

# ARTSY

## DECEMBER 9, 2019

### WHAT SOLD AT ART BASEL IN MIAMI BEACH

by Benjamin Sutton



Woody De Othello's "Cool Composition" (2019). presented by Jessica Silverman Gallery and Karma, at Art Basel in Miami Beach, 2019.

Toward the end of Art Basel in Miami Beach's VIP preview on Wednesday, as the French dealer Emmanuel Perrotin was making his way back to his bustling booth, he saw a man testing the ripeness of the fair's viral sensation: Maurizio Cattelan's *Comedian* (2019), a work consisting of a banana duct-taped to the wall. Contrary to the work's title, Perrotin was in no mood for comedy.

"Sir, you cannot touch the art unless you are planning to buy it—this piece costs \$120,000," he said sternly. When the banana-groper feigned surprise at the price, Perrotin snapped back: "Yes, you heard me correctly."

Three days later, another grabby fairgoer went further still: On Saturday afternoon, performance artist David Datuna removed *Comedian* from the wall, peeled the banana, and ate it. He called the performance *Hungry Artist*. By then, the work had appeared on the cover of the *New York Post*, sparked the trending hashtag #cattelan—where people posted images of various objects taped to walls—and completely sold out. Perrotin sold the three editions of the work for prices between \$120,000 and \$150,000, and both artist's proofs had been acquired by museums.

Perrotin explained that even though his gallery doesn't typically disclose prices publicly, in the case of Cattelan's banana, doing so was crucial to the work's success. "You're buying a story," he explained. "From the moment you buy it, you're part of the story."

Beyond the hunger for Cattelan's *Comedian*, dealers were doing serious business at this year's edition of Art Basel in Miami Beach. In addition to the whopping 269 galleries occupying booths on its main floor, the fair debuted a new sector on the upper level of the convention center, Meridians, featuring really big works by 34 artists.

"Launching Meridians was several years in the making," said Art Basel's director for the Americas, Noah Horowitz. "We wanted to get artists excited about the opportunity to work at that scale, and to get a deeper level of engagement with major collectors and institutions."

Large-scale installations by Portia Munson and José Antonio Suárez Londoño found new homes right out of the gate. Munson's piece *The Garden* (1996)—a domestic space stuffed with plastic flowers, decorative floral motifs, and other conventional signifiers of femininity—was being presented by New York's P.P.O.W. It was snapped up during Meridians's preview on Tuesday night by the collectors Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, founders of the art museum and hotel chain 21c, for \$225,000. Subsequent sales from the new sector included an enormous painting by John Armleder, *Stetson* (2019), which Almine Rech sold for an undisclosed price, and all three editions of Woody De Othello's giant yellow sculpture of a box fan, *Cool Composition* (2019), which Jessica Silverman Gallery and Karma sold for \$175,000 apiece.

Most dealers I spoke with agreed that even though they hadn't experienced the same sustained buying frenzy as last year's edition of the fair, business had been very good during the VIP preview. David Castillo, whose namesake gallery is based just a couple blocks away from the Miami Beach Convention Center, sold out his booth during the preview and, by Friday, had switched out many of the works to showcase available inventory.

"Usually there's a bit of consultation, but this year, collectors came and made decisions on the spot," Castillo said. "Some people have already paid me, which has never happened before."