

ART BASEL DECEMBER 5, 2015 7:17 PM

# The art week that was: when life and art became one



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Even though it wasn't quite over, you could call 2015 the art week of collision.

Climate change, politics, violence, traffic – all reverberated throughout artworks, fairs and — and yes, the weather — in ways both predictable and unexpected. Those who claim art week is divorced from everyday life repeatedly were proven wrong.

Now in its 14th year, Art Basel Miami Beach, the 20-plus parallel fairs and countless events that surround them also delivered the Year of the Woman. From the Littlest Sister Fair showcasing work by 10 women in Little River to the signature Art Basel Miami Beach fair in the Miami Beach Convention Center, women artists often claimed the spotlight.

“No Man’s Land,” the current exhibit at the private Rubell Family Collection in Wynwood, showcased work by women artists. “We noticed that a disproportional number of the works we were acquiring were by women artists. And not 20-year-olds. The work was more interesting,” said Don Rubell.

At the convention center, Pace Gallery offered 18 sculptures by Louise Nevelson created between 1953 and 1987. Surrounding those with works by other female artists seemed natural, said gallerist Marc Glimcher. Sixteen Nevelsons sold the first day for prices ranging from \$75,000 to \$1 million.

Other artists featured across the various fairs included sculptor Rachel Feinstein, Miami-born Michele Oka Doner, fire artist Laura Kimpton, the late Ana Mendieta, and "gender fluid" Martín Gutierrez. A “feminist” orgy organized by a group called Killing Kittens was scheduled for Saturday night, soggy weather permitting.

Despite a downturn in Latin American economies and strife in Europe, galleries at the best-known fairs reported strong attendance and brisk sales. Many galleries at NADA, the New Art Dealers Association, reported that most works sold out within hours.

At Art Basel Miami Beach, where prices range from \$4,000 for some prints to \$1 million-plus, some gallerists reported stronger sales than last year, while others reported a more deliberative mood in a pricey market.

Most Miami Art Week fairs remain open until 6 p.m. Sunday.

By Friday, New York’s Van de Weghe gallery had reported sales of the 1954 Francis Bacon oil *Man in Blue VI* priced at \$15 million, Pablo Picasso’s 1971 painting *Buste au Chapeau* priced at \$10.5 million and Damian Hirst’s 2005 multimedia *I Love You But I Don’t Like You* priced at \$900,000.

“We’ve talked to people who did really well in every type of gallery,” said Art Basel global director Marc Spiegler.

“Sales have been phenomenal,” said New York gallerist Jack Shainman, whose booth carried work ranging from \$18,000 to \$1.2 million by artists including Nick Cave and El Anatsui. The weather may have been a plus, he said. “I think people are more focused on the work than heading out for a margarita.”

For many Art Basel galleries, sales were stronger on Thursday and Friday than on the VIP opening day, and many gallerists were still selling works during the weekend, after many of the high-end buyers traditionally have left town, said Americas director Noah

Horowitz. Sales reportedly were strong among collectors in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Asia and the United States, and buyers included museums and institutions.

As of Friday, attendance at Art Miami was up 15 percent over 2014, said fair director Nick Korniloff; Saturday afternoon the fair was packed. “When the weather turns bad and the traffic gets tied up, people take the decision not to go from fair to fair. They go to one fair where they know they will see a lot of good work and spend the day,” Korniloff said.

As proof of the week’s marketing power, presidential candidates Hillary Clinton, Martin O’Malley and Jeb Bush held big-ticket fundraisers; none was officially associated with Art Basel. The familiar artistic themes of politics, protest and inequality were evident from a performance piece at Pinta Miami involving a naked man chained to a pole flying the Mexican flag to the Portal, a installation linking fairgoers with individuals in Iran, Afghanistan, Cuba and Mexico with questions sometimes involving repression.

Given recent events, the “Guns in the Hands of Artists” exhibition at The Miami Project fair, held this year at the Deauville Hotel in Miami Beach, seemed especially poignant. Using 180 decommissioned guns from New Orleans, 30 well-known artists created works commenting on gun violence.

Real-life violence made an appearance this year, too, when a 24-year-old New York student, identified by police as Siyuan Zhao, stabbed another fairgoer — reportedly a stranger — at Art Basel with an Exacto knife. The scene was so unexpected that the fairgoers who saw it at first thought it was an art performance. The victim survived; the perpetrator was charged with attempted murder.

In a twist on the usual soirees and exhibits hosted by luxury brands for top clients and press, brands aimed at regular consumers – including AirBnb, Mazda, Volvo and Web call and messaging platform Viber – hosted receptions and pop-up art exhibits.

Like Miamians, out-of-towners complained vociferously about traffic. Though both the county and various other agencies arranged regular free shuttles through the art zones, those too got stuck in snarls that frequently turned the two-mile trip from the Arsht Center to the Design District into an hourlong slog. With the Venetian Causeway closed for repairs, the trek between the mainland and Miami Beach was slower than usual. It’s very difficult to get around,” said New York collector Barry Meisel. “You’ve got to be able to facilitate that.”

The unprecedented December storms didn't help – though they did underscore the environmental questions posed by works such as *Holoscenes*, an interactive installation at Miami Dade College by Lars Jan, and sculptures by Alan Sonfist at Art Basel and the Sagamore Hotel that speak to climatic change and the fragility of the local ecology.

Despite the challenges, art reached many for whom the price of a fair ticket was a stumbling block. From an exhibition of Botero sculptures by Gary Nader Art in Bayfront Park to the UNREALISM figurative painting and sculpture show arranged by New York megadealers Jeffrey Deitch and Larry Gagosian in the Design District, many exhibits were free.

With so much art and so little time, the question invariably arises whether all the fairs can thrive.

“The roster changes every year,” said Helen Stoilas, web editor for the Art Newspaper, who has covered Art Basel week since 2004. “What I like about having a lot of shows is that you can see different types of artists at different price points, and that allows for different types of collectors.” Not everyone is going to be shopping for blue chips at the [Miami Beach] convention center. It's good to have a space for younger, first-time collectors that want to find emerging artists.”

Dennis Scholl, former vice president for arts at the Knight Foundation, agreed. “In an art world like we're in today, it's certainly a golden era for contemporary art,” Scholl said. “There's room for an awful lot of participation.”

One looming problem for some of the fairs is Miami's real estate boom. Developers and investors have been snatching up land as prices for residential and commercial properties in South Florida skyrocket. That means less space for fair organizers to set up tents.

“The key to the Art Basel [satellite] fairs is being able to tap into undeveloped land in the Midtown and Wynwood areas,” said Peter Zalewski, a real estate market analyst. “But that's exactly where developers and land bankers have been buying . . . It will definitely create a real dilemma for the fairs.”

But the biggest challenge in the long run, said Miami gallery owner and Art Basel Miami Beach exhibitor Fred Snitzer, is the traffic. “It took me 20 minutes to drive a four-minute walk,” he said. “People spend a lot of money to have a Miami presence. If visitors can't get to their show, they're not going to come back. The city's almost not functional. We need to address the problem.”

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*SIOBHAN MORRISSEY AND ANDRES VIGLUCCI CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REPORT.*

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