



# Under New Ownership, EXPO Chicago 2024 Maintains Its Midwestern Charm

By Maxwell Rabb

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Ta-coumba T. Aiken, installation view in Dreamsong's booth at EXPO Chicago, 2024. Photo by Justin Barbin. Courtesy of EXPO Chicago.

It might be in its 11th edition, but EXPO Chicago is embarking on a new chapter. This year's fair—the largest in the U.S. Midwest—is the first since Frieze announced last summer that it'd be acquiring EXPO, along with The Armory Show in New York. How the new ownership would influence EXPO was a hot topic among art world whisperers heading into the fair, and on its VIP day Thursday, Tony Karman, the fair's president, was in an enthusiastic mood. EXPO's legacy of community involvement will continue, if not get stronger, he said, as Frieze helps elevate Chicago's presence on the international stage.

“The good news is [Frieze’s leadership] recognizes, just like they do in the cities that the Frieze fairs are in, the importance of a fair activating a city and a community,” Karman told Artsy. “There’s no question that as we continue to evolve under their ownership and leadership, we’ll get the benefits of a great company, but with what I believe is an earnest intent to make sure that EXPO Chicago—as we’ve built it with our programming, our curatorial forum, our curatorial initiatives, our Director Summit, and the way we organize so many events with the institutions around Chicago—doesn’t get lost.”



Installation view of TERN Gallery’s booth at EXPO Chicago, 2024. Photo by Justin Barbin. Courtesy of EXPO Chicago.

Indeed, while a slight drizzle and cold winds greeted VIPs at Navy Pier’s Festival Hall, the fair’s famed Midwestern warmth was on full display. This year, EXPO welcomes 170 international galleries hailing from 29 countries, an expansion of its international reach that continues to maintain its Midwestern character. Crowds were reliably strong throughout the day, with a solid showing of institutions alongside collectors perusing the halls.

“It’s a different approach [for Chicago collectors],” said Karman. “It may not be an immediate ‘I want this, this, and this.’ It’s a relationship. It’s a connoisseurship. It’s a long relationship that is built between an exhibitor, exhibiting gallery, and a collector in ways that I do think is slightly Midwestern.”

As the opening bell rang at noon, one aspect that perhaps characterized this Midwestern attitude was a calmer, more measured enthusiasm among VIPs compared to the more frenetic energy of some other fairs. This approachability extends to the pricing as well, creating an appealing point for new collectors.



Amanda Williams (b. 1974)  
*What black is this you say—“Stop crying fo I give you something to cry about” (03.26.24)*, 2024  
Rhona Hoffman Gallery



Michael Rakowitz  
*The invisible enemy should not exist*, 2007-Ongoing  
Rhona Hoffman Gallery

In the heart of the fair concourse, Chicago stalwart Rhona Hoffman—founder of the eponymous Rhona Hoffman Gallery—was quickly holding court. Her booth, featuring 19 of the gallery’s artists, attracted waves of interested collectors and visitors throughout the entire day. Celebrating her 11th year at the fair, the gallery presented works from Chicago stars, such as Bassim Al-Shaker and Amanda Williams, the latter of whose work, made from oil paint and mixed media on wood panel, *What black is this you say? —“Stop crying fo I give you something to cry about”—black (03.26.24)* (2024), was a magnet for the booth.

Another standout among the expansive body of work is Michael Rakowitz’s *The invisible enemy should not exist (ivories)* (2023), a glass case containing Middle Eastern food packaging with newspaper clippings. This sculptural piece, made from found objects, emphasizes the Chicago gallerist’s bold approach that mirrors her gallery program. Above all, she intends to curate the best survey to appeal to Chicago’s visitors and collectors.

“You try to get the best art here for the people of Chicago—very many people in Chicago like art and buy art or look at art,” Hoffman told Artsy. “But wait until you see Friday, Saturday, Sunday when thousands of people from Chicago come to the art fair to look—not to buy—but meet each other, have a good time, and feel replenished.”



Cameron Welch, installation view in Nino Mier Gallery's booth at EXPO Chicago, 2024. Photo by Timothy Johnson.  
Courtesy of Cameron Welch and Nino Mier Gallery.

Across the central pavilion and past the Lúcia Koch installation of photographs capturing the interiors of discarded cardboard boxes (a part of the fair's IN/SITU program of large-scale sculptures across the fair), Nino Mier Gallery's solo presentation features the striking mosaic works of Brooklyn-based artist Cameron Welch. His piece *Theseus and the Bull* (2024) is a rich amalgamation of references spanning from ancient Greek mythology to digital clip art. Crafted from subway tile, porcelain tile, glass tile, and various found objects, these materials are intricately embedded into the grouted mosaic, creating a visually compelling narrative.

"These are so densely populated that I think there's you can tell one story and then tell another story," said Margaret Zuckerman, senior director of Nino Mier's New York space. "I love that that narrative thrust really draws in the audience, especially in a city that's so concerned with a history of art."

The works are priced at \$30,000 and \$38,000. Other than the wall works, the table where the gallery directors are sitting is Welch's *Relics (Coffee Table)* (2024), which is priced at \$20,000.

On the northern flank of the Navy Pier, Luis De Jesus Los Angeles is presenting a five-person exhibition featuring works from artists across its program: Karla Diaz, Hector Dionicio Mendoza, Griselda Rosas, Gabriel Sanchez, and Evita Tezeno. In the first hours of the fair, the

gallerists welcomed strong collector interest—both in inquiries as well as a deep curiosity about the program and its artists. Tezeno’s collage painting *When I Grow Up...* (2023) sold as the fair opened, as well as another work, both priced in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 range.

“They’re running through and coming back and want to learn more about some of the artists that were presenting this year,” said director Jay Wingate. “That is because there are artists that are being presented that have not been presented in Chicago before.”



Cameron Welch  
*Theseus and Friends*, 2023  
NINO MIER GALLERY



Evita Tezeno  
*When I Grow Up...*, 2023  
Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

Near the west entrance, meanwhile, the fair’s notable Profile section presents solo booths and focused projects that showcase ambitious installations and thematic exhibitions, adding depth to the fair’s offerings. These 19 galleries delivered an impressive array of experimental and conceptual works, engaging a diverse audience and enriching the overall experience. One noteworthy gallery is Spinello Projects, a veteran participant of EXPO, first exhibiting in 2011. The Miami-based gallery is presenting a series of compelling pieces by Cuban painter Nereida Garcia-Ferraz, known for her rich, multilayered compositions that combine figurative and abstract elements with a hint of surrealism. The works feature multiple figures in close proximity, displaying a variety of poses that suggest different facets of the artist herself, rendered in a bold palette that captivates viewers.

“There’s a lack of—in many museums—of women of color, especially artists from the Caribbean and, of course, LGBTQ+ artists, so it seems that people are attracted to the work and Nereida,” said gallery founder Anthony Spinello. Additional highlights include *Quien Sab Lo Que Pasa Allá Arriba (Who Knows What Happens Up There)* (2023), a figurative surrealistic work filled with fantastical elements such as a staircase coming out of a woman’s head and a ghostly shadow behind a young figure. Spinello’s booth, which was priced from \$5,000 to \$22,000, had sold out before the end of the VIP day.

On the opposite end of the Profile section, London dealer Maximillian William is presenting a solo presentation from Polish artist Magdalena Skupinska. These abstract works are made from atypical natural materials, where she creates pigments from ingredients such as ground corn, chili peppers, and turmeric. For instance, her work *Golden Hour* (2024) uses ashwagandha and turmeric to create golden and yellow hues. According to the dealer, the fair was swarming with collectors, consistent with the gallery’s previous two experiences in Chicago. Collector interest was at a remarkable high for its booth, with prices ranging from \$6,000 to \$12,000.

“The display is 10 paintings, we have four left, and it’s five o’clock,” said founder Maximillian William. “And it’s been really strong and exciting collectors. All sales have been to new clients.”

Among the buzziest sections of the fair is the Exposures section, which features 47 emerging galleries in business for 10 years or less. The section, curated by the curator of visual arts at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Rosario Güiraldes, features solo and two-artist presentations that realize the real allure of the Windy City fair. Throughout the fair, especially in the Exposures section, collectors had the opportunity to meet and interact directly with the artists, who were present in huge numbers.

Los Angeles’s Make Room presents a standout solo booth of Chicago-born artist Cathleen Clarke, which showcases new work from the artist’s “Dancer” series, such as *Nightingale* and *To Live is to Fly* (both 2024). Inspired by old photographs of ballet dancers, the works are defined by their hazy, ephemeral swathes of bright colors.

“These works are so much about the subconscious,” said gallery founder Emilia Yin. “The figures there are somewhat identifiable. They don’t have a very concrete feature where people can pinpoint a specific person. It’s a portrait of someone’s mental space rather than their actual appearance.”

By 2 p.m., the gallery had placed all works from the booth in the range of \$4,500 to \$13,000, and Yin underscored how important EXPO is for developing curatorial relationships. Even after the booth sold out, the gallerist and artist, who was present, welcomed several institutional representatives and curators. She noted that the calmer nature of EXPO helps galleries nurture these new relationships. “It really enables the opportunity to build a little deeper connection with people, more time to engage instead of saying ‘hi’ and ‘bye,’” the gallerist noted.



Rajni Perera, installation view in Patel Brown's booth at EXPO Chicago, 2024. Photo by Mikhail Mishin. Courtesy of Patel Brown.

Across the aisle, Canada's Patel Brown returned to the Exposure section for the third time with a remarkable solo exhibition of Sri Lankan artist Rajni Perera. Here, the work *Joyous Procession / The Infinite Serpent* (2024) captivates viewers with its depiction of mythological figures dancing in line. This piece is crafted by stretching fabric, which is then meticulously painted with gouache and charcoal and embellished with pearls and metallic thread.

Accompanying the paintings, Perera's polymer clay statues, such as the sculpture of a head with a woven reed basket on its head, *Knife* (2024), pay homage to Sri Lankan craftswomen. The gallery sold works that received significant attention from curators and institutions at prices ranging from \$15,000 to \$50,000.

"We've gotten a really strong response, and especially from curators," co-founder Devan Patel told Artsy. "Rajni is showing at the upcoming Sharjah Biennial, and her work was featured at the Gwangju Biennale and several other major biennials and solo exhibitions internationally. It's a really exciting time in her career, and I think it's awesome to see people discover her work for the first time in the booth."

Elsewhere, London's Cob is curating a special solo exhibition for 50-year-old Spanish artist Chechu Álava, whose paintings contemplate her childhood. Displayed works like *Waiting*

*for the Miracle* and *The Mirror* (both 2024) delve into self-reflection and personal history, using traditional oil painting techniques. Álava hand-mixes her colors from just four pigments, creating cohesive and layered effects that give her canvases a gauzy, ethereal quality. The introspective nature of her art attracted collectors drawn to the depth and personal symbolism in her pieces. Prices for these impactful works range from \$6,500 to \$16,000.

Echoing the sentiment across the entire fair, Cob co-founder Victoria Williams emphasized how the nurturing atmosphere of EXPO uniquely supports deep, meaningful engagements between artists and collectors.

“The collectors here are fantastic,” Williams said. “Because of the attachment to the institute, you get a very knowledgeable, sensitive collector that wants to be involved and learn more, not just about the artists presenting, but programming. I find it to be quite like in-depth collecting. That kind of collecting is more focused. It maybe isn’t as busy sometimes as some of the other fairs, but I find it more nurturing and you can nurture better relationships.”

Another highlight, Bogotá’s SGR Galeria, is showcasing new works from Colombian artist Lorena Torres at prices between \$3,600 and \$10,500. Her latest series, “No te veré morir” (“I will not see you die”), delves into themes of love, loss, yearning, and the ephemeral connections between the soul and the body. In works like *Esta Es La Última Pintura Que Hago Sobre Ti* (2024), a red rose weaves through the contemplative scene, symbolizing the internal violence of heartbreak as it draws blood from its subject.

Some 11 editions in, EXPO has carved a reputation for creating an environment that is both inclusive and engaging. The fair and its exhibitors pride themselves on offering a thoughtful, reflective experience, where the pace is relaxed, and the atmosphere communal. This spirit perhaps played into the thinking behind Frieze’s acquisition, which should only help to build its reputation further. “EXPO Chicago, no question, since its inception, has reinvigorated that frisson, that connection, that ability to let the whole community be in service of our artists,” said fair president Karman.