

We Went to Baltimore Part 1: The Art Fair that Doesn't Suck



The Artist Run Art Fair

The Artist-Run Art Fair

Charles Street Garage

1714 Charles Street

Baltimore, MD

What's on view: 19 booths in a parking garage occupied primarily by artist-run centers. We saw a car covered in white T-shirts, a fish tank filled with waterproof art, two bales of hay wrapped in reproductions of protest-sign messages like "Black Lives Matter," "I am a Woman," and "Silence is Compliance."

Paddy Johnson: This is the best art fair I've ever seen. I know that's coming out of the gate pretty strong, but there are so many ways to fuck up artist-run fairs in a garage and this fair did none of them. Washington's (e)merge sticks all their shitty work in the garage, where there's no light, so that model

doesn't work. And we're all aware of the seemingly countless artist run efforts in New York and Miami that flop because they don't attract strong work. To the New Yorkers reading this, the closest comparable I can think of is the Dependent—an edgy artist-run hotel art fair we loved that ran in NYC from 2010 to 2012. The Artist Run Fair has tons of more space, lower overhead for exhibitors (it costs \$100 for a booth), affordable art, and so, so much good art. I actually left that fair delirious with happiness.



Michael Jones McKean's fish tank

There are so many highlights it's hard to know where to start, but gallery BB's exhibitor display in a fish tank might have been the strongest on view. All works were either waterproof or waterproofed, and stuck underwater. Grace Davis made a landscape drawing of a mountain in pencil, encased in a Ziplock bag with

ball bearings, then affixed it all to a rock in the aquarium. It almost doesn't matter what the drawing looks like when you're so busy marveling that a plastic baggie actually works well enough to preserve a piece of paper.

I was most impressed, though with Michael Jones McKean's waterproof plastic make-up box used to encase a few leafy plants. Perfectly rounding a single corner, the artist affixed a fake eyelash extension. It fit that corner so snugly that looking at it was immensely satisfying.

Anyway, I know you liked BB, too, but I got the impression you were most wowed by Alan Resnick's weird parking-lot tour video at Open Space.



Alan Resnick shows off a pylon in his parking garage as he seeks help for his various illnesses.

Michael Anthony Farley: I was blown away by the Artist Run Art Fair. SO good. I think what was great about the video (and Open Space's booth in general) was the nod to/subversion of context. Like, this is an art fair in a kinda creepy parking garage. Alan Resnick shot that video the week before the fair, while it was still being used for parking. People parking their cars were apparently terrified (I was told) while he was walking around as this totally diseased, insane resident of the garage. Which is also hilarious because a lot of people from "nicer" parts of the city drive to the neighborhood (which is where I live) for the theater or whatever and practically sprint back and forth from their cars because they think the area is so scary.

In that same vein, using a parked car as a piece of display furniture for T-shirts was brilliant. Rather than

trying to disguise the fact that it's an art fair in a parking garage, Open Space called attention to the utility of the circumstance. It was such a good, fun booth. I almost missed all the little found objects Lucas Haroldsen had glued to the floor. They looked a lot like litter, but were a nice surprise. More so, I would imagine for the big contingent of non-typical-art-viewing audiences who stopped by the fair.

I think I enjoyed BB's booth on a similar level. The overall theme of the main Artscape festival this year was "water" so there were installations and performances (which we totally missed somehow) commissioned by the official, main festival that dealt with sea-level rise, water rituals, and the like. But I think BB's staging was such a smart treatment of those concerns: these semi-precious objects encased in fragile-seeming membranes underwater...with a fish!

Paddy: Yeah, the clever and inventive display devices might be the most impressive aspect of this fair, rivaled only by the price points of the work themselves. I COULD AFFORD ALMOST EVERYTHING AND IT WAS GOOD. I'm used to being a window shopper at these events; I also expect fairs that promise affordable prices to be lame as fuck. And that's not coming out of no where. Does anyone else remember the ad featuring [this shopper kicking his heels up](#) because he got such good deals at the Affordable Art Fair? Nobody wants to be that lame.



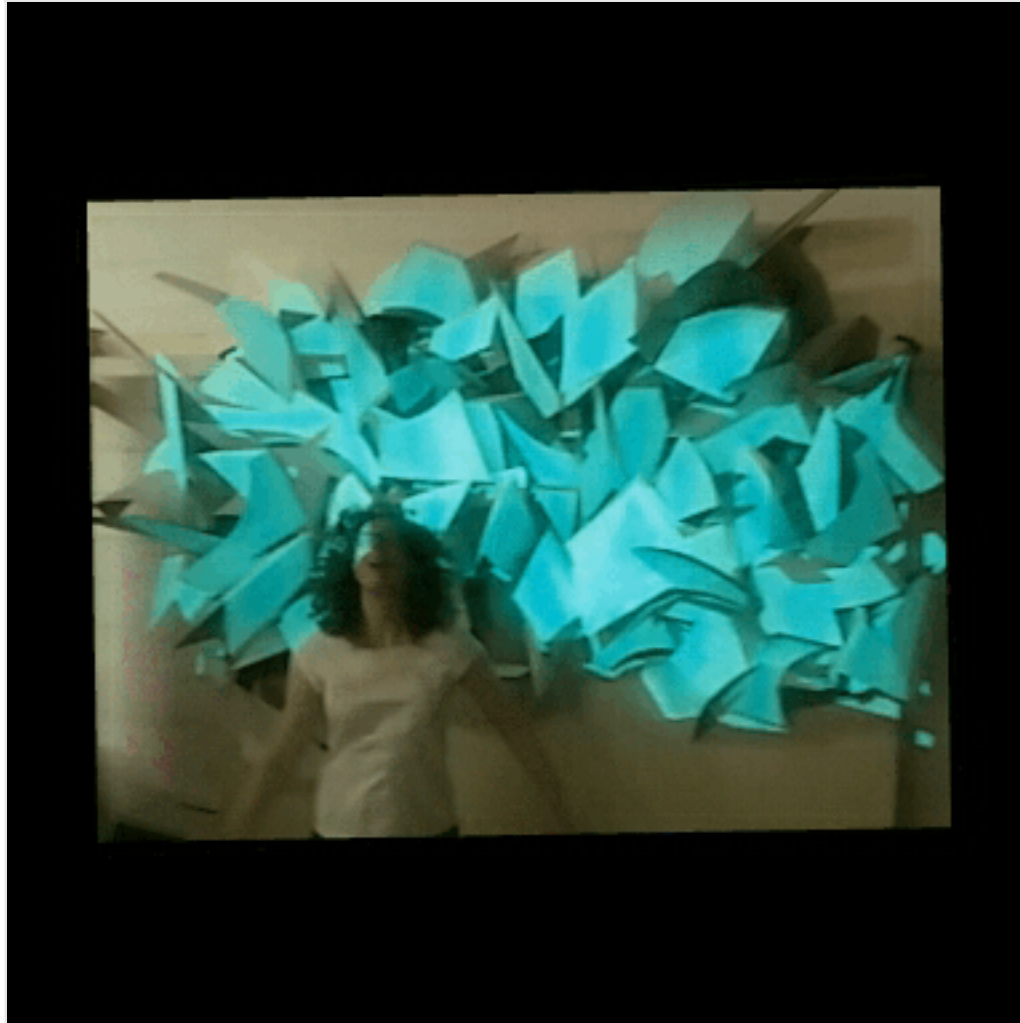
Zines and Ceramics at Sediment Gallery

I wasn't in the fair for more than two minutes and I'd purchased four ceramic cups by [Heather McCalla](#), a sculptor showing at Richmond's [Sediment](#) Gallery. I wanted pretty much everything she made, and even the more complicated vases weren't more than \$40. Compare that to the crafty pottery people with stands in the streets at Artscape—you'll spend \$70 bucks on a boilerplate ashtray—or with the wares at a blue-chip gallery like Anton Kern where you'll spend tens of thousands of dollars. This work isn't [figurative-bloppy](#), a widely popular style in blue chip galleries right now, but it's beautiful and skilled, and I could take it home in a paper bag. I wish I had bought more.

Michael: I really wish I had bought some art! Platform Gallery was selling really nice collages by Anna K. Crooks for \$25! I checked back with them Sunday afternoon and they (unsurprisingly) had really strong sales. Some of my favorite work in the fair was also at their booth: Kaita Niwa's polyurethane pieces that look like a mash-up of pendants and product packaging. Apparently Sediment Gallery sold a lot of work too. Ceramics did really well at Lil' Gallery, and Terrault Contemporary sold a lot of publications/zines/multiples, but no one picked up the larger work they were showing. Which is crazy! I think Sarah Favreau's organic-looking minimalist pieces were some of the prettiest offerings there. I later [looked up her work](#) and realized that one piece, [which was installed with a fan blowing on it](#), was a "car wash" reference, which made me love it even more in the garage.

Paddy: Maybe they need sections like the New York Art Book Fair? Nothing over 50 bucks sells well in the zine section of the fair, but more significant pieces do fine in the main part of the event. I know it's a small operation, but I bet those distinctions would help visitors who intend to purchase.

Other Highlights



GIFshop at Furthermore

Selfie it up. Stephen Crouch's selfie backdrop is a mass of white geometric shapes globbed onto the back wall that then have appears to be patterned projections cast on them. You chose the pattern, do something for eight seconds in front the blob and it makes a GIF. I spent my time jumping. – PJ



Rod Malin of Guest Spot overseeing Self-Organized

Self-Organized

A group show assembled by [Transmitter](#) and [Guest Spot](#) that explores the aesthetic politics of the artist run. I'm not quite sure how that happened, but I liked a lot of the art-work on display here. Alex Epstein [Matisse-like abstract paintings](#) made of yoga mats were a stand out here. Someone's gotta show her in NYC. It's great work and I'm sure there would be an audience for it here. – PJ



Ortega Y Gasset Projects

Ortega Y Gasset Projects: Always Already Here Vol. # 1

Cassette tapes are now just as sexy as vinyl. The booth itself was just two hayballs wrapped in reproductions of protest signs and a beat box playing a cassette tape. But what a tape!

For this project sound artist [Joshua Bienko](#) invited 16 artists to produce what appear to be genre-specific riffs for his album *Always Already Here*. This is the kind of project for which I set my expectations low, not just because there are so many bad tracks produced by artists but because it's so hard to pull off. This, though, succeeds as art and music. Filled with catchy tunes in a range of styles—eighties girl bands, hip hop, banjo music—most of these riffs joke about anything from art to cats to children. Gary Setzer produces a Gary Numan-type track called “[Generator](#)” in which he sings about the emotional life of an artist. “I have anxiety...What is this that I have made? I have not made anything!” he laments against the bubbly notes of his keyboard. Meanwhile, a wall of guitar backs Sheilah Wilson’s French post-punk love song for her daughter Rose in her Delta 5 meets Stereo Total ditty “[J’ai une Bebe 2](#)“. These are just two of 20 tracks all of which can be downloaded for 5 bucks. At the fair you could purchase the tape too, but I passed because I had nothing to play it on (Martinkitchenburger.bandcamp.com). I’m feeling regret for

not just spending the money. It would have been nice to have. PJ



At the Platform booth, this dog knows just how we feel. After a long day at the fairs and in the heat, we need a bit of cool down time.

At Baltimore's Artscape there was a clear trend of taking your dog to openings. Here's a dog that's hot and clearly over that trend. Somehow this seems a fitting note to end on.

Tagged as: [Alan Resnick](#), [Anna K. Crooks](#), [Artscape](#), [baltimore](#), [BB](#), [Grace Davis](#), [Heather McCalla](#), [Lucas Haroldsen](#), [Michael Jones McKean](#), [Open Space](#), [Platform Gallery](#), [Sarah Favreau](#), [Sediment Gallery](#), [Stephen Crouch](#), [The Artist-Run Art Fair](#)