



Winter Guide: Keith Tyson Shows His Hand at the Pace Gallery

Plus: seasonal art picks!

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published: November 24, 2010

Courtesy Keith Tyson, the Pace Gallery



Return of the jokers: From "52 Variables"

Courtesy Keith Tyson, the Pace Gallery



The artist Keith Tyson is a gambling man. He will even admit, candidly, that he was once a gambling addict, and has been through therapy to shake the scourge. Famously, when he won the Turner Prize—Great Britain's much-hyped, endlessly lambasted, but generally influential art honor—back in 2002, he took home more money by betting on himself than from the honor itself.

"I looked at the odds, and they put me at 7 to 2, which, in a race that small, is insulting," the artist recounts from his studio in London, where he is busy preparing "52 Variables," his upcoming show at New York's Pace Gallery. "But in a pool that tiny, one bet can change everything—I caused myself to go from being an outside shot to the odds-on favorite."

This anecdote makes a fine introduction to Tyson's art, which isn't really about gambling, per se, as much as it is about an artist's intervention into chance. For the Turner Prize, his winning installation involved an "art machine" that generated instructions for the creation of artworks. For his memorable "Large Field Array," seen in New York in 2007 at Pace, he created a walk-in landscape of hundreds of seemingly random sculptural objects, a condensed encyclopedia of the chaos of images we live in.

The new Pace project seems particularly gambler-y for the artist, centering, as it does, on playing cards. Basically, the show consists of 52 precise paintings on aluminum, each depicting the blown-up image of the back of a card from one of 52 different decks. The designs draw from the artist's own personal collection of cards—apparently, card enthusiasts often trade jokers as a way to accumulate various designs they have an affection for, and Tyson estimates he owns "up to 1,000." He has selected the cards to hit a diverse set of notes, ranging from the deliberately generic to the intricacies of a card featuring a Hieronymus Bosch painting.

The show cuts a broad path through the history of card design, from '50s pin-ups to modern corporate packs, so that it forms an oblique slideshow essay on the collective subconscious. "It's amazing what works its way in there," Tyson says. "There's all this repressed stuff, Jungian archetypes, some racism, suggestions of stuff going on in the world—all of this overlooked history in this space that's meant to be a placeholder, really." The societal trajectory of "52

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Variables” begins with an elephant standing for British colonialism in India, and ends with the little bird from Twitter—draw from that what you will.

Tyson is one of those artists who can speak about his work with a sort of analytical grandiloquence, as if he’s solving a theorem: “I am always trying to find some way in a solid and static artwork to show something dynamic.” He’s concerned with the cosmic, and has even been “Artist in Residence” at Oxford’s Astrophysics and Cosmology Department.

What’s most promising about “52 Variables,” however, is more down to earth. Like most good art gestures, the idea itself is actually very simple—it just opens naturally onto a multitude of associations. In its quotation of vernacular culture, “52 Variables” is Pop. In its precise cataloging of data, and eye for subtle historical criticism of its imagery, it’s Conceptual. But, finally, Tyson stresses it’s also a show about painting, about abstraction and pattern and some striking images. “Usually I’m not such a fan of my shows, because I am so covered in neuroses,” Tyson confesses, summing up his feelings about the new project. “But these look quite nice.”

Sounds like he’s betting on himself again.

Keith Tyson, ‘52 Variables,’ December 10 to February 5, 2011, Pace Gallery, 510 West 25th Street, thepacegallery.com

Winter Art Picks

Allora & Calzadilla: ‘Performance 9’

December 8 to January 10, 2011

If you’re a New York gallery rat, you’ve had the chance to see Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s *Stop, Repair, Prepare* performance before: It was just at Gladstone Gallery

last year, where various performers stood in a piano with a hole cut in the middle, and attempted to play a gymnastic, impossible version of “Ode to Joy.” But there is one good reason to take advantage of MOMA’s spotlight on the quirky Puerto Rico–based art duo now: The two have been selected to represent the U.S. at next year’s global art fest, the Venice Biennale—so Allora & Calzadilla’s awkward piano solo gains a whole new meaning as a national symbol. *The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, moma.org*

‘Law of the Jungle’

December 9 to January 28, 2011

Looking to do an exhibition capitalizing on the buzz around Brazil, Lehmann Maupin turned to Brazilian artist Tiago Carneiro da Cunha as curator—and has gotten something much more wild and personal in return, in the great tradition of artist-curated shows. “Law of the Jungle” serves as a showcase for some interesting Brazilian artists, from Jac Leirner, who makes art out of devalued Brazilian currency, to the psychedelic street art duo Os Gemeos. But it also incorporates a more far-reaching selection of da Cunha’s idols and mentors, from the Bali-based painter Ashley Bickerton to the inscrutable British conceptualist Liam Gillick, his former adviser. *Lehmann Maupin Gallery, 540 West 26th Street, lehmannmaupin.com*

Feng Mengbo: ‘Long March: Restart’

December 12 to April 4, 2011

Any vintage video game fans out there? What about fans of Chinese military history? If so, you have got to run out to MOMA P.S.1 to plug into Beijing artist Feng Mengbo’s *Long March: Restart*, an

immersive, eight-screen video environment that doubles as a fully playable side-scrolling action game. The lucky player gets to control a boxy Red Army soldier, traversing a landscape where he does battle with characters from Street Fighter II, Contra, and Super Mario Bros. Bewilderingly—and awesomely—the hero achieves victory by flinging cans of Coca-Cola at his foes. *MOMA P.S.1, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, Long Island City, ps1.org*

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe

January 5, 2011, to February 12, 2011

British-born, L.A.-based Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe is known as a consistently articulate art critic himself, a serious brain—but as a painter he’s focused like a laser on the wordless discretion of old-fashioned abstraction. This time out for Alexander Gray, he offers up a large-scale painting described by his dealer as “a complete reconfiguration of the grid, with raucous colors, balancing hot and cold, density and light.” It’s paired with a single work from the 1980s, simply to show how enduring Gilbert-Rolfe’s artistic commitments have been—but the installation should be otherwise sparse, in keeping with his philosophy of serious and considered looking. *Alexander Gray Associates, 508 West 26th Street, alexandergray.com*

Yeni Mao: ‘Dead Reckoning’

January 7, 2011, to March 6, 2011

Canada-born, Art Institute of Chicago--trained, and now New York--based, Yeni Mao likes to tout a fan’s description of him as “an omnivorous appropriator of cultural references.” One previous work involved a glimmering series of portraits of the Wu-Tang Clan as gold-leaf profiles, his goof on idol worship, machismo, and decadence. For “Dead Reckoning,” he’s reaching back considerably farther into history to play on these same themes, with an homage to the 14th-century Chinese naval explorer and all-around badass eunuch Zheng He, in an installation that involves, among other things, a collection of toy boats hung from the ceiling. *Collette Blanchard Gallery, 26 Clinton Street, colletteblanchard.com*

Jeppe Hein

January 28, 2011, to March 5, 2011

Perhaps you remember the work of ascendant Danish artist Jeppe Hein from his residency a few years back at Queens’ SculptureCenter, where he created “Illusion,” a giant mirrored V, suspended in the air and slowly rotating, producing a dizzying effect of watching the space you were standing in constantly wheeling away from you. Hein’s brand of art displays the polished sleekness of good design and precision engineering, but put to trippy ends, from park benches meant to be bafflingly unusable to a motorized “self-destructing wall.” For his new work at 303, prepare to scratch your head and be delighted. *303 Gallery, 547 West 21st Street, 303gallery.com*

Luis Camnitzer

February 2, 2011, to May 29, 2011

There’s no better target for El Museo’s “FOCOS” series highlighting “mature and underrepresented artists” than the great Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer, who has lived in New York since 1964 and left the mark of his own restless intelligence on classic conceptualism. The 70 works in this retrospective illustrate how early feints at word art—signs that declare, nonsensically, “This Is a Mirror, You Are a Written Sentence”—developed into a deft installation for which he created a “Living Room” out of words, affixing the name of furnishings to the walls and floor of an empty space, and then to more playful ’70s-era attempts to sell off his own signature, and so on. *El Museum del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Avenue, elmuseo.org*

Sue de Beer

February 4 to 6, 2011

February 18, 2011, to March 19, 2011

It’s a one-two punch of Sue de Beer this winter, as the artist gets a showcase at the Park Avenue Armory, courtesy of the Art Production Fund, followed directly by a solo outing at Marianne Boesky. Projected in the Armory’s Historical Rooms, de Beer’s new video, *The Ghosts*, draws on the look of Italian horror films, in the service of a tale of an irresponsible hypnotist—played by artist Jutta Koether—releasing spirits from the subconscious of a “money manager,” played by famed rocker Jon Spencer. Over at Boesky, de Beer will play on the hypnotic theme in more formal ways, promising a

series of projections and short films that manipulate her viewers' perceptions. *Park Avenue Armory*, 643 Park Avenue, armoryonpark.com, *Marianne Boesky Gallery*, 509 West 24th Street, marianneboeskygallery.com

