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Art

At Fairs by the Beach, the Sands of Creativity

By KAREN ROSENBERG

MIAMI BEACH, Dec. 7 — Last week the art world descended on the New Museum of Contemporary Art's new building on the Lower East Side, where the art was fragmentary, improvisational and defiantly down-to-earth. This week the same crowd has massed here in Miami Beach for the sixth installment of Art Basel Miami Beach, a fair that celebrates everything the New Museum has made an effort to avoid.

The art is heavily scripted, raucously colorful and monstrously proportioned. Parties and people-watching crowd the field of vision. Fortunately, serious art lovers can still find moments of transcendence while hopping from fair to fair, or even from fair to private collection to cocktails by the pool.

With more than 20 fairs (at least 7 more than last year) now piggybacking on the main event, Art Basel Miami Beach has made a point of finding new ways to showcase smaller galleries and individual artists. Art Supernova, a kind of fair-within-the-fair, creates a communal booth with shared storage space and a sales office for some 20 galleries. A program called Art Kabinett disperses solo-artist exhibitions in separate booths throughout the fair. As in previous years, Art Nova places the more cutting-edge part of the establishment along the main room's periphery, and Art Positions places emerging dealers in beachside shipping containers.

One particularly active corner of the Miami Beach Convention Center is home to Terence Koh's salaciously self-mythologizing photographs at Peres Projects and Xu Zhen's complete re-creation of a Chinese supermarket at ShanghArt. Nearby, Michele Maccarone is exhibiting Paul McCarthy's aromatic chocolate Santas, a lush peacock-feather carpet by Carol Bove and a decidedly less sensual array of documents from the harrowing legal battle between the artist Christoph Büchel and Mass MoCA.

The display of unflattering e-mail messages between that museum's director and staff members about Mr. Büchel, who worked on a vast installation at Mass MoCA but then walked off last January, is raising eyebrows here. But it has attracted less attention than Mr. Büchel's installation at Hauser & Wirth's booth. There, his "Training Ground for Training Ground for Democracy" offers a capsule version of the notoriously unfinished artwork, with a trash-filled alley leading to a room cluttered with voting booths and children's drawings. For now, Mr. Büchel has the last word.

Statement-making works are otherwise scarce. A few halfhearted gibes at the market, like the fake A.T.M. by Elmgreen and Dragset, are quickly absorbed into the briskly commercial atmosphere. Merlin Carpenter's slapdash text painting "Die Collector Scum" sold the first day. Last year's must-see booth, Gavin Brown's, has a streetwise but nonthreatening display of modified high-top sneakers by Oliver Payne and Nick Relph.

Power dealers are not disappointing. Barbara Gladstone shows a Richard Prince tire planter next to a wall sculpture by John Dogg (recently revealed as Mr. Prince's alter ego). Mary Boone has new work by Barbara Kruger, David Salle and Eric Fischl, whose work is jointly being exhibited with Jablonka Galerie; Marian Goodman has fresh John Baldessaris and a recent Lawrence Weiner. Mr. Weiner keeps turning up, as do Anish Kapoor, Kehinde Wiley and Tracey Emin.

Ms. Emin's gallery, Lehmann Maupin, gives its entire booth over to the female artists on its roster, a commendable act that would have been more impressive had the gallery not announced it on the wall. Over all, women are making a strong showing throughout the fair. Art Kabinetts are devoted to Louise Bourgeois, Laurie Simmons and the lesser-known but talented Sandra Vásquez de la Horra. Videos by Nathalie Djurberg and Catherine Sullivan stand out, as do paintings by Mickalene Thomas, a performance by Nicole Eisenman and an installation featuring a menorah by Josephine Meckseper (the only sign that Hanukkah had arrived).

The holidays came early at the fair for the New Art Dealers Alliance, as collectors rushed promptly at the 4 p.m. opening on Wednesday. Now in its fourth year, the alliance, known as NADA, has had to contend with an unprecedented number of competing fairs, like Aqua Art Miami (which has expanded into the Wynwood Art District) and Pulse (which has a special section of unrepresented artists, organized by Takashi Murakami's studio). None of the other satellite fairs, however, have been able to match NADA's style and attitude.

On Tuesday night the progressive rock band Deerhoof performed as dealers from the fringes of Chelsea and the orbit of the New Museum lounged in hammocks. Inside the fair black, white and silver geometric abstraction proliferated. Adam Cvijanovic's panoramic landscape dominated Bellwether's booth; **Matthew Day Jackson's installation based on an Albert Bierstadt western scene was the focus at Ballroom Marfa.** Courtney Smith and Ivan Navarro's collaborative sculptures, incorporating wood and light bulbs, caught my eye at Roebling Hall.

The Wynwood district has been solidifying its reputation as Miami's answer to Chelsea, with most of this weekend's satellite fairs joining a smattering of galleries and two important private collections in the area. The Rubell Family Collection, an obligatory stop on the Art Basel circuit, typically hosts a trend-defining group show. This year's "Euro-Centric" is a disappointing hodgepodge of bloated neo-Neo-expressionist paintings, echoing the inflated scale of many of the works at the convention center. The solo projects on the second floor, by the homegrown talent Hernan Bas and the recently rediscovered collage artist John Stezaker, are better. Viewers who know Mr. Bas as a painter will be surprised, as I was, to discover that he has been making enchanting video installations for years.

Sculpture and video art from the Margulies Collection, also in Wynwood, will be familiar to Chelsea regulars. I was happy to have another chance to see Olafur Eliasson's "Your Now Is My Surroundings," a space-extending mirrored skylight that was a highlight of the 2000 gallery season, and Anthony McCall's misty light cones from last spring. Doug Aitken's "Sleepwalkers" (soon to be recreated for the facades of the Miami Art Museum, after its recent sojourn on the exterior of the Museum of Modern Art) is also here in single-screen, linear form.

After so much art in congested booths and crowded group shows, solo-artist projects become especially appealing. Peter Coffin's giant sculpture of a spiral staircase twisted into a circle, at Emmanuel Perrotin's gallery in Wynwood, is worth a detour. So is an Enoc Perez exhibition at the MOCA at Goldman Warehouse, a branch of the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, where Mr. Perez's patchy transfer paintings of midcentury Caribbean hotels are a guilty pleasure akin to the Collins Avenue strip.

Tropical modernism also reigns supreme at MOCA's main building, where a midcareer survey of Jorge Pardo combines large-scale photomurals of his site-specific installations with furniture and design objects. The exhibition is cheerful, formally inventive and perfectly pitched to the art-meets-design Miami Basel scene.

Everyone, from the most elite V.I.P. to the artist with a toehold in one of the smaller fairs, eventually succumbs to exhaustion. When my eyes had had enough, my ears took over. In addition to the Deerhoof performance, there was Iggy Pop's high-energy Wednesday night concert on the beach and the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black's downtown cabaret act at a private function hosted by Deitch Projects.

Installations by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, the subjects of a survey at the soon-to-expand Miami Art Museum, had riveting soundtracks that ranged from opera to strange mutterings to ambient noise. I wished I had had time to see Ms. Cardiff and Mr. Bures Miller's achingly harmonious "Forty-Part Motet," which was in the show but installed off-site at the Freedom Tower in Miami.

Music was also the basis of one of the fair's biggest word-of-mouth hits, an installation at the Kate MacGarry Gallery's shipping container by the British duo Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard. Titled "Silent Sound," it led me into a dark, padded chamber to hear, and feel, a recording of a specially commissioned live performance by the English rock musician J. Spaceman. Maybe it was the "ambisonic" technology, an ocean rather than a wall of sound. Maybe it was the subliminal message that was supposedly encoded in the music. Or maybe, after three days of nonstop looking, it was a relief just to sit and listen.