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The Armory Show's Great Challenge: How to Surprise Visitors Who Have Seen It All

As it happens, there are still a few things I haven't seen in the art world

By [Alanna Martinez](#) • 03/04/17 4:52pm



A recreation of Patricia Cronin's Tack Room, 1997-98.
Alanna Martinez

There is little at an art fair that could surprise me at this point. I say that not because I've seen it all, but because I have honestly seen quite a lot. A naked woman in a cage made of flowers. A real live donkey just hanging out alone in a room all day long with only the company of an ornate chandelier. An actual stabbing. This is not to say that there might not be plenty more of the unexpected and unusual to look forward to on the fair circuit, but the scene has become so

noticeably saturated with shock and awe art campaigns that if you told me a gallery had brought an army of purebred hairless kittens and was selling them for \$5,000 a piece just to make an argument for the parallels between the exotic animal trade and the art market, I'd be like "OK."

So imagine my surprise when I walked into New York's premiere art fair, the Armory Show (which runs through March 5), and witnessed a concrete pillar as large as a dump truck floating through the air like an untethered balloon. Was it science? A miracle? Or simply a stunt? The answer is a complex algorithm of all of the above, but equally amazing was that my curiosity was genuinely piqued.

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Nearby, artist Patricia Cronin's 1998 installation *Tack Room*, originally shown at New York's White Columns. A cluttered square room made of four plywood walls and strewn with hay features horse saddles and bridles, show ribbons, equine-shaped party lights, old copies of *Spur*, *Practical Horseman* and *Equus* and a selection of Cronin's portraits of the noble beasts. The work, she told me, explores themes of female autonomy and power, and a loose and longtime dream of someday achieving enough success to own a horse herself. But it's the underlying historical narrative of women on horseback—from riding sidesaddle to appearing in full page adverts for Bloomingdales wearing breeches—that can be gleaned from Cronin's assemblage of images which is even more timely today as it was when it was first shown.

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