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ART REVIEW | ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH

Miami Fair: Big Pieces, Smaller Prices and Relief

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Photo: Michael F. McElroy for The New York Times

"Deitch Projects had one the most talked- and tweeted-about works at the fair: an immense equestrian portrait of Michael Jackson, by the painter Kehinde Wiley."

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. — [Art Basel Miami Beach](#) is a delicate organism. It requires sunlight, optimism and an abundant supply of collectors with open wallets. And while there's generally plenty of the sun around here, the other two elements were in short supply last December, to the point where some wondered whether this fair could survive. It has, by adapting to the new environment. Crowds are smaller at this year's fair, which runs through Sunday, and parties more intimate. Discounts are rumored to be larger. The noon stampede on

Wednesday, when the fair opened to V.I.P.'s, was an orderly procession. Relief is the prevailing emotion; the irrational exuberance of two or three years ago feels very far away.

The art, however, is big — much of it sized for museums, foundations and private warehouses. And the larger scene surrounding the event, which is now in its eighth year, remains daunting, with upwards of 15 satellite fairs and the usual calendar of dinners, parties, concerts and talks. From the evidence here, the art fair, as a species, is not endangered: collectors are too attached to its convenience and competitive vibe.

At the main event a clever redesign has distracted most visitors from the lower energy level, and has been generally well received. The most drastic change is the new centrality of Art Positions, a section of the fair dedicated to emerging galleries, which has been relocated from a nearby beach to a ring in the middle of the exhibition hall. Collectors seemed a bit disoriented at first, but no one missed the shipping containers that served as oceanfront booths in past years.

Blue-chip art by Americans is everywhere, from vintage work by Joan Mitchell at Cheim & Read and by [James Rosenquist](#) at Acquavella to [Alex Katz](#)'s new, eye-popping portraits on cheery yellow and orange grounds, which are at Pace and Jablonka. (The presence of so much high-quality work by sought-after artists may have had something to do with the thriving secondary market fed by collectors in need of quick cash.)

Latin American art is just as visible, both at and around the fair. Works from the circle of the Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco, whose Museum of Modern Art retrospective opens on Dec. 13, seem particularly widespread. And one of Mr. Orozco's own pieces, a giant oval pool table, is a major element in the most talked-about off-site show, the Bass Museum of Art's exhibition of works from the Jumex Collection. Based in Mexico City, it is Latin America's most prominent private collection of contemporary art, and is being shown in the United States for the first time.

As usual, the Art Kabinetts, organized mini-exhibits within selected booths, are excellent. They range from a reprise of the Francis M. Naumann gallery's recent show "[Marcel Duchamp](#): the Art of Chess" to diagram doodles and zines by the painter Amy Sillman at Sikkema Jenkins.

Bright spots in Art Nova, the fair's section for young galleries showing new art, include Lorraine O'Grady's photographs at Alexander Gray and new paintings by Dana Schutz at Zach Feuer. Ms. Schutz's paintings, each titled with three verbs, imply frantic activity. (By late afternoon of the day of the V.I.P. preview, the large ones had already sold, though smaller works were still available.)

Also in the Art Nova section, at Reena Spaulings, are Merlin Carpenter's paintings of reviews from The New York Times. (We get it: critics are part of the market, whether we like it or not.) Other dealers who specialize in attitude and art fair shenanigans are noticeably absent — Gavin Brown, to name the most obvious one. Turnover was heavy. About 60 of last year's exhibitors did not return, although others quickly replaced them; the fair added five galleries over all.

A different, less abrasive sort of institutional critique is emerging. Big-name artists take a gentle ribbing, exemplified by Jonathan Monk's flaccid version of a [Jeff Koons](#) balloon bunny at Lisson. And a new category — self-loathing neon art — has been born. At Peres Projects, a neon drawing with text by Dan Attoe says, "We're all here because we were too afraid to deal with problems in our real lives." And at Ingleby, a neon wall text by Peter Liversidge reads, "Miami Beach is where neon goes to die."

A smattering of dealers have rejected the moody and cerebral. James Fuentes has a riotous installation of sculptures by Agathe Snow: bulbous figures with likenesses of Homer Simpson and [President Obama](#) against a graffiti-scrawled background. El Anatsui's shimmering red-and-gold wall hangings that resemble crumpled textiles enliven Jack Shainman's booth. And Salon 94's showstopping installation by Marilyn Minter and Wangechi Mutu has larger-than-life photographs of a gold-dipped tongue (Ms. Mutu's).

The Swiss gallery Gmurzynska has generated nonstop gossip and entertainment: first with its display of smeary Neo-Expressionist paintings by the actor [Sylvester Stallone](#) (who attended early on), and later when word spread that United States Marshals had seized several paintings from the booth just before the fair's opening in

connection with a legal problem involving the gallery, its insurance company and a consignor. (The gallery announced on Friday that the dispute had been resolved and the works returned.)

Deitch Projects has likewise been a source of buzz, for its immense equestrian portrait of Michael Jackson by [Kehinde Wiley](#). In the painting, titled after a portrait of Philip II, two putti crown the windswept singer with a laurel wreath.

Deitch is also behind a series of exhibitions in the Wynwood neighborhood of Miami, organized in cooperation with Tony Goldman, a local developer. The best is an outdoor show of murals by Jim Drain, Os Gêmeos, [Shepard Fairey](#) and others. The works are eye-catching and give off as much energy as the young crowd they attract.

Other special projects outside the fair proper include an installation of gorgeous sculptures by [Yayoi Kusama](#) at the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, in Coral Gables. It was a welcome change from the fair, if you had the time and energy to get there.

Also evolving is the New Art Dealers Alliance fair, or NADA, which has moved from downtown Miami to the Deauville resort on the South Beach strip. It is split into two sections, one dedicated to solo-artist displays and the other to the standard booth format (though single projects can be found here too, including a functioning pirate radio station by Tom Scicluna and Nicolas Lobo at Miami's own Twenty Twenty).

The art, and its surroundings, seem designed to lift spirits. Stephan Stoyanov, for example, has a mirrored cabinet reflecting a soothing Alpine landscape, by the artist Ellen Harvey. Eleven Rivington has painted its booth a sunny yellow. Such efforts, and the move to the Deauville, seem to be working; several dealers, including Rental and Sunday, said they had sold out their booths.

The private collections, meanwhile, have not disappointed. The regulars were joined this year by the Jumex show, a splashy mix of classic Pop Art, Mexico City bricolage and international contemporary showpieces like Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset's door marked "VIP." The Rubell Family Collection is presenting a show, "Beg, Borrow and Steal," highlighting various generations of appropriation art. Here, Cady Noland's installation of beer cans meets its descendants, Rachel Harrison and Guyton/Walker, and Adam McEwen's fake newspaper obituary of Richard Prince rubs shoulders with some of the Rubells' many Princes.

Of course, in a fair environment, titles and themes don't have much sway. At the end of the day it's hard to remember whether that McEwen was at the Rubells', the MoCA's group show "The Reach of Realism" or Nicole Klagsbrun's convention center booth.

Miami collectors being a fiercely competitive lot, the Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz Collection also has a large Guyton/Walker and a Rachel Harrison in its light-filled new space in the city's Design District. Any regular visitor to Chelsea can see that a couple of galleries in particular — Greene Naftali and Anton Kern — have had a strong hold on the de la Cruzes. Only on the third floor, with its graceful mix of Ana Mendieta, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and [Jim Hodges](#), does the collectors' own sensibility start to emerge.

There is more, much more, including a Guillermo Kuitca survey at the Miami Art Museum and, under the aegis of the big fair, a beachfront installation and performance stage by the artist Pae White. When markets contract, art fairs shrink — but only to a point.