



Peer inside this tiny art fair, where major artists present at miniature scale

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(CNN) — Spread across sprawling convention centers, art fairs often deal at a grand scale: huge floorplans, major artworks sold for millions, dramatic installations and, sometimes, big stunts.

But in Chicago, one fair brings the art down to a miniature size, with its participants making itty-bitty paintings, sculptures and other works to be displayed at 1:12 scale in dollhouse-sized booths. Barely Fair, now entering its fourth year, brings together both well-established commercial galleries and artist-run project spaces, and has previously featured a “mini bean” by Anish Kapoor and other little works by the likes of Barbara Kruger, Yoko Ono and Rebecca Morris. The fair runs the week of Expo, Chicago’s (regular-sized) annual international fair and opens on April 12 at Color Club.



The artist Amanda Ross-Ho nods to a monumental 7-foot-tall T-shirt she made in 1998 with this tiny playful version. Roland Miller/Barely Fair

The Chicago-born, Los Angeles-based artist Amanda Ross-Ho, exhibiting with the Portland gallery ILY2, is using her booth at this year's fair to look back at one of her formative artworks and bring it full circle. In 1998, Ross-Ho began playing with monumental proportions in her art, creating a 7-foot-tall t-shirt that read "LEAVE ME ALONE" in a bold sans-serif font, a nod to the declarative slogan tees of fashion designer Katharine Hamnett. Ross-Ho has created various iterations and sizes of the shirt over the years; now, her smallest version, "LEAVE ME ALONE (XXXXXS), 2024," measuring only a few inches, will come home to Chicago — where she first ideated the work.

"(It's) inverting the dynamics of making a monument at small scale," she said, explaining that Barely Fair "happened to feel almost tailor-made" for her work.

Chicago, she added, has "such a long legacy of artist-run spaces, and truly alternative models to the art market and the art fair system... so there's something about the miniature art fair that's *so* Chicago, and I love that."

Ross-Ho is selling eight wearable "LEAVE ME ALONE" shirts at Barely Fair for the occasion, but sales are not the draw, she emphasized. Price points for artworks at Barely Fair typically range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, with some of the works not meant for sale at all.