

DON'T INTERRUPT JULIAN SCHNABEL  
AND OTHER LESSONS FROM ART BASEL

By Diane Solway



Walter Price at Karma Booth, NADA fair.

Art, fashion, design, music and just about everything else converge in Miami during Art Basel, requiring spreadsheets, text reminders and sharp instincts to navigate its ever-multiplying offerings. No one's Basel experience is quite the same as another's - chance encounters, traffic and discoveries lead visitors to constantly change their plans. This year served up plenty of pomp, signaling the number of big global players on the contemporary art scene. The new kid on the block was the Argentinian entrepreneur Alan Faena, who presided over the grand opening dinner of the new Faena Arts District like an art world P.T. Barnum, dressed in a white suit and top hat. Fireworks illuminated Damien Hirst's giant, gold-leaf encrusted skeleton of a woolly mammoth; a procession of red-plumed, leggy ladies presented seafood platters, and the New World Symphony orchestra performed selections by the pool as guests dined alfresco. It was equal parts Fellini and Folies Bergere.

Elsewhere, baby-blue, blue-chip and emerging art held sway. At the main fair, three standout booths were those by Gavin Brown's Enterprise, Neugerriemschneider and Galerie Grymskaya. Brown showed a little cheek with Karl Holmquist's neon *Who Run this Mother?*, alongside paintings by Bjarne Melgaard, Sturtevant and Alex Katz. The Berlin-based Neugerriemschneider dispensed with walls to open up its space to compelling installations by the likes of Ai Weiwei, Jorge Pardo and Pae White. An eye-popping mix of paintings covered the walls salon-style at Galerie Gmurzynska, which in honor of its 50th anniversary invited the celebrated curator Germano Celant to install works by Yves Klein, Jean Dubuffet and other masters.

Over at the NADA (New Art Dealers Alliance) fair, at the Fontainebleau hotel, there was plenty of action at the Canada gallery booth, where people were snatching up Katherine Bradford's expressive paintings of swimmers in the sea. Next door, Karma had people swooning over the erotically-charged child-like drawings of Walter Price, while White Columns offered the most eclectic fare, with quirky drawings of her own imagined life by the late outsider artist Lady Shalimar Montague and landscape and still life paintings on salvaged plywood by the late Bill Lynch. "Happy Basel!" a NADA official yelled cheerily as I made my way out. That was a new one, as was "Basel Tov!" the greeting of an email from the Standard Spa Miami.

Outside of the fairs, there was also plenty to satisfy the cognoscenti. Katherine Bernhardt continued her hot streak, with her fresco on the floor of the pool at the Nautilus Hotel, while Nari Ward packed a powerful, resonant punch with Sun Splashed, his terrific survey at the Pérez Art Museum Miami. Don't miss his casket-like Glory, made of oil drums and a wall hanging made of shoelaces that spells out the phrase, We Shall Overcome.

At the ICA Miami, a solo exhibition devoted to the pioneering new media artist Alex Bag included her prescient 2001 work Untitled (The Van), a precursor to the work of Ryan Trecartin and others, which features the artist in the role of three ambitious young artists who catalogue their career "musts" to their seedy dealer. ("I want Hauser & Wirth to buy me a Ferrari!" "I want the Project Room at MoMA!") Another gem was the pioneering Light and Space artist Larry Bell's 6 x 6 An Improvisation, which offered a poetic reprieve from the city's cacophony of images. Simplicity itself, the installation is built from large reflective glass panels that create resonances as you walk through it.

Miami, of course, is synonymous with the Rubell Family Collection, which this year focused on women artists. Plenty of big-ticket collections offer the usual suspects; the Rubells always pull out a few surprises that reflect their particular taste. Among this year's edition, No Man's Land: Solange Pessoa's Cathedral, a colossal, snaking installation made entirely of human hair that took some 13 years to complete and Anicka Yi's quixotic Life Serves Up the Occasional Pink Unicorn, which evokes pressed flowers in scrapbooks in its exploration of the ephemeral and the immutable. Nearby at the sprawling Moore Building, the first collaboration between frenemies Larry Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch was also required viewing. An intriguing show highlighting the return of figurative painting and sculpture, UnRealism featured particularly striking works by next-gen stars Jamian Juliano-Villani, Jonathan Gardner and Sanya Kantarovsky, who were shown alongside such '80s forebears as David Salle and Julian Schnabel.

Speaking of Schnabel, the artist also sang for his supper at Mr. Chow when the impresario/ restaurateur turned artist Michael Chow hosted "Night at the Opera," a gathering Wednesday night to toast his exhibition in April at the Andy Warhol Museum. Schnabel first read a poem and didn't hesitate to tell guests, "shut the f--k up, please" when they preferred to speak over his performance, before turning over the stage to two stars of the Beijing Opera and Italian tenor Vittorio Grigolo. If art ruled the day, music was the night's tonic. To this visitor, the hit turns of the week were those delivered by Andra Day and Alicia Keys. Day gave a knockout performance late into the Faena Hotel opening, with a rousing rendition of her song Rise Up. (Never mind the dissonance of singing that tune to a room full of billionaires and Leo DiCaprio.)

Keys was the kickoff headliner for The Dean Collection x Bacardi's Untameable House Party, curated by her husband Swizz Beatz to coincide with his first No Commission art fair. Keys dazzled the crowd with Girl on Fire, likely igniting the lightning storm outside. "Have you all been watching Empire?," she said, referencing the hit TV show. "Pretty crazy, right?" (Spoiler alert: Her character is having a thing with Jamal Lyon.) Afterwards, I went to check out Beatz's Dean Collection art fair next door.

Beatz, the star hip hop producer/DJ, has been collecting art for awhile and has amassed quite a collection of works by artists such as Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas and KAWS, along with newer finds. His three-day fair, in Miami's Wynwood district, showed a selection of mostly paintings by the artists he collects, and regularly promotes via Instagram.

As we began to chat, Miami Heat shooting guard Dwyane Wade turned up, wearing neon orange sneakers and rolled-up jeans. Beatz gave him a thorough tour of the works on view. I tagged along. Occasionally, so did Fab 5 Freddy and Jermaine Dupri. "This is the only show in Art Basel that is 100% for the artists," Beatz explained. "They get 100% of what they sell."

He went on: "Art Basel has become too much about business and the artists are kind of left on the side. The galleries win, the collectors win, and the artists got to find their way home. So I said, you know what? I want to put on a celebration of the artist and charge people nothing to get in. Every night we do a concert. I just want to create a celebration to honor what the artist stands for."