

BASEL—For the European art world, the ritual goes like this: Another June, another American invasion. Some of the sites on the U.S. collectors' circuit may change, but eventually everyone lands at Switzerland's Art Basel. Last summer the crowds streamed north from the Venice Biennale. This year they descended southward from the Documenta quintennial in Kassel—a stolid German town that only registers on the art world's radar every five years.

Like the Biennale, Documenta theoretically exists outside the art market. When Documenta began in 1955, the Iron Curtain was only 20-odd miles away and the event served as a rebuff to Soviet totalitarianism, in art as much as politics. For the 2002 edition, artistic director Okwui Enwezor, the Nigerian-born poet and critic, had a similarly ambitious sociopolitical agenda: He initiated a series of colloquiums on topics such as "Democracy," "Justice" and "Creolization"—in places as far flung as Lagos, New Delhi and St. Lucia—before the Kassel exhibition, which was previously the only Documenta site. When the artist list was released, even the hippest contemporary art types were stumped by many of the names, especially those from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Enwezor's detractors predicted a stultifyingly politically correct show, and some thought his pronouncements about art's debasement by commodification would dissuade U.S. art dealers, collectors and consultants from attending. Clearly, they did not. By lunchtime on the "press day" opening, the outdoor cafeteria at the Binding Brauerei teemed with the art market elite: the cream of Chicago's collecting community, gallerists such as David Zwirner from New York and Stephen Friedman from London, and New York powerhouse art consultant Kim Heirston with a client in tow, to name a few.

As for the art itself, yes, there was "worthy" work from the Third World, giving fuel to those critics hellbent on labeling Enwezor an ideologue. But reigning artists also shined, including Mona Hatoum, William Kentridge, Steve McQueen, Shirin Neshat, Raymond Pettibon and Jeff Wall. Their inclusion, however, seemed to many observers like a bit of bet-hedging aimed at placating the market's mainstream. But the truth is, market players don't go to Kassel to see such pieces; they go to discover new stars.

And, as always, some emerged. The Atlas Group from Lebanon hit a resonant note, mixing humor and humanity in its pseudo-documentary work on Beirut's murderous travails;



Every June Europe is flooded with Americans on the art circuit, ending at Art Basel. Photographs from Frank Thiel's construction site series, including the one above, sold for \$12,000 apiece; and the triptych at right, one of several from Isaac Julien's video *Paradise/Omeros*, for £10,000 (\$9,400). The video was shot expressly for Documenta, another major stop on the collectors' tour.

Zarina Bhimji's entrancing video of her native Uganda drew crowds into a small projection room; Carlos Garacoia of Havana aptly rode the line between art and architecture; and the constructions of Mark Manders were darker, slicker cousins of those by his Dutch countrymen in Atelier van Lieshout. Undoubtedly these and other (relatively) little-known Documenta artists have already started to be courted by museums and high-powered galleries. From a market standpoint, Kassel is just Venice without the paninis and palazzos.

Luckily for visitors suffering glamour withdrawal, Prince Heinrich zu Fürstenberg hosted a Black Forest reception with Simon de Pury and Daniella Luxembourg on June 9, the day after Documenta's opening. The occasion was the unveiling of the Pisces collection, which de Pury started assembling for a still-mysterious client before becoming chairman of Phillips, de Pury & Luxembourg in 2000. The works themselves offered few clues to the collector's personality. Though posed as "art ahead of the 21st century," the collection consists of solidly bankable '80s and '90s artists, including Andreas Gursky, Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, David Salle and Cindy Sherman. The only risk was Belgian artist Wim Delvoye's photographs depicting lunch meat conjoined to evoke parquet floors.

After a spin through the multifloor exhibition in the

Fürstenberg museum, the bejeweled ladies and bespoke-suited men adjourned to the Fürstenberg castle just down the hill for champagne and complicated crudités. The Pisces crowd trended toward Teutonic, but the American contingent was certainly present, including Manhattan gallerists Lawrence Luhring and Roland Augustine, and Christie's international head of contemporary art, Amy Cappellazzo. Others had no doubt opted to attend the Manifesta biennial in Frankfurt or to swing through the galleries in Berlin, Cologne and Zurich.

The art world reconvened the next night, Monday the 10th, for the exclusive preview opening of Art Basel's "Unlimited," a selection of outsize works from the fair's exhibiting galleries. Meanwhile, as dealers were setting up their booths in the adjacent building, collectors and private dealers were sneaking onto the floor in an attempt to scope out—and secure—coveted works before anyone else could get to them. Chicago collector Stefan Edlis and recently "retired" London gallerist Anthony D'Offay were just two of those spotted in the act. Pierre Huber of Galerie Art + Public in Geneva ranked among those who decried the booth crashers, recalling how one of his collectors grew so irate over the poaching that he immediately hopped his private jet out of Basel. Then again, Huber himself did business before the fair officially opened. "Someone came to me wanting to buy an On Kawara on Monday night" for \$40,000, he says. "Of course I sold it. What am I supposed to do, say no?"

As soon as "First Choice," the fair's official invitation-only opening, kicked off the next morning, all the major collectors were buying with gusto. Photography was a strong presence again, with many stands sporting works by contemporary stars Thomas Ruff and Jean-Marc Bustamante. Next-generation photographer Frank Thiel of Berlin had large works prominently hung in five different booths—most came from his new construction sites series and went quickly. Galerie Helga de Alvear of Madrid sold five pieces from the two editions of four it displayed, at \$12,000 each, plus more back-room stock.

Documenta artists were highlighted whenever possible. Galerie Neu of Berlin, for example, sold a massive €55,000 (\$52,000) installation by Manfred Pernice. "It was a big success for us to have two artists in Documenta," says Neu's Thilo

Wermke, referring to Pernice and to Welsh installation artist Cerith Wyn Evans. "Several people came directly to the booth and asked for their work." Like many exhibitors, Neu was inundated by an unprecedented rush of collectors in the first two days of the fair.

Then, overnight, the buying slowed. And, more surprising, it stayed slow until the fair closed on June 17. The traditional weekend influx of middle-tier collectors from France, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland barely materialized. "I only got here on Tuesday afternoon, and by then almost everything was done," says Andrew Silewicz of Victoria Miro in London, which nonetheless did record business, selling Inka Essenhigh's 2001 painting *WWF* for \$30,000 to Athens collector Dakis Joannou, as well as several photo triptychs from Isaac Julien's Documenta video, *Paradise/Omeros*, produced in editions of four and ranging from £10,000 to £20,000 (\$15,000–29,000).

The missing middle tier made the fair a front-loaded, lopsided affair. Wermke blames the economy. While the truly rich stay rich, he points out, after two years of shaky economic news, the midlevel collectors may be feeling poorer. As Carlos Urroz, director of Helga de Alvear, notes, "Attending an art fair when you can't buy is pure masochism for a collector."

Art Basel director Sam Keller is happy to have such problems. "Overall, the sales were on the same level as last year, which was incredible," he says. "It's true we have an auctionlike sensation the first few days. The preview buying is more important and more energetic than ever before. But it's bullshit to say that there's nothing left afterward for other collectors. Some exhibitors bring four times as much work as can fill a booth."

Yet some Art Basel insiders see a major problem—the "Americanized" attitude toward acquiring art. "Everyone, including the top European collectors, rushed in to buy early and competitively," says Victor Gisler of Galerie Mai 36 in Zurich, a member of the fair's committee. Now, Gisler fears, other European collectors think Art Basel sells mainly high-priced work, and that all the great stuff disappears early. To him, that's dangerous: "Those midlevel collectors have been an important foundation for many galleries. We need them as much as we need the big American collectors." **MARC SPIEGLER**

