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Art Fairs

5 Discoveries From This Year's Art Basel Miami Beach

Gonzo art history, gorgeous works of high-concept craft, and more.

Naomi Rea, December 7, 2023

Speaking about Miami collectors, an advisor once told me that “all of their taste is in their mouth.” That assessment has certainly rung true for at least parts of this week, as Art Basel Miami Beach (a.k.a. “the fun Basel”) got into the swing of things for its 21st birthday.

To my eye at least, much of the art on view scattered around the city was about as refined as an everlasting gobstopper. Its defining features were cutesy cartoonish figuration, kitsch, and Day-Glo “Instagrammable” installations. As for the big fair itself, at least some of these aesthetics transferred over, as dealers looked to court some of the Magic City’s stupid money following a year of art-market slowdown.

The enormous scale of the Convention Center and the vast real estate afforded to some of the blue chips added further difficulty to the task of choosing the best booth presentation. Commercially motivated to display as much inventory as possible all at once, art fair booths tend to be more chaotic than curated. Still, I can forgive galleries for trying to make the most out of an expensive-to-attend trade fair.

And after all, it is still an Art Basel fair, where there is always plenty of great work to be found for serious collectors who know where to look. This year, some of those collectors may even secure themselves a bargain or two, at least from the dealers who have accepted the new market reality and have priced work to sell.

Here are my 5 top picks out of the presentations brought to the fair.

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In the fair’s section for art historical projects, Klaus Von Nichtssagend Gallery’s meditative booth is showcasing art by the late U.S. artist Geoffrey Hendricks.

The booth features the artist’s famous paintings of clouds on various media, from watercolors on paper affixed to a 14-foot barn ladder to slate roof tiles and a window shade. Hendricks earned the nickname “Cloudsmith” for his preoccupation with celestial phenomenon, which fueled his ruminations on “impermanence, desire, and possible transcendence.”

Heavily involved in the Fluxus movement in the 1960s and ’70s, Hendricks’s work was often ephemeral, sometimes encompassing performance—his most famous being the Flux Divorce he staged with his wife, the artist Nye Ffarrabas, in 1971. The performance marked the end of their 10-year monogamous union and the opening of their relationship to same-sex partners with a series of rituals that included sawing their bed in half. An important figure in the queer community, Hendricks helped found the Archive Project of Visual AIDS in the 1980s, and also became an influential teacher at Rutgers for nearly half a century, helping to shape the practice of generations of artists, including Pope.L.

Hendricks died in 2018 at the age of 86, and the gallery has been representing the estate for two years. In the early hours of the fair, there had been interest in the work but no confirmed sales, with prices for the work ranging from \$40,000 to \$120,000.