

## **Americana @ the Piers: Their Ships Came In**

by Jeanne Schinto

The hordes gathered early for the start of Stella Show Management's Americana @ the Piers on Saturday and Sunday, January 20 and 21, during Americana Week in New York City. We had arrived soon enough to take a spot fairly close to the front of the line, but we quickly realized that position wouldn't matter much, once the start time came. Behind us, stretching seemingly to the horizon, was a huge and growing crush of humanity. How many hundreds? Impossible to estimate, given that the line bent back on itself and around the corner, out of sight, in order to fit everyone or nearly everyone inside, protected against the cold winds whipping down the Hudson River.

No one could rightfully complain about this gate. But would these showgoers actually open their wallets and buy this time from the nearly 200 dealers waiting hopefully inside? The short, sweet answer is, yes. In fact, this eyewitness report could be two telegraphic words long: great show-with or without a redundant exclamation point. "Swarm." "Ants at a picnic." "Bees-honey." Along with prices and descriptions, these were the impressionist words and phrases we scrawled into our notebook as we were carried by the throng through the show. "Fully engulfed," we wrote, followed by the names of three dealers we recognized from The American Antiques Show at the Metropolitan Pavilion on 18th Street.

In between snapping photos of objects for sale, we snapped one of money being counted into somebody's palm, then wrote three more names, of New England dealers we recognized from home. It wasn't until four hours later ("2 p.m.-noise level down") that we noted more room to move in the aisles. We returned to the show on the following day to find out what had sold and to collect dealer comments.

Lorraine German of Mad River Antiques, North Granby, Connecticut, said it was "the best Pier show of all we've ever done." It was the fifth one for her and her husband, Steve. "Excellent show," she reiterated. "As usual, the Stella staff is amazing. They go out of their way to make things happen for you." There is such a thing as puffery, but we don't think that's what we were hearing from the Germans. We could see for ourselves the blank spaces on their show walls.

Steven H. Schwartz and Casey Hale of Urban Country, Venice, California, had been mobbed on Saturday; we hadn't even been able to get a toe into their double booth. On Sunday Schwartz said, "The show was terrific." He spoke to us as porters were carting off a vintage arrow sign of painted white metal with spaces for electric bulbs all the way up its 9' length. It was headed for Long Island. Besides having sold multiple items, large and small, Schwartz said, he also handed out "hundreds" of business cards; giving us one, he clutched the remaining dozen or so in his hand.

Doug and Bev Norwood of Norwoods' Spirit of America, Timonium, Maryland, said the show had been "excellent." Asked what categories of items had already sold, Bev said, "We've sold all over the place. Yesterday we were busy all day. It wasn't until the late afternoon that we finally took a breath. We sold theorems, spice cabinets, paintings, hooked rugs, trade signs, paint-decorated furniture, stools, smalls, columns, and shelving. We sold to good return customers, and we sold to a woman who asked, 'Now do I become a return customer?' We got a call early this morning on an item. The shopper had forgotten at which of the [Americana Week] shows she had seen it. She tracked us down and just came in to buy it."

Mary and Joshua Steenburgh of Pike, New Hampshire, said, "Yesterday was fabulous. It was a great crowd. Everybody seemed interested. They were all asking questions." They also bought. The Steenburghs, who deal in folk art, industrial art, and unusual objects of all kinds, said they sold 40 items on Saturday alone, including an item marked \$6500 that you'll see in the captions.

Costa Sakellariou of One Good Eye Antiques, who sells out of the Mad Hatter group shop in Binghamton, New York, said, "Yesterday was crazy. We sold good folk art and a nice collection of trade signs to good, sophisticated buyers. I feel really vindicated." Vindicated? Did he mean because the last couple of years of shows had been slow? "Yes," he said. "People were bullish. They had traveled long distances to come to this show and bought once they got here."

Bill Powell of American Arts, Franklin, Tennessee, made a similar comparison between this show and others that have been on his roster lately. "It's been great," he said. "There were big crowds, and they were buying. It's been stronger than other recent shows." Al Linder of Northfield, Minnesota, who sells farm primitives and folk art, said, "Yesterday was fantastic, and hopefully today will be too."

As for Barry Dobinsky of Schorr & Dobinsky, Bridgehampton, New York, who had brought a booth full of French industrial items, he and his partner had literally sold to the walls. Stackable metal chairs and other seating, tables, cabinets, baskets, bins—all gone. "It's been a very good show for us," Dobinsky said, standing on what amounted to an empty stage. "We've been doing the industrial look for five years now. Typically we do a more general booth of goods—we carry a full line of French goods—but Irene Stella suggested an all-industrial booth for this show when she saw our all-industrial booth at the Modernism show a couple of months ago. To be perfectly honest, the stuff sells itself. It's extremely popular in New York."

Leanne Stella, Irene's daughter, now heads the company that her mother founded over 30 years ago. Briefly we caught up with her at the show, where she had time only to say of the crowds, "They seem hungry for the stuff!" Later, we spoke to her by phone about this show and the other Stella event that weekend, Antiques at the Armory on Lexington Avenue at 26th Street. Although she wouldn't give the exact numbers of the gate at either place, she would reveal this: "We did seem to have more attendance at both shows than we've had in a couple of years."

Like her dealers, Leanne was ebullient and seemed even a little amazed at the pent-up energy that had been released. "In the last couple of years, people almost seemed to be just moping through the shows," she said. "It wasn't like that this time. Dealers told us people were buying things up so fast. It was great to see that level of excitement again."

Sound too good to be true? It was possible not to do well at this show, if you brought the wrong merchandise (undistinguished Continental, for example) or overpriced the right stuff. But the savvy, hardworking dealers with whom we spoke had every right to conclude that the middle market had turned a kind of economic corner. The coming year will tell us whether it was a (pardon the pier-inspired pun) fluke.

For more information about next year's show, contact Stella Show Management at (212) 255-0020 or via its Web site ([www.stellashows.com](http://www.stellashows.com)).