

Collecting

From Barbadian silk paintings to painstaking ink-wash — these are the New York debuts to watch

The Independent fair has a reputation for career-making starts — this year it's looking for the next generation of stars

Jacoba Urist, Published May 3, 2025

The Independent art fair has vaulted many a breakout star to New York over the years, from figurative painter Nicolas Party's soft pastels to Deborah Joyce-Hollman, whose nine-hour film "Moment 2" was recently acquired by the Guggenheim Museum. In 2012, influential Miami collectors and museum founders Don and Mera Rubell discovered the paintings and sculptural wall pieces by then relatively unknown Colombian artist Oscar Murillo. Within days, the couple arranged to meet Murillo: a five-week summer residency at the Rubell Family Collection and a first US solo exhibition at their private museum in Miami soon followed.

"Last year, for our 15th anniversary, we did an expansive look backwards at how many American and international artists had their first solo presentation at Independent, either as an American debut or as a New York debut," says Elizabeth Dee, founder and curatorial lead of the fair. The retrospection yielded more than 300 names. "It was such a significant list of artists that have gone on to become consequential, in terms of museum representation and the market," she adds.

For Independent's 2025 edition, held at Spring Studios in Tribeca, Dee and her team began organising the event that draws insidery, mid-sized galleries as they always have, by invitation and nomination only, with a keen sense of whether a solo artist has already had a New York moment. But this time, the fair is launching a new programme called Independent Debuts, which

features 26 solo presentations within the larger platform. To qualify, artists must have had no more than one, non-fair solo show in New York. “We didn’t want to exclude artists, by default, because maybe they had a small show in a pop-up somewhere or a show during Covid that five people saw,” Dee says.



‘Towards An Outer Island’ (2025) by Gunnel Wåhlstrand © courtesy of Andréhn-Schiptjenk, Stockholm, Paris and Independent

Spread throughout the fair’s 85 participating galleries, Independent Debuts is the result of close observation and months of collaborative conversations. “We have artists that are extraordinarily established in their home countries, but for various reasons, have not yet had the opportunity to show in New York,” she clarifies. “There’s a whole next generation of artists coming up that are showing at this fair.” This week, Independent Debuts kicks off with that fresh crop of global talent, from Tokyo and Addis Ababa to Berlin, Bucharest and Bologna. Stockholm painter Gunnel Wåhlstrand — a “national treasure in her home country”, says Dee — is presented by the Stockholm- and Paris-based gallery Andréhn-Schiptjenko. Wåhlstrand works exclusively in subtle tonal, ink wash, conjuring the Swedish island of her childhood summers. A testament to painstaking intentionality, the artist has made just 50 artworks over her 25-year career, presenting three paintings at the fair. Independent

Debuts is her first solo outing in the US. “This is what makes us very different from traditional venues in the fair landscape,” Dee explains. “Because we are nomination-based, we are very high-touch with each gallery and their artist about space selection and placement.” Wählstrand selected precisely the location on the sixth floor of Spring Studios that she wanted her work to be seen, the exact wall lengths for her pieces to be hung, and the wall colour — “all huge considerations for the artist”.



'Birthday Confetti', 2024 by Nicole Economides © courtesy of Callirrhoe, Athens and Independent

Independent Debuts artist Nicole Economides is presented by the Athens gallery Callirrhoe, a first-time exhibitor at the fair. While Economides lives in New York, this will be her first solo presentation there. Dee spots a “connection between conceptual art in New York and this painting practice that could easily be in dialogue with Kelley Walker”, linking the young artist to early-2000s work by the New York icon. Economides conjures her family’s

immigrant experience — owning a Greek restaurant — in some of her works: cheese and olive oil barrels prop up canvases. “One of the trends we’re seeing among this rising generation of gallerists and artists is the decentralisation outside of New York,” says Dee. She points to April April, a Pittsburgh gallery founded by Patrick Bova and Lucas Regazzi in 2021, which operated out of the front room of their Brooklyn apartment until 2024. For Independent Debuts, they bring drawings and sculpture by Montreal-based artist Alix Van Der Donckt-Ferrand, alongside a series of the artist’s music boxes, playing a composite of songs, including original compositions.



Alix Van Der Donckt-Ferrand, 'Ausencia', 2024 © courtesy of april april, Pittsburgh and Independent

For some artists, their New York moment at Independent Debuts follows a splash elsewhere in the US. Rising British gallery Copperfield highlights Ada M Patterson, whose silk paintings expand upon the Barbadian-tinged textiles she developed for the Prospect.6 triennial in New Orleans last winter. As to whether Independent Debuts is a way to entice buyers in a

challenging environment, Dee says: “I think even though we’ve been in a market correction and there’s been a lot of economic and political volatility, the area of the market that is growing significantly is the lower to mid-tier galleries.” She cites last month’s Art Basel and UBS Art Market report which found that in 2024, dealers with turnover of less than \$250,000 experienced the largest increase in aggregate sales year-on-year at 17 per cent. “We’ve been in a massive generational wealth transfer,” she says. “But it’s also a generational gallery shift . . . We are trying to represent the next generation of gallerists and the artists that they are selecting from their own generations.”

May 8-11, independenthq.com

Published: Financial Times, 2025-05-03

<https://www.ft.com/content/03829c41-a73d-4e77-bb73-f9a706250a4b>