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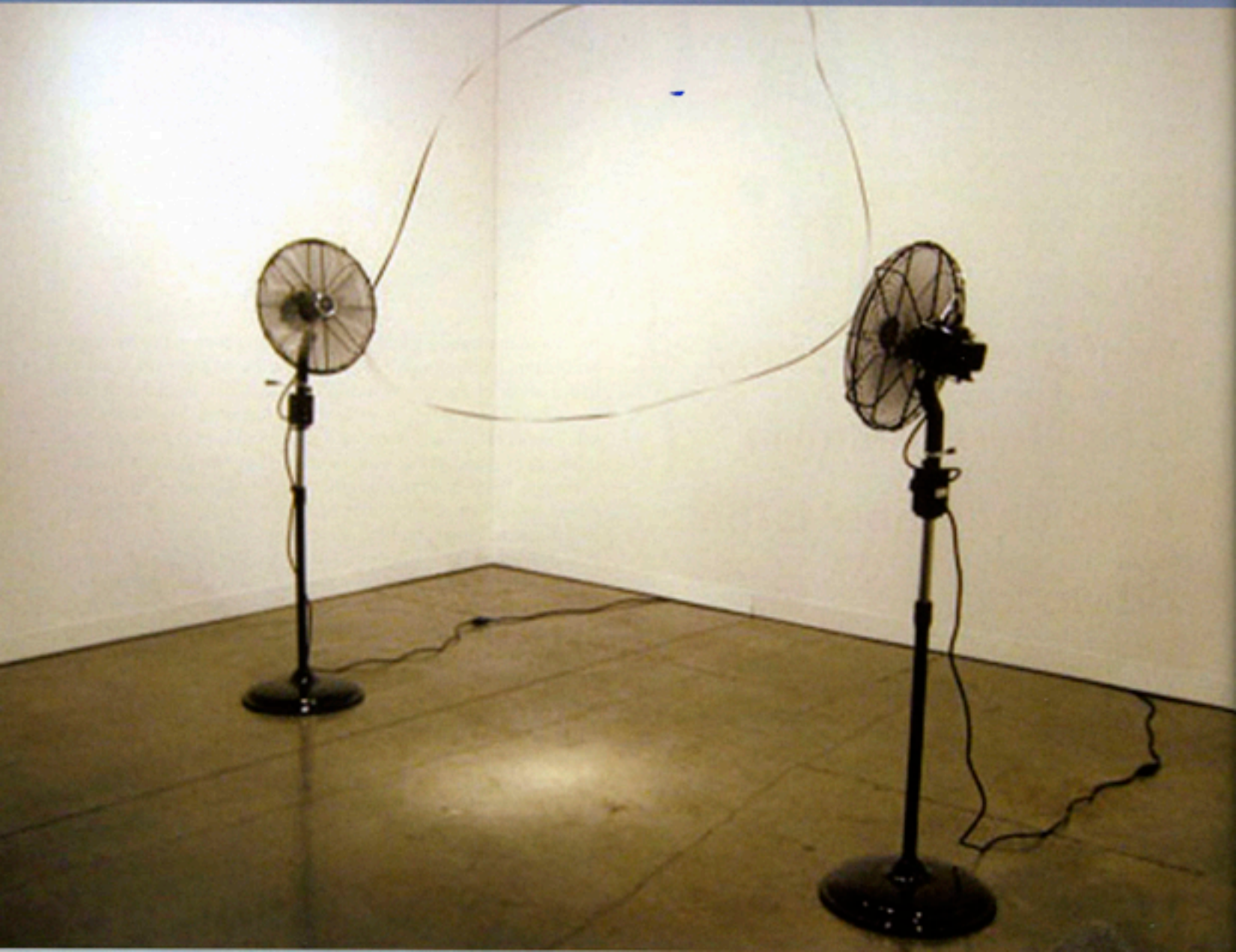
# Miami Truly Lives Up to the Hype

Leah Oates

Everyone says the same thing about the week of Art Basel Miami: there is too much art to see, too much going on, and it's all about the art market. I'll admit that I went to Miami expecting this to be the case, with a fairly skeptical attitude towards how the experience would pan out. It turned out that I was pleasantly surprised by what I saw, and by the overall experience. I think that when people in the arts mention these things, there is a kernel of truth, but that it diminishes the magic that can and does happen during the week of Art Basel. Because there is so much art being shown, one is bound to see strong work by emerging artists at the Pool Art Fair, mid-career artists at Scope and established artists at Art Basel. While these critiques have some validity, I think that there should be venues for whoever wants to be there and that this is ultimately a good thing. The art world looks at itself as being beyond status, class and rank, but,

really, that is not true, and comparing fairs only feeds into the idea of a pecking order, which ultimately does not serve anyone. More fairs and events means more people coming to Miami and can also translate into more contacts, sales and excitement.

Nothing in Miami compares to Art Basel, which truly lives up to all the hype and was outstanding overall, even if it was on the conservative side at times. Painting was quite strong here and stood out the most since work from the past was contextualized with current work and, overall, was curated skillfully in certain booths. Some standouts for painting included Pier Kireby at Bjerggaard Gallery, Mickalene Thomas at Rhona Hoffman, Enoc Perez at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, Bjorn Copeland at China Art Objects, Kirsten Everberg at 1301 Gallery and Craig Kucia at Bruk Gallery. Standouts in other mediums include sculpture by E.V. Day at Deitch Projects, sculpture by Mindy Shapiro at CRG Gallery, photography by Marcia Xavier at Casa Triangulo Gallery,





neon installation by Artemio at Galleria Enrique Guerrero and photography by Jorma Puranen at Anhava Galeria.

Spencer Brownstone Gallery at Art Basel Nova featured a magical sculptural installation by the artist Zilvinas Kempinas called *O Between Fans*. The work consisted of tape from a video floating in a continuous circle between two fans. The work was mercurial and hypnotic and when I talked to the artist he stated that the work was about a zero floating in space and nothing more, which gave the work more depth, ironically. What he meant, I think, is that the work is about a state of nothingness, modesty and emptiness without any pretension of any other ostentatious theories.

Many booths at Art Basel exhibited Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat. If you happened to see the recent Basquiat retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum, you know what an amazing talent he was and continues to be. While it was great to see so much work by two great artists, their work was diluted within the context of the fair. Not a single booth placed a Warhol or Basquiat next to less-established artists in a manner that truly showed these greats' influence on other artists, which continues to be significant.

Video was marginalized at Art Basel into a video lounge and, overall, there was not much video work in the booths. Performance art was non-existent. More of both would add a vitality that was clearly missing. To be fair, performance was almost non-existent at all the fairs.

Over at DiVA, which focuses on digital work in video and photography, there were some outstanding works by international galleries. Taipei-based Chi-Wen Gallery had a moving and emotional black and white video by Chen Chien-Jen about the body in pain in the age of globalization. Dublin-based Rubicon Gallery had a video work by artist Martin Healy that, again, was quite moving and emotional in a non-overt manner.

Healy's video was of a cover band playing *Stairway to Heaven* forward, and in reverse. The work transforms a song that has become so well-known and tired into something original and transformative. At Gent-based Hoert Bekaert Gallery, Thomas Bogaert showed video of a crazy car chase with colorful toy cars zooming around the screen. Bogaert's work was so zany and self-effacing that one could not help but like it.

The Wynwood District was great fun even if the work was a bit uneven from space to space. The galleries had DJs and a party atmosphere that made for a very laidback scene. Ingalls and Associates had a strong solo show by artist Ivan Toth Depena. Toth Depena's work consisted of small, glowing ethereal light boxes that seemed like small views into the cosmos.

At Pool, which I was also a part of as an artist, there was some very strong work, but traffic was slow and the venue was a bit rundown. The artists which stood out were Michael Cole, Peter Barrett, Robyn Voshartdt/Sven Humphrey, Pierre St-Jacques, [Virginie Sommet](#), Sarah Small, Manuel Geerinck, Yuliya Lanina, The Polvo Group, John Bonafede, Gosia Koscielak and Mike Quinn. Overall, the artwork in Pool was very strong and well-curated. But, depending on your perspective, Pool was either a refreshing break from the other fairs, because it did not seem so polished, or a disappointing example of how artists are not empowered within the art world.

The week of Art Basel is certainly one of the leading art forums in the country, and why not be generous enough to allow space at the table for all who desire to attend? The sheer number of events allows one to get a broad view of a thriving and thought-provoking art world with many ideas, medias and personalities all at once, an immersion in all things art related. Overall, I think all the events that went on are a positive sign of an independent and alive arts community that is global and flourishing. □