

ART REVIEW

ART REVIEW; At Annual Print Fair, A Multitude of Styles

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If you have never been to the Print Fair, the ninth annual installment of which is on view at the Seventh Regiment Armory, do yourself a favor this year and go.

With an international roster of 88 dealers offering 100,000 items, the show is, as always, mind-boggling in quality and quantity. It has works like Rembrandt's masterpiece "The Three Crosses," at David Tunick's booth, as well as what must be counted as the contemporary hit of the show, a giant, juicily vibrant silk-screened self-portrait by Chuck Close.

If you have attended the fair in past years, you know what to expect: a profusion of Durers, Toulouse-Lautrecs, Picassos and Matisses along with countless works by minor masters, all tastefully hung in no particular order. Whether you are looking for a bargain to add to your own collection (prices range from \$1.5 million for "The Three Crosses" down to the low hundreds) or just for fun, the sprawling diversity makes for a great scavenger hunt.

You may seek and find all sorts of gems by lesser-known talents, including a couple of sexy pictures by the wonderful early 20th-century woodcut artist Felix Vallotton at Catherine E. Burns's booth, or, at Thomas French, a horrific picture of a dragon biting off

a man's face in "The Dragon Devouring the Companions of Cadmus" by the 16th-century engraver Hendrik Goltzius.

But the miscellaneous nature of the fair can be numbing, and one appreciates the booths that present more coherent exhibitions. At Susan Sheehan there's an exceptionally elegant installation of mostly black-and-white works, including a gas station by Ed Ruscha, a dark, silvery "Marilyn" by Andy Warhol, two simple pictures of leaves by Ellsworth Kelly, an overlapping numbers lithograph by Jasper Johns and a suave essay in Abstract Expressionism by Willem de Kooning. At Sylvan Cole there's a surprisingly interesting show of three Americans: the old-fashioned technician John Taylor Arms flanked by two modernists, Will Barnet and Milton Avery.

The down side of the fair is summed up by an amusing small etching at Rona Schneider by the American Ash Can School painter John Sloan. Called "The Connoisseurs," this 1905 etching depicts a crowd of people at an exhibition, including a dowager reading her catalog, a fat bald man with a lorgnette and a tall thin man examining a small picture on the wall with a magnifying glass. What rings true is not the caricature of swinish effeteness but the microscopic focus on the small picture.

Printmaking is a conservative and intimate medium, which is why exposure to it can make one hunger for bigger, bolder and newer things. After a few hours at the Print Fair, a wake-up jolt of brash, adolescent energy from the "Sensations" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art might be just the thing.

The Print Fair remains on view at the Seventh Regiment Armory, 643 Park Avenue, at 66th Street, through Sunday. Hours: Today and tomorrow, noon to 7 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. Admission: \$12 a day. Information: (212) 759-4469.