

artists, press representatives, and energetic South Florida school groups carefully sidestep each other to experience more art in one place than they can meaningfully absorb before the nine p.m. closing time.

A young American gallery manager from London remarks that an international art fair feels like a performance—not by the galleries, but by the buyers. She opines that people typically buy art for prestige or to impress friends with the astuteness and taste of their purchases. Raised in a well-to-do family whose patriarch avidly collected stamps, she witnessed firsthand how opportunity and passion inform the collecting psychology of economically privileged people. And yet, although her background taught her “how rich people think,” her own job pays as modestly as most galleries pay their sophisticated and usually well-educated representatives, which, she says, explains the prevalence

of “trust-fund babies” among her colleagues.

I hear unguarded discussions among gallerists inside and away from the convention center, alternately anxious and optimistic about sales this year, invariably though cautiously sharing hopes that the final days on Friday and Saturday will bring returning clients anxious to close deals conceived on Wednesday. A Chicago dealer speaking with a famous New York owner posits that the over-saturation of international art fairs may be sapping everyone’s sales, Miami’s growing art bazaar status notwithstanding. Two Los Angeles dealers commiserate over the difficulty of picking the “right” fairs in which to participate from among the “30 or so” next year; they can only endure five. No matter the other fairs the two decide to attend in 2008, both promise to be back in Miami.

—Mark S. Price



Above: Galleri Faurshou, Berlin and Copenhagen, at Pulse Miami. Left: Clemencia Labin's *Series of Columns*, exhibited by the Jacob Karpio Gallery, Costa Rica, at Art Basel Miami Beach.



#### ALT BASEL

Launched in 2000, Art Basel Miami Beach has become the auto show of the art world, where high-end galleries from around the world convene for a mix of commerce and glorious weather. Although the name Art Basel is used to refer to anything happening the first weekend of December in Miami, it's what's around Art Basel that is most interesting. There were over 20 alternative art fairs during Art Basel Miami Beach this year, not including many extraordinary private collections and a sprinkling of galleries and museums. In the past seven years, the explosion of Alt Basel fairs distributed among hotels in South Beach and Miami warehouses has made this city the place to be in December. Only six miles from each other, these two clusters are worlds apart in their focus and presentation.

AquaFair (Aqua Hotel), a Seattle-based project, included primarily West Coast galleries. The Flow Art Fair (Dorset Hotel) presented U.S. galleries from Chicago to New Orleans, and the Bridge Art Fair (Catalina and

Maxine Hotels), from Chicago, housed a selection of national and international galleries. All three fairs represent regional galleries with emerging or established artists. With 100 galleries between them, the hotel fairs are overwhelming, more like a salon than a museum, but good work always stands out. At Aqua, Jill Sylvia's hand-cut ledger paper drawings (Eleanor Harwood Gallery) were indicative of this year's Miami-wide passion for cut paper drawings. Elaine Bradford's taxidermy *Dancing Squirrels* at Art Place (Texas) was a quirky find. At Flow, the stand-out work was Ghada Amer's lithograph with hand stitching, *For Wonderwoman*, at Landfall Press (New Mexico). Bridge hosted 79 galleries, the highlight work being Vik Muniz's *Gummy Bears Portfolio*. There was very little room for sculpture at the hotel fairs, and the majority of work was two-dimensional. The hotel shows can be a win or lose proposition: they feature up-and-coming galleries that represent lesser known or emerging artists. Sometimes great or good work makes it worth slogging

through tiny hotel rooms. Still, unlike a typical opening night in Chelsea, the weather is divine and the cocktails free and plentiful.

The second cluster of shows occurs in Miami's Wynwood neighborhood, which hosts the private collections of the Rubell, Margulies, Cisnero, and Goldman families. Each of these could easily satisfy an art traveler's lust for exceptional work. Alongside these powerhouses are another 10 fairs, distributed at unwalkable distances from one another. Unlike the funky hotel projects, the Wynwood fairs occupy large warehouse or tent spaces. With security, generous exhibition spaces, white walls, and excellent lighting, they draw international galleries from around the world and large crowds.

New York-based Nada, New Art Dealers Alliance, housed 86 galleries at the Ice Palace (Miami). With an eye on the mix, one-third of the NADA galleries are new each year. This is chiefly a traditional media show, so Ian Burns's video/sculpture *Pinnacle* at Mother's Tankstation (Ireland) was a great surprise. His elaborate machine, cobbled together with purchases from Bed Bath and Beyond, resembles a basement invention of small motors and simple electronics that transforms cloud-print sheets and fans into a special effects live video feed from a mountain top.

Ninety-five galleries with a conceptual focus and strong pop sensibility were brought together by Scope Art Fair Inc., (New York). Positioned as both professional and hip, the entrance area hosted the Urban Nomad Projects, Underground Grassroots Film Festival. A scribbled manifesto proclaimed, "Let's drink some beer and watch some fuckin' movies." Exhausted by the fairs, it's hard not to buy into that philosophy, although the cafeteria chairs and skateboarding videos didn't exactly serve the purpose. Scope exhibited Dennis Oppenheim's gigantic *Traffic Cones* outside the tent. Inside was

Peter Schmitt's *004#03-7*, a kinetic paper-generating tree consisting of a metal pole leading to branches of little adding machines feeding out white receipt paper that it periodically cut and dropped to the floor like autumn leaves. The sound, the simplicity, and the irony of a tree making its own paper were mesmerizing.

The 80 galleries at Pulse Contemporary Art Fair were divided into invited galleries and emerging galleries. Pulse contained the most diverse mix of media of the fairs, including installation, video, digital animation, and photography. Standout work included Adam Fowler's cut paper line drawings at Margaret Thatcher Projects (New York), Patricia Piccinini's *Angel (Blue)*, a fiberglass tadpole/waverunner hybrid at Conner Contemporary (Washington, DC), and Michael Joaquin Grey's compelling *Irreversible River*, a live algorithmic contour drawing that retraces a 100-meter-long painting of the Three Gorges area of the Yangtze River over three video screens, shown at Bitform.

Perhaps the most striking fair was the American debut of a Japanese fair, Geisai, a juried group of 20 artists without commercial representation who present their work directly. The raw ambition of the artists was palpable. Peephole wooden sculptures that opened like labyrinths by Danielle Giudici Wallis and model houses made of vacuum dust collected while cleaning other people's houses by Maria Adelaida Lopez were notable for their outstanding craftsmanship and conceptual focus. More events like Geisai, sponsored by Miami art organizations, would provide greater access to a variety of local artists.

Art Basel and Alt Basel have the potential to transform Miami into a cultural powerhouse, provide international exposure for Miami artists, and fuel the neighborhood redevelopment scheme for Wynwood. The larger question for Miami is how to



Above: Chris Larson's *Spaceship and Shack*, exhibited by Magnus Muller Gallery, Berlin, at Pulse Miami. Below: Peter Schmitt's *004#03-7*, exhibited by Space Other, Boston, at the Scope Art Fair.

nurture the chaos of the diverse fairs and keep it fresh. Right now there are so many fairs it is tough to know which to attend, which is a terrific problem to have. As the fairs compete for attention, they are building a repertoire of lectures, video screenings, performances, and site-specific projects within the Miami community. More focus and development of these events will build a smarter and more open-minded art audience —

greater access for the public is crucial to building a healthy and sustaining cultural community. It's rare that there is too much art, and unheard of that there is too much art in the southern U.S. The circus of Art and Alt Basel provides an opportunity for surprises, for young galleries to catch a new collector, and for both young and old artwork to find new audiences.

—Julia Morrisroe





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