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Wrestling Crabs, Hot House Dancer, Glacial Ice at Expo 1

By Lance Esplund - May 16, 2013 9:31 AM GMT+0530

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Ansel Adams/John Wronn/The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust/The Museum of Modern Art via Bloomberg

"Mount Williamson, Sierra Nevada, From Manzanar, California" (c. 1944) by Ansel Adams. MoMA PS1's museum-wide show "Dark Optimism," part of "Expo 1: New York," includes two galleries devoted to the photographs of Ansel Adams.

People walk through a downpour yet never get wet.

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"WWJD" (2012) by Jack Early. Porn, mirrors, shiny baubles and Pop Art-influenced work like Early's dominated the Frieze art fair this year. Photographer: John Berens/McCaffrey Fine Art/Frieze New York 2013 via Bloomberg

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Cannibalistic spider crabs fight to the death in a watery battle dome. With a bronze Brancusi "Sleeping Muse" for a shell, a lordly hermit crab watches the scene.

These are part of MoMA PS1's ecological "Expo 1: New York." Random International's immersive "Rain Room" (2012), which shuts off where a person walks, is at the Museum of Modern Art, while the wrestling crabs can be found in a murky corner of Long Island City's PS1.

You can watch a woman chanting and dancing among plants in a hot house, and you can also move around massive pieces of Icelandic glacier in Olafur Eliasson's

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Paul McCarthy's "Balloon Dog" (2013) in the Sculpture Park outside the entrance to the Frieze New York art fair on Randall's Island. Photographer: John Berens/Hauser & Wirth/Frieze New York 2013 via Bloomberg

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"Rain Room" (2012) by Random International. The Museum of Modern Art's installation allows visitors to walk through a downpour without getting wet. Source: Random International/The Museum of Modern Art via Bloomberg

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"Your waste of time" (2006) by Olafur Eliasson at neugerriemschneider in Berlin. A walk-in refrigerator at PS1 holds enormous pieces of ice from Iceland's Vatnajökull glacier. Photographer: Jens Ziehe/neugerriemschneider/Tanya Bonakdar Gallery/The Museum of Modern Art via Bloomberg

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Tim Youd completed Henry Miller's "Tropic of Capricorn" on a single sheet of paper around the corner from Miller's boyhood Brooklyn home, after typing throughout the art fair Pulse New York 2013. Source: Coagula Curatorial/Tim Youd/Pulse

walk-in refrigerator "Your waste of time."

PS1's museum-wide extravaganza "Dark Optimism" is the major section of "Expo 1: New York." It's a series of programs, interventions and exhibitions that explores pressing environmental and sociopolitical issues.

Included are robots, a large pool with aquatic plants, a life-size replica of an ancient, post-apocalyptic amphitheater and a group show that ponders technology versus Darwinian natural selection.

There are classes, a film series, a live-in colony of artists, thinkers and architects and a beautiful exhibition of the photographs of Ansel Adams.

Interactive Events

Like the "BMW Guggenheim Lab," "Expo 1" is among the increasing spate of museum-sponsored, interactive "events." The museum's role as curated exhibition space shifts to think tank and community outreach.

As intriguing and commendable as "Expo 1" is, I can't help feeling that energies here are piecemeal and at times misplaced.

When art starts acting principally as public advocate, viewers can leave scratching their heads, as I did in response to Eliasson's giant refrigerator full of glacier ice.

If Eliasson's artwork is ironic, I get it. If, however, it's an alarm -- a call to combat the harmful effects of greenhouse gasses and global warming -- then someone should pull the plug on this cooling unit's massive carbon footprint.

Art Fairs

At least "Expo 1" is taking the world seriously, unlike the contemporary art fair Frieze, which just concluded its second edition on Randall's Island.

Frieze 2012 was fresh and broad-ranging, one of the most satisfying art fairs I've ever attended.

Frivolous and flashy, Frieze 2013 had dealers and artists on their knees worshipping at the altar of [Jeff Koons](#).

His sleazy influence was everywhere, from [Paul McCarthy](#)'s 80-foot-tall Koons-rip-off "Balloon Dog," which squatted suggestively outside the entrance, to the thousands of glitzy, shiny, Pop-Art baubles displayed throughout the booths.

Never under one roof have I seen so many piles of crumpled foil, lights, mirrors and appropriated porn masquerading as art.

The concurrent Manhattan art fairs Nada and mom-and-pop Pulse were more representative.

Pulse offered tiresome performances in which a man typed Henry Miller's "Tropic of Capricorn" on a single sheet of paper and two women in bathing suits sipped cocktails and sunned themselves in beach chairs.

And they had rounded up the usual suspects: Just once I'd like to attend an art fair without having to confront a huge Chuck Close self-portrait.

Yet both these smaller fairs offered proportionately less flash and more surprise, grit and substance.

"Rain Room" runs through July 28 at the Museum of Modern Art, West Lot, 11 W. 53rd St. Information: +1-212-708-9400; <http://www.moma.org>.

"Dark Optimism" runs through Sept. 2 at MoMA PS1, 22-25 Jackson Ave., Long Island City, Queens and other venues. Information: +1-718-784-2084; <http://momaps1.org>.






(Lance Esplund is U.S. art critic for Muse, the arts and leisure section of Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)



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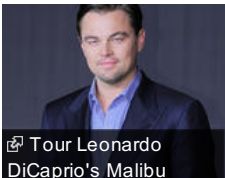
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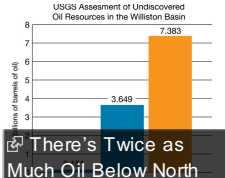
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