

The Sun

Art Fair Season Blossoms

Art Fairs

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A constellation of contemporary art fairs will appear in Manhattan next week, between March 26 and 30. At the center is the 10-year-old Armory Show, drawing into its orbit Scope, Red Dot, Pulse, Volta, Bridge, and Art Now. While the Armory Show — which shows new art by living artists — is the largest and oldest event, the smaller fairs have begun to view themselves and one another as parts of a symbiotic whole, a smoothly operating artistic universe.

The gathering fairs have created a "cross-pollinating" effect, the president and founder of Scope Art Fair, [Alexis Hubshman](#), said. All the shows, no matter what their size, benefit from increased traffic of connoisseurs, collectors, and curators, and the Armory has been supportive of newcomers eager to piggyback on their success. "As more fairs rounded around it, Armory appeared like the big dog that it really is," Mr. Hubshman said.

Still, more fairs don't always mean better business. Armory Arts Week, as it has been unofficially dubbed, has grown and diversified in the last three to four years, but it is a less splashy affair than its tropical cousin, [Art Basel Miami Beach](#), which occurs in December. Many fairs show work in both cities, and organizers often find that the 10 fairs in New York — as opposed to the more than 20 in [Miami](#) — hit a sweet spot in quantity.

"The situation in Miami causes problems for the smaller fairs," the communications manager for the Armory Show, Giovanni Garcia-Fenech, said, adding that the smaller fairs often do not get the attention they need when buyers have an overwhelming number of art fair options. The smaller number also helps build connections between the fairs. Some fairs are linked by a common corporate owner, but others have joined forces to crosspromote themselves or provide free transportation between venues. Scope's sponsor, Zipcar, will provide free rides for VIPs between all other fairs as well as their own. "Saying, 'Use our cars, enjoy yourselves,' is sort of a gentlemen's handshake to the other fairs," Mr. Hubshman said.

And since connections are a most precious commodity in the art world, it doesn't hurt to be in the good graces of other organizers. "Being a satellite fair, you want to get the word out as much as possible," Art Now's [Nicole Hudson](#) said. Art Now is working with its corporate sibling, Red Dot, as well as the nearby Volta Show, to boost business. Grouped on the East Side, away from the cluster of fairs in the Chelsea area and the piers, the three shows have joined forces to provide pedicabs for fairgoers journeying to and from other locations.

The goal for organizers is to find a balance between setting the fair apart and linking it to the collective whole. "Each fair is definitely an entity in itself," Ms. Hudson said. "But if we didn't have the Armory, or if we didn't have Pulse or Scope or Volta, it would be hard to stand alone."

For a smaller operation such as DiVA @ White Box, a digital and video media fair, the goal is to stand out from the crowd. "The question is not how to fit in with the other shows, but how to be different and how to be noticed," DiVA organizer Christian Viveros-Faune said. To achieve that, DiVA will be showing work in oversize white containers on the streets of Chelsea. The highly visible location is convenient for viewers who will be coming to that area anyway, he said, citing increasing competition among fairs as a challenge to his not-for-profit show.

Art fairs in New York also compete with the "real lives" of many collectors and curators, said Helen Allen of Pulse Contemporary Art Fair; many of the art fair customers live and work at least part-time in New York, so patrons will be more at work and less at play than they were in Miami. "A lot of big collectors are New York-based and will continue along their normal trajectory, visiting the art fairs in their off hours," she said. Whether the fairs are holding hands or just peacefully coexisting, there is a sense of community among them. There is also a combined desire to introduce today's freshest art talent, wherever it may come from. "The satellite fair used to be like the Armory's little kid brother," said Mr. Hubshman. "Now we're more like the brother that has grown up and come into our own."