

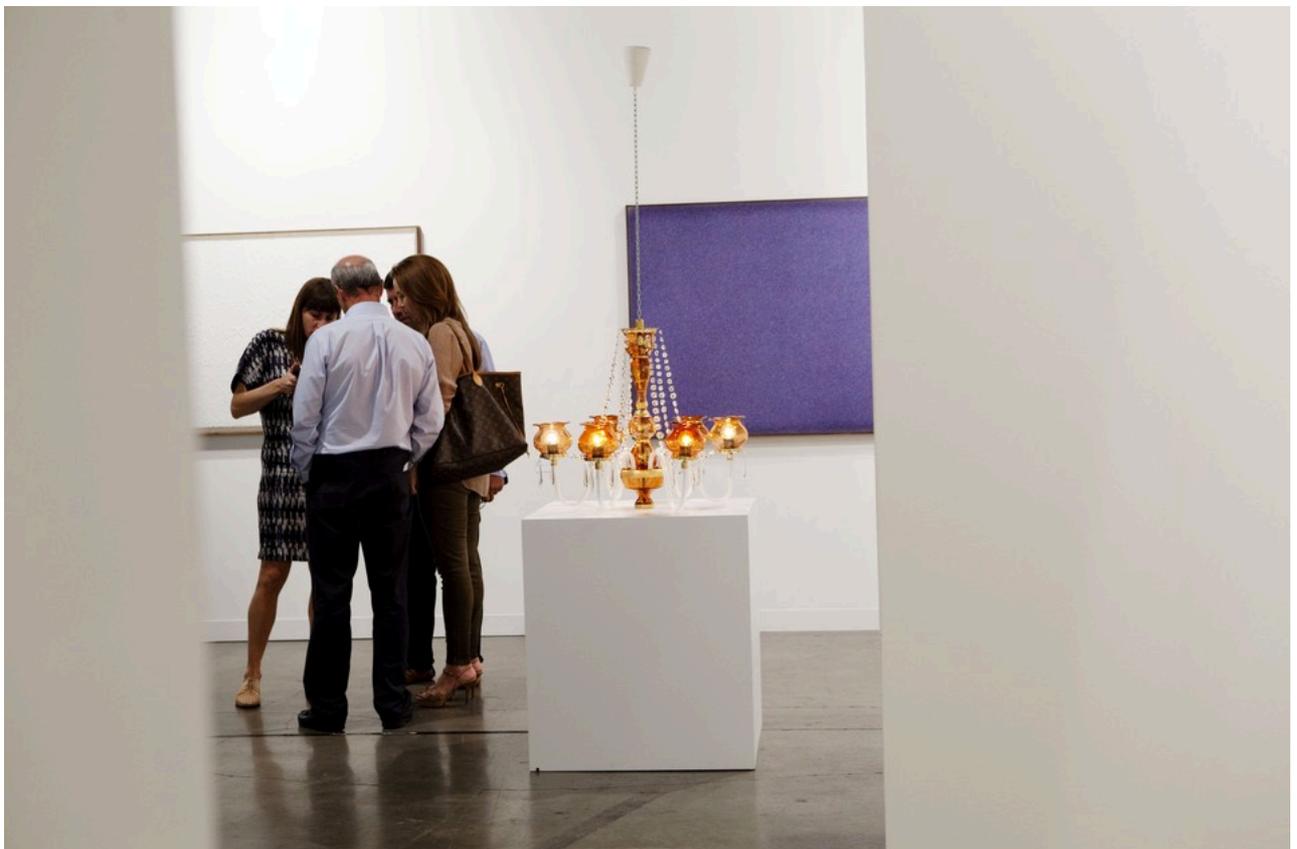
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Art Basel Miami Beach Continues Season's Fast Pace

by Kelly Crow

The first few days of Art Basel Miami Beach suggest that the fall season's last big art event will keep up November's pace



A chandelier by Sirous Namazi at Galerie Nordenhake is a remembered version of the one in the artist's Iranian home that he left behind when he had to flee the country as a boy. ELIZABETH LIPPMAN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

After a feverish November, the art world is finding that the heat is still on in Miami.

For the last 13 years, Art Basel Miami Beach has served as a last hurrah of the fall art season, an end-of-year check on collectors' shopping budgets and tastes for art offered up by 267 galleries from around the world. With demand high during a round of November auctions in New York, dealers didn't hold back this time around. They brought pieces to the fair worth a combined \$3 billion, up from \$2.5 billion last year, according to AXA Art Insurance Corp. Offerings ranged from small, \$1,500 drawings to a \$35 million Alexander Calder dangling mobile that's bigger than a taco truck.

The overall mood of the fair remained upbeat during Wednesday's VIP preview, with dozens of collectors and museum curators lining up (some wearing glittery loafers) just to get into the warren of booths filling the Miami Beach Convention Center. By Sunday, the fair's last day, organizers expect some 70,000 people to stop by. A collector has reserved the Calder.

Among the celebrities spotted navigating the aisles Wednesday were music mogul Sean Combs, dressed in maroon slacks; actors Owen Wilson, Tobey Maguire and Leonardo DiCaprio; third baseman Alex Rodriguez and trustees from museums like New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and London's Tate. The ubiquitous financiers included Steve Cohen, J. Tomilson Hill and Dan Loeb.

Art Basel Director Marc Spiegler said he spotted a surprising number of newcomers from China, Russia and Brazil at the fair, including a young Chinese collector who only started buying last year but appeared to be catching up quickly. After two hours at the fair, Mr. Spiegler said this collector had bought five pieces and "didn't seem to be slowing down."

By and large, galleries responded by offering huge, colorful paintings and shiny sculptures whose appeal is easier to size up at a passing glance, than, say, a cryptic video work or performance piece. Paris gallery Tornabuoni Art had no trouble finding a buyer for Francesca Pasquali's \$30,000 "Light Yellow Straws," a wall relief made from drinking straws cut at varying lengths so that the surface appeared to undulate. New York gallery Ameringer McEnery Yohe also had a hit with Markus Linnenbrink's "Arms of Mine (Blue Melody)," a \$45,000 pockmarked wall work that looked like the artist used a melon-baller to scoop into layers of rainbow-hued resin.

Dozens of other galleries displayed abstract paintings that seemed designed to dazzle without any explanation needed. (One of the few performance pieces in the main fair was an area where worn-out shoppers could nap on colorful cots, courtesy of artist Marina Abramović and Basel's Beyeler Foundation.)

No wonder Zurich gallery Gmurzynska and curator Nellee Hooper applied a school-tutor approach to their booth filled with modern masterworks, titling the gallery's stand "A Kid Could Do That" and enlisting filmmaker Baz Luhrmann to create a 1920s schoolroom setting complete with desks and chalkboards. Mr. Luhrmann said he agreed to do the project in part because he was intrigued by the chance to help demystify the gallery's group of works by Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso and Kurt Schwitters —although he wished he'd been allowed to use "better lighting," he said.

"I've put homesteads in the desert, and I've blown up boats, but putting a painting in an art fair isn't easy," Mr. Luhrmann joked. For his part, he isn't collecting—yet. He said friends occasionally give him artworks, but he said he has no plans to shop at the fair because "I'm afraid I'll get addicted."

Plenty of others proved willing, though. New York dealer Dominique Levy said she sold two-thirds of her booth offerings for up to \$3 million apiece in the fair's opening hours, including examples by artists Kazuo Shiraga, known for painting with his feet, and Christopher Wool, whose conceptual paintings use black, stenciled letters.

Collectors also appeared to glom onto artworks that evoked lamps or chandeliers—including Pae White's seven dangling geometric sculptures topped with light bulbs and Martin Kippenberger's see-through resin lamp from 1991, "Kippenblinky," which dealer Klaus Weibelholz said he sold "immediately" for \$175,000. Brooklyn artist Michael DeLucia even carved images of three lamps into sheets of ordinary laminate countertop, revealing the plywood underneath. Dealer Anthony Meier sold two for \$15,000 a piece.

Masks and busts turned up everywhere as well, including Wim Botha's heads carved from charred wood, which sold for between \$22,000 and \$35,000 apiece at Stevenson.