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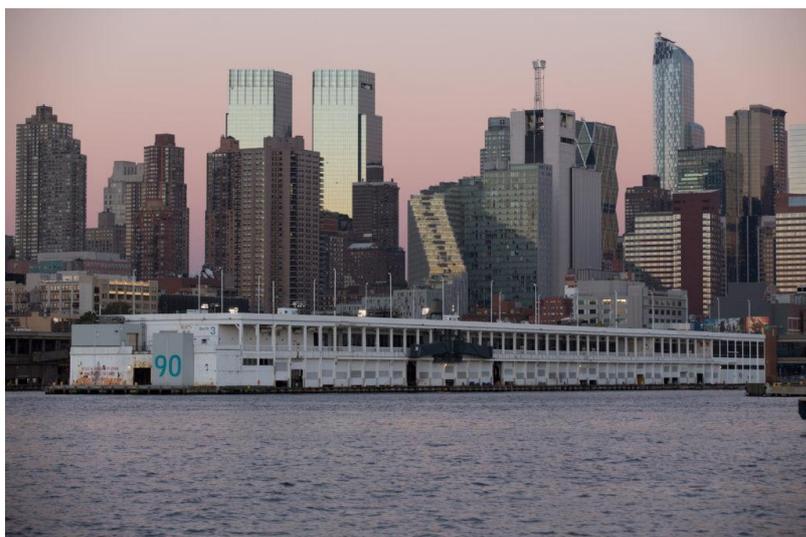
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‘This Left Us Without a Chance’: VOLTA Dealers Describe How They Lost as Much as \$20,000 After the Sudden Cancellation of the Fair

Gallerists left out in the cold by have plenty to say about the situation.

Sarah Cascone, March 1, 2019



Pier 90. Photo by David Willems, courtesy Volta.

Shock. Dismay. Disappointment. Those are some of the words that art dealers who planned to participate in VOLTA New York used to describe their reactions upon learning that the fair had suddenly been cancelled just days before it was to open.

Some 70 galleries from around the world have been left in the lurch by the abrupt cancellation, a decision made by top management at Vornado, the real estate giant that owns the show and its more famous sister fair, the Armory Show. Top brass made the call after learning last week that Pier 92 on Manhattan's West Side, which was to host around 60 Armory Show dealers, was structurally unsound and could no longer be used. So they turned to neighboring Pier 90, VOLTA's home for the past four years, as an emergency site, displacing the smaller fair.

While Armory Show director Nicole Berry has promised that "everything is going to proceed as normal" for the her show's exhibitors, VOLTA's dealers have heard no such assurances.

"The art fairs are always a financial stretch for galleries, but there's always that hope that your artist will be well received and you are able to recoup your outlay of money," said Cheryl Hazan, who runs an eponymous New York gallery and planned to show at VOLTA. "This left us without that chance."



Vornado Realty Trust Real estate investment trust company logo seen displayed on a smart phone. Photo by Igor Golovnirov/SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images.

The High Cost of Doing Business

Officially, VOLTA has only been postponed, but neither the fair's management team, run by director Amanda Coulson, nor Vornado has so far put forward an alternative date or venue.

Irina Protopopescu, director the Slag Gallery, told artnet News that she wrote a letter to Vornado asking for an alternative venue free of cost.

“I also wrote a different letter to Nicole Berry, proposing to give VOLTA a smaller area [of Pier 90] where at least each artist can show one work,” she said. “At least to give us an opportunity to present the work at our former venue.” She says she has not yet received a reply.

Vornado, which according to its website, owns more than 20 million square feet of Manhattan retail and office space, is also a target of dealers’ ire.

“If they really cared, they could have scrambled their considerable resources to make this happen in a viable alternate location,” dealers Robert and Henry Chung of New York’s Robert Henry Contemporary said in a joint statement.

Although VOLTA is refunding booth fees (around \$8,000), the reimbursement comes with a catch: dealers are required to sign release agreements that, according to the document, “expresses a full and complete settlement of all outstanding claims against each other.”

Even then, there are other costs galleries won’t be able to recoup.

“High transportation costs, crate building costs, non-refundable long distance flight tickets, hotel costs, and labor costs are among the direct additional expenses,” said one dealer who wished to remain anonymous. “Apart from that, there is also a loss in revenue and selling opportunity.”

The financial situation is particularly trying for those based overseas, some of whom already shipped artwork to New York.

Dealer Peter Frey, who planned to come in from Austria, sent two crates full of works by Johannes Domenig at a cost of \$5,500. “All together it will be about \$15,000 to \$20,000 damage up to now,” he told artnet News. “I have already invited collectors and made appointments, too.”

Coulson, VOLTA’s director, declined to comment on these matters.



Art being transported in a crate. Photo Patrick Kovarik/AFP/Getty Images.

Announcing Plan B

By Thursday afternoon, dealers Frey and Protopopescu found an alternative, and will now present at Plan B, a pop-up fair organized by collector Peter Hort, dealer David Zwirner, and a group of supporters including the Rema Hort Mann Foundation, and dealer Quang Bao of 1969 Gallery.

Members of VOLTA's team are also providing logistical support.

Admission is free of charge and the fair will be open Wednesday through Saturday of next week. It is set to feature approximately 30 VOLTA dealers.

"It is a community thing," Hort said. "We're all doing our best to make a bad situation a little bit better."

Other dealers are decamping to separate fairs. The Miami gallerist Mindy Solomon made the switch to Art on Paper to show collages by artist Glenn Barkley along with the his ceramic vessels. "He's all the way from Australia," Solomon said. "I didn't want to let him down."

Solomon is one among many to make the rush to Art on Paper. Kelly Freeman, director of the fair's parent company, Art Market Productions, was getting out of the shower when the first calls from frantic dealers started coming in.

Within hours, she was reviewing the fair map with her architect to see how many additional spaces they could carve out. The show, which takes place downtown at Pier 36, was already hosting a record of number of dealers, but Freeman and her team were able to make space for several additional booths, including ones for David Lusk Gallery, studio_e, and Sim Smith. (Hazan was originally planning to show at both fairs.)

“I know how unfortunate it is to have the rug pulled from underneath you,” Freeman told artnet News.

Other dealers have turned to separate fairs, and SCOPE will get a slew of European presenters: Zahorian & Van Espen from Bratislava and Prague; Rutger Brandt Gallery from Amsterdam; KultProekt from Moscow; and uJung Gallery, from Seoul, among others.

“We have extended special discounts in light of the extenuating circumstances so as to offer them a home during Armory Week,” a spokesperson for SCOPE told artnet News.

Asked to comment, Coulson said she and her team were “extremely appreciative of the art community in New York for stepping up and accommodating almost 45—more than half—of our orphaned galleries,” adding that the dealers affected by the situation have been “gracious, understanding and flexible.”

A red-headed stepchild?

But not everyone has found a happy home. “Some fairs did contact us but we felt like their asking prices this late in the game and under these circumstances were predatory,” dealers Walden and Chung told artnet News.

And while an overall sense of optimism remains, there is still a lingering feeling of resentment over being unceremoniously cast out of Pier 90.

“Anyone who has done VOLTA or has been paying attention knows that VOLTA is the bastard child of the Armory,” Los Angeles dealer Paul Kopeikin, who will show with Plan B, told artnet News. “I have racked my brain trying to understand why Vornado and the Armory have been so uninterested in making VOLTA more successful, even to the point of ridiculously inadequate signage between the [two fairs].”

Kopeikin says he bets there will be a much greater effort to connect the two piers now that both are part of the Armory Show. (The fair has promised to run a shuttle back and forth.) “Everything they do to make the dealers in Pier 90 happy,” he said, “will be things that could have been done for VOLTA, and that would have made it a much more successful fair.”