

SEAN KELLY

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Art Basel in Miami Beach Shines a Light on the Americas



"Conga Blanca," 2015, by Los Carpinteros, two Cuban-born artists who split their time between Havana and Madrid, will be displayed at Art Basel in Miami Beach. Los Carpinteros studio. Courtesy of the artists and Sean Kelly, New York.

"The Swiss have a saying: 'After the fair is before the fair,'" said Marc Spiegler, the global director of Art Basel, referring to the way his organization starts planning for the next event as soon as one ends.

The approach has brought success and proliferation. The first Art Basel was in 1970, in its home base, in Switzerland, with the Miami Beach edition added in 2002 and a Hong Kong outpost in 2013.

Now in its 14th edition, Art Basel in Miami Beach is firmly entrenched as one of the most sought-after and meticulously planned events on the American art world calendar.

The 267 galleries showing their wares at the fair, which runs from Dec. 3 to 6 at the Miami Beach Convention Center, were mostly lined up by June. For the lucky few, invitations to Champagne receptions for luxury brands started arriving in August. The best hotel rooms were largely booked by the first weekend in September.

The sunshine of Miami and a swirl of attendant events have made the fair attractive to a broad, non-art-world audience, too. At the very least, it's an overwhelming feast for the eyes and senses for visitors who can spring for a \$47 day pass, and then migrate over to the many satellite fairs, parties, panels, screenings and hybrid happenings.

For the buyers and sellers of ambitious paintings, sculptures and installations, it remains a prime venue for brokering major transactions.

"Miami is an important fair for us, where we see the top curators and collectors," said Jacqueline Tran, a director of the Matthew Marks Gallery. Not that the gallery lacks places to show art: It has four separate gallery spaces in New York and two in Los Angeles.

"We save some of our best material for the fair," Ms. Tran said. "Our approach is not just for sales, but a way to put ourselves forward and reinforce our values."

This time around, Matthew Marks will display work by Ellsworth Kelly, Martin Puryear and Ron Nagle, among other artists.

There are 29 first-time exhibitors in this year's crop, and three dealers have "graduated," as the fair's organizers term it, from other sectors to the main one, Galleries.

The Andrew Edlin Gallery of New York — which last year exhibited in the debut of the Survey sector, for focused historical presentations — joins Galleries with an exhibition of two well-known "outsider" artists, Henry Darger and Adolph Wölflfi.

It adds an element of diversity to the offerings at the fair, which tend more toward the insider. "We're the only gallery doing outsider art, and that's noteworthy," Mr. Edlin said.

While the overall lineup of sectors remains the same in 2015, the biggest news comes from behind the scenes: Mr. Spiegler, the Art Basel global director, created a new position, director for the Americas, and appointed Noah Horowitz to the job.

"We needed to cover more ground," Mr. Spiegler said. "I couldn't cover that ground while being head of global organization, which went from 17 people when I started to 55 people now."

Mr. Horowitz formerly ran the Armory Show, the Manhattan international art fair, which takes place in March.

"It's not just director of the Miami fair but it's an overarching position connecting Canada, the U.S., Central and South America," Mr. Horowitz said of the job. "I can meet with galleries and do more reaching out. I can speak to a gallery in Mexico City about the Hong Kong fair if they're interested in that."

About one-half of the galleries at Art Basel in Miami Beach come from the United States or Latin America, and for dealers from places like Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, it's the year's biggest opportunity to connect with global buyers.

"There's no doubt that it is the best 'showcase' for Latin America galleries," Silvia Cintra, the owner and founder of Galeria Silvia Cintra + Box 4 in Rio de Janeiro, said in an email. "We've been doing it for five years, and each edition we feel that the collectors are more and more interested in Brazilian art. Last year, for instance, we sold everything we took to the fair."

This year, Ms. Cintra's booth features work by the Brazilian artist Nelson Leirner.

Mr. Horowitz said that perhaps because of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Washington and Havana, Cuba seems to be on the mind of dealers and fair organizers.

A panel in the Salon sector, "New Role for Art in Cuba," will feature Stéphane Aquin, chief curator of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, part of the Smithsonian Institution.

"This is a big turn in their history," said Mr. Aquin, who traveled to Cuba recently. "There's going to be a huge influx of money to the art market there. We saw it at the last biennial in Havana. There were buses full of American museum patrons."

The Sean Kelly Gallery, in New York, plans to feature several works by Los Carpinteros: Marco Antonio Castillo Valdés and Dagoberto Rodríguez Sánchez, Cuban-born artists who split their time between Havana and Madrid.

Among the sculptures on display will be "Surf de Lego Azul" (2014), a blue surfboard made of Legos, and "Conga Blanca" (2015), which looks like a conga drum that is melting into a white puddle.

In an email, the duo said it was "great news" to have Cuban visibility at the fair, given that Miami "has such a close connection to Cuba, geographically and also culturally." They said the appearance of "Conga Blanca," something between a solid and a liquid, represented the changes afoot in Cuba.

“Everyone is wondering how the transition will affect the authenticity of Cuban heritage, tradition, music, values,” they said. “Will it be transformed, will it melt or mix? There are many ways to think about those pieces in relation to the larger state of the world.”



“The Current,” triptych, 2013/2015, by Marina Abramovic, will be displayed at the fair by the Luciana Brito Galeria of São Paulo, Brazil. For dealers from Latin America, Art Basel in Miami Beach is the year’s biggest opportunity to connect with global art buyers. Courtesy of Marina Abramovic, and Luciana Brito Galeria. Photo by Marco Anelli.



“Surf de Lego Azul,” 2014, a surf board made of Lego bricks, by Los Carpinteros. Credit Los Carpinteros studio. Courtesy of the artists and Sean Kelly, New York.



“Untitled (Green Block),” 2015, by Mel Kendrick, in bronze. For buyers and sellers of ambitious paintings, sculptures and installations, the Miami Beach fair remains a prime venue for brokering major transactions. Credit Mel Kendrick, courtesy David Nolan Gallery, New York. Photo by Jenny Gorman



"Gypsy Tendencies," 2014, by Ron Nagle, in ceramic, glaze, catalyzed polyurethane and epoxy resin.
Credit Ron Nagle, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery