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## On a Treasure Hunt, Uncovering Modern Wonders

By Ken Johnson

“Works on Paper,” a gathering of 78 purveyors of drawings, prints, posters and photographs at the Park Avenue Armory, is not one of those jaw-dropping fairs that confront you at every turn with shockingly expensive brand-name wonders. And though it features mostly modern and contemporary material, there is little in it to challenge conservative tastes. Yet once you adjust to its low-key visual register, perusing the exhibition becomes enthralling and often revelatory.

While hit-and-miss diversity is the rule in most booths, two are presenting excellent solo exhibitions this year. Lori Bookstein Fine Art offers about 40 drawings by the great Modernist architect Louis Kahn (1901-74). If you know Kahn’s buildings but not his drawings, you may be surprised. Rather than projecting monumental, monolithic forms, they exhibit a remarkable fluidity, a playful virtuosity and an avid responsiveness to real experience.

Kahn traveled all over the world, and he drew everywhere he went in pencil, charcoal, ink, watercolor and pastel. Dating from 1928 to 1951, the drawings here include views of sunstruck Egyptian pyramids; ruins in Greece; houses along the coast of Italy; street scenes in Gloucester and Rockport, Me.; and mountainous landscapes in New York State, Colorado and Canada. You sense the artist thoroughly enjoying the process of looking and drawing, and you may mourn postmodern architecture’s abandonment of drawing by hand.

The other solo exhibition, from Lost City Arts, presents more than 50 monotypes by the sculptor and furniture designer Harry Bertoia (1915-78). Bertoia regularly made one-of-a-kind prints as a way to explore possibilities for sculptures. These prints, from the late ’40s to the mid-’70s, depict abstract structures, sometimes organic and sometimes geometric. They have a smudgy, tonal elegance, and collectively they produce a sumptuously decorative ambience.

After that, the show becomes a kind of treasure hunt. Wander into Valerie Carberry’s booth, where among works by various American Modernists is a lovely small still life from 1945 by the Abstract Expressionist Jack Tworkov. Rendered with a sharp pencil and an energetically sketchy yet exacting touch, the domestic items on a tabletop vibrate as though caught in an earthquake.

On the same wall a 1939 view of Cape Cod sea grass, dunes and a pine bough was drawn with such exquisite soft-focus subtlety by Edwin Dickinson that you could miss how vividly realistic it is if you pass by too quickly.

Delightful pieces at Simon Capstick-Dale Fine Art include a sweet surrealist boat drawn in blue and red pencil by the multitalented Jean Cocteau, and a small, mysterious picture drawn in colored pencil by Picasso in 1905. It shows a bald man on his hands and knees like an obedient dog before a standing woman who wears only red shoes and thigh-high red stockings.

Among some nondescript works at Bernarducci Meisel are three arresting small works by fathers of photorealism: a man's head made of fuzzy ink dots on green graph paper, by Chuck Close; a gouache painting of the reflective glass front and revolving door of a New York office building, by Richard Estes; and a beat-up Mustang raked by California sunlight in a moody watercolor, by Robert Bechtle.

Kiki Smith fans should visit the Riverhouse/van Straaten booth, which has a set of finely drawn etchings, each depicting a rough, semitransparent rock crystal, and two large etchings portraying roguish young men with goatees. One wears a cowboy hat, the other has hair flowing over his shoulders. Conceived of as a pair, the prints go by the enigmatic title "Noon."

Intriguing for art historical reasons is Frank Stella's 1957-58 composition of brushy, arced lines, made around the time he graduated from Princeton University and before he discovered his early vocation as an antiexpressionist. It's at Mark Borghi Fine Art.

An affecting 1925 watercolor by Edward Hopper, at ACA Galleries, shows two women in the distance crossing a strangely empty urban space. Its haunting, De Chirico-like lonesomeness grows yet more poignant when you learn that its title, "The Day After the Funeral," refers to the death of Hopper's friend George Bellows, the Ashcan School painter. One of the two women in black is believed to be his widow.

A more curious work is an enormous color lithograph at Bernard Goldberg Fine Arts, made by an anonymous artist between 1910 and 1913. Measuring almost seven feet square, it depicts the interior of a huge indoor swimming pool in San Francisco, populated by hundreds of little people in bathing suits and based on a contemporary photograph of the glass-enclosed three-acre Sutro Baths.

Of the handful of booths showing old master works, the best is R. S. Johnson Fine Art of Chicago. Five gorgeous etchings by Rembrandt on one wall face seven equally entrancing prints by Albrecht Dürer. It offers a fascinating comparison. While Rembrandt's lushly textured portraits and biblical scenes convey a sensuous, down-to-earth humanism, Dürer's works, roughly 100 years older, exude a late-Gothic visionary extravagance.