For the 2025 edition of the Independent Art Fair, we are proud to present an exceptional collection of vintage American game boards created between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries. These once functional, visually compelling works, created by unknown artists, transcend their original purpose to align with the aesthetics of minimalism and geometric abstraction. Ricco/Maresca's presentation, the first of its kind at a major art fair, decontextualizes these objects to celebrate their graphic beauty, materiality, and historical significance. This exhibition furthers the gallery's mission to elevate self-taught and vernacular art into the modern and contemporary art discourse.

Aligning with Ricco/Maresca's ongoing mission to promote the crossover of self-taught, outsider, and vernacular art into the modern and contemporary arenas, our booth at the 2025 edition of the Independent Art Fair will present a collection of outstanding game boards made between the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Created as functional objects by unknown American artists, these examples of parcheesi, backgammon, halma, checkers, Chinese checkers, mills, and solitaire have transcended their original purpose and stand on their own as cousins of modern art. This exhibition thus decontextualizes these works to highlight their concrete beauty, but it also acknowledges the mystery and gravitas that they possess as objects that once participated in everyday life.

Modern board games developed as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the middle class, but their precursors date back to ancient times—with dice being at the core of humanity's oldest games. The most prolific and creative period in the American game board tradition falls approximately between 1820 and the end of World War II, when a general period of prosperity and the mainstream availability of new technologies, particularly radio and television, practically eliminated people's need to fabricate the means to entertain themselves. In the nineteenth century, the majority of game boards were homemade for personal use or produced in domestic workshops for sale within the immediate community—much in the same way as bird decoys, dolls, and quilts. Artists used the materials at hand; easily accessible, generally native

hardwoods and standard oil-based household paint—whose durability could withstand the continuous quiet abrasion of the moving parts on the surface.

In the informal environment of a young American nation, artists transformed pre-established patterns into personal compositions, taking creative liberties analogous to jazz—if we think about the framework of the game as a basic melody and of each artist's visual execution as a kind of musical improvisation. In the best of cases, game boards embody this powerful junction of familiar and new information; of tradition and innovation, with the latter manifesting itself through various degrees of abstraction, deconstruction, and formal embellishment or distillation.

The rhythmic configurations in the square grids of checkers and halma boards; the flat architecture of parcheesi, with its four nests flanking a nucleus and divided by compartmentalized paths; the sharp hypnotic quality of backgammon's interweaving dagger-like triangles; the harmonious symmetry of the marble-shaped indentations of the hexagram in Chinese checkers and the octagon or cross in solitaire, and the web-like concentric lines in mills offer us—as contemporary viewers—a visual lexicon that is as cohesive and direct as the best works of minimalism and geometric abstraction, which they often precede. Beyond this, a game board's texture and materiality are equally relevant to its graphic qualities: the surface and "purity" of the object should be a matter of historical significance, a threshold to its former life. Time becomes tangible through scratching from years of touch and play; through the network of cracks (or craquelure) triggered by the shrinkage of the paint and wood, and through the oxidation of the paint after the initial drying phase, which gives the pigments an aged, subdued quality.

Ricco/Maresca's presentation at the Independent Art Fair, which focuses exclusively on an art form the gallery has passionately championed for 40 years, is the first of its kind at a major art fair. Our hope is that it contributes to bringing vintage American gameboards closer to entering the realm of fine art and further away from the notion of craft.

The once marginal understanding of self-taught and outsider artists vis-à-vis the art historical continuum has changed radically in the last few decades, we now recognize them not as extraneous but as essential in the development and ethos of modern art; museums collect and present them. African American quilts have to a certain extent, and more recently, been included in this shift—with museums outside the folk art specialization collecting Gee's Bend quilts in particular. Exceptional works made by anonymous American game board artists must follow. The preface of Ricco/Maresca's book *American Vernacular* (Knopf, 2002) expresses it eloquently:

"It has been comfortable for dealers, critics, and collectors to champion this work under constricting labels, almost solely according to concepts of primitivism and authenticity. They set up a simple—and, we believe, spurious—opposition between vernacular and mainstream, art. We call this the 'glass ceiling' of folk art, which forever limits its appreciation, understanding, and evaluation … Art is something people do all the time, everywhere, when they need to and when they don't, when others say it is wrong and when they say it is right … Whether art originated in private pain or in communal vision, it is always excessive. And excess, as William Blake taught, is a form of celebration."