Elusive Tech Money

by [Amanda Manitach](#) on August 4, 2015



Addie Wagenknecht creating one of her drone paintings at the bitforms booth at the Seattle Art Fair (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic unless otherwise noted)

SEATTLE — Seattle has never been a destination for art collectors. I've been here since 2001, and from day one artists have lamented that the deep pockets of our tech zillionaires don't impact the local art market. Seattle's uber-tech-mogul billionaire [Paul Allen](#) may, however, have just changed that. Six months ago, Allen — co-founder of Microsoft, owner of the Seahawks and a major art collector in his own right — announced he would be co-producing Seattle's biggest art fair to date with the help of [Art Market](#), a Brooklyn-based company responsible for producing art fairs like Texas Contemporary and Miami Project. Allen is notorious for taking his 414-foot superyacht "Octopus" to the Venice Biennale for the past decade. When he initially suggested Seattle could mount a similar

biennial or fair a few years ago, many locals balked. After all, over the past decades we'd tried our hand at fairs — once in the '80s and then in the mid '90s, with the **Affordable Art Fair** most recently floundering in 2013. AAF's two-year attempt to attract sellers and buyers of bargain art met with little enthusiasm; regional gallerists shied from affiliating with cheap goods.

The inaugural **Seattle Art Fair** exuded anything but cheapness. On opening night, more than 4,000 people packed into the **CenturyLink Field Event Center**, with barely enough room to maneuver the booths of 62 local and national galleries, including big names like Gagosian, Pace, and David Zwirner, who offered pieces by equally big-name artists.

In addition to standard, large-scale photography, sculpture, and painting, the fair's curatorial team also programmed a number of satellite events, with installations by local artists scattered across the city (perhaps too scattered, as many flew under the radar); a stunning exhibit of 25 videos and sound installations by artists from the Pacific Rim region curated by Leeza Ahmady, director of **Asia Contemporary Art Week**; and panel discussions on issues like environmental and geo-economical concerns in the region. Of course, there was an emphasis on tech and art wherever it could be wedged in.



Viewer interacting with Micah Ganske's "Ocular EVA Pod" (2015)

This included two ostentatious Gigabot 3D printers at the 101/EXHIBIT booth that tirelessly churned out objects designed by artist and future fantasist Micah Ganske. In the same booth, Ganske's "Ocular EVA Pod" offered a breathtaking if wacky virtual reality flight inside a glass sphere floating 1,000 feet above a small moon. A highlight of the experience was looking down and realizing, for at

least two minutes in VR, that you'd slipped into the body of a shiny, pink fem-bot with massive, metal breasts.

Each day at bitforms, artist **Addie Wagenknecht** demonstrated her "Black Hawk Powder" drone painting. Viewers who expected to see larger airborne drones jizzing out action paintings from above were at first disappointed, but eventually seduced by Wagenknecht's ballet-like, studied movements: dressed in a flowing, black garment and gas mask, she dusted her canvas with loose pigments then steered the drone around, kicking up plumes of black and magenta powder, carving white marks in its wake.



teamLab, "Flower and Corpse Glitch" (2012) (photo courtesy of Pace Gallery and Seattle Art Fair) ([click to enlarge](#))

The marriage of tech and art might have been a little forced, with a whiff of catering too much to Seattle cliché, but Japan-based digital collaborative teamLab's tech-powered piece "Flower and Corpse Glitch" at Pace was mind-bending and sublime. The video brings a traditional, mountainous landscape painting to life with uncanny movement, as small, armor-clad men crawl through the image and glittering, undulating digital noise plays. Spencer Finch's "Sunset," a solar-powered ice cream

truck, offering soft-serve in shades to match the shifting color of the sky, also was a crowd pleaser — without trying too hard. I arrived for a cone late afternoon on Friday, under a cloudless sky beating down 90-degree heat and was served a bright, peachy swirl.

The fair's effort to appeal to Seattle's nubile, moneyed, Amazon class was certainly not its strength (apart from the aforementioned programming, a conspicuous dearth of new media art was offered for purchase), but to their credit, at least the fair producers did their best to entertain and educate potential collectors in the tech sector — in their own way.

A less corporate, more hip, Salon des Refusés version of the fair manifested a few blocks away from CenturyLink's bustle. Sponsored by a local marijuana edibles company and the Seattle Department of Transportation, **Out of Sight** embodied other aspects of a city evolving at identity-defying speed. Its team of curators transformed the previously derelict third floor of King Street Station and showed works by over 100 local artists. (Full disclosure: as an artist, my Seattle gallery represented my own work at both the art fair and Out of Sight.) The fair packed murals, ephemeral installations, and a durational performance of homoerotic football play delivered by Pol Rosenthal and Tim Smith-Stewart, who dressed in pads and helmets, and sensuously grappled for a four-hour stretch during the opening.



Pol Rosenthal and Tim Smith-Stewart performing Alice Gosti's "Impossible Kiss" at Out of Sight

Seattle has suffered an inferiority complex and craved a place at the international — or even national — art world table for as long as I've been here, and both Seattle Art Fair and Out of Sight stepped up, with remarkable esprit, to finally do something about it. Whether or not we finally have the

collector muscle to sustain a fair that doesn't fizzle after a year or two has yet to be seen (though plans are already underway for a 2016 edition), but the fair and its offshoots provided a buzz unlike anything we've experienced. This weekend was like witnessing a city going through puberty, and it finally kind of feels like we're on the other side.

The Seattle Art Fair ran July 30–August 2 at the CenturyLink Field Event Center (WaMu Theater) (800 Occidental Ave S, Seattle).

Addie Wagenknecht **Featured** **Micah Ganske** **Out of Sight** **Pol Rosenthal** **Seattle Art Fair** **teamLab** **Tim Smith-Stewart**