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MIAMI 2010

Four days on the Beach in the Art World

by Molly Enholm



The recent proliferation of art fairs continues to garner attention throughout the art world. Just this past year, new contemporary fairs opened in Los Angeles, Dallas, Aspen, and San Francisco—with varying degrees of criticism and success. Combining unprecedented amounts of art ranging from emerging new talent to Blue Chip Moderns, with featured speakers, symposium and off-site events; the fairs themselves have begun to blur the confines of their by-definition commercial status. As 2010 nears its conclusion, there is an undeniable gravitational pull towards “the gateway of the Americas” as the crowds descend and the fairs open their doors once again on Miami Beach.

The eye of the storm, and what has become a “must do” on the domestic art circuit, is actually less than a decade old. Located in the Miami Convention Center, Art Basel Miami Beach, sister fair to its 40-year-old sibling in Switzerland, has become an undisputed center of gravity since first staking claim to the balmy shoreline in 2002. As Greg Kucera owner of Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle succinctly states, “When Art Basel decided to go to Miami, it changed the map.”

The terrain has been anything but predictable. After a disappointing 2008, Art Basel Miami Beach seemed to regain its stride last year with over 42,000 visitors and many galleries noting a studied focus on the art as opposed to its market share. But there can be no doubt that art fairs can be a very expensive risk; with so many fairs located throughout the States, what inspires galleries out west to travel back east?

“I believe that certainly in the art world that we are all part of, auctions and art fairs create a spectacle that drive people to them,” says

Michael Hackett of Hackett I Mill in San Francisco. “An enthusiasm is created by the fair, and energy and enthusiasm are contagious.” Adding to that energy is a renewed focus on the art, as Hackett notes, “people have really started using the art fair as a resource to learn about art.” For their part in the process, Hackett I Mill is bringing a solo exhibition of noted Bay Area Figurative painter David Park to Art Basel Miami, accompanied by a presentation of sculptural work by Manuel Neri as the gallery’s Art Kabinett presentation, geared towards demonstrating the influence of Park on Neri’s work.

Susanne Vielmetter, who operates out of Los Angeles and Berlin, also takes advantage of the impact that can be made by showing a limited number of artists. Vielmetter is returning to Art Nova, a section of Art Basel that allows a maximum of three artists and an emphasis on their latest works, with painters Whitney Bedford and Mickalene Thomas. “An art fair can be an overwhelming experience,” Vielmetter begins, describing how the fairs can often spur the first contact between the collectors and curators with new artists. “It is very important for the initial contact to be made in the ‘real world,’” she observes. “This is very often the beginning of long-lasting relationships.”

The international roster of galleries that descends on Miami each year is matched by an equally broad sampling of collectors, curators, directors, trustees and critics from across the globe. Miami is important, “not only for interacting with New York and European collectors,” says Los Angeles based Patrick Painter Gallery Director Michael Briggs, “but many new collectors from Latin America who are very serious about building their collections.”

Art Miami, the original contemporary art fair in Miami, brings together an equally compelling mix of international and domestic galleries to the Midtown Miami Arts District. Returning to the fair for a second year, Megan Fitzpatrick of Santa Fe-based Turner Carroll speaks of the opportunity to showcase the West Coast talent on their roster—Rex Ray, Squeak Carnwath, Hung Liu, and Deborah Oropallo—during the Miami event. She notes, “The individuals that walk through the doors are there to acquire the best of the best.”

“It broadens our reach,” says Kucera, who is participating in Art Miami. “We’ve been doing art fairs for 26 years, one to four per year, and they’ve proven to be a valuable part of the business, providing access to curators and collector groups who aren’t naturally going to be traveling through Seattle.” This year, Kucera is featuring Deborah

EXTERIOR VIEW OF MIAMI BEACH CONVENTION CENTER,
LOCATION FOR ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH 2010.



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Butterfield. "I would have to say, that for the fairs we do—I don't think Miami is so different—we simply bring the best we have."

Bringing West Coast artists back East and introducing emerging talent during the fairs are key strategies among many of the West Coast galleries. Aqua Art Miami has combined those aspects as key components of its own mission statement. Eleanor Harwood, who has brought her eponymous gallery to Aqua from San Francisco since 2006, notes the strategy of selecting which artists to bring to Miami. "I tend to bring more complicated, conceptual work to Miami because I know the people will enjoy it here," says Harwood whose roster at this year's fair includes James Cronister, Jill Sylvia and Laura Pollini.

The increased exposure courtesy of the art fair is high on everyone's list, but particularly those whose galleries are a little farther off the main circuit. Jane Beebe of PDX Contemporary Art in Portland, Oregon has participated in Aqua for years, also sees the fairs as a means of providing greater opportunities and exposure for her largely Northwest roster of artists. Showing at Pulse, Denver-based David B. Smith is using the opportunity to showcase the work of Gregory Euclide to new collectors; and Leigh-Anne Anderson of the Anderson Collective—a first time Red Dot exhibitor—likewise hopes to build upon her existing base.

The excitement created by these fairs is enhanced, in no small part, by the sheer volume of them that spring up throughout Miami. From the heavy hitters Art Basel and Art Miami to the budding energy and unique experience of the hotel and satellite fairs—Pulse, Verge, Aqua, Red Dot, NADA, Art Asia, Ink—the opportunity for galleries to connect with dealers, curators, directors, critics, and each other is unparalleled elsewhere in the States. In a recent conversation, Los Angeles artist Andy Moses summarized the upcoming bonanza, saying "you'll see more art in four days than you've seen so far in your life... and parties until 4 am every night." Well, to be honest, he might have only said this year, but either way the point is clear: come December, Miami is the place to be.

TOP: TO BOTTOM:

"LOUISE"

1959

David Park

OIL ON CANVAS, 48" X 56"

PHOTO: COURTESY OF HELEN PARK BIGELOW, NATALIE PARK SCHUTZ AND HACKETT I MILL, SAN FRANCISCO

"WILD SWAN"

2010

Hung Liu

MIXED MEDIA ON PANEL

41" X 69"

PHOTO: COURTESY TURNER CARROLL GALLERY, SANTA FE

"NORMALIZING DEMAND'S PUSH," (DETAIL)

2010

Gregory Euclide

ACRYLIC, BIODEGRADABLE FILM, CANVAS, CEDAR, DAME'S ROCKET, EUCALYPTUS, EUROCAST, FERN, FOUND FOAM, MOSS, PAPER, PENCIL, PETG, PHOTO TRANSFER, SAGE, SEDUM, SPONGE, WOOD
24" X 24"

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID B. SMITH GALLERY, DENVER