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The Venice effect

Ruff, Neuenschwander, Orozco, Balka, Wallinger and Vezzoli are among the artists whose sales have been boosted by their presence at the Biennale

VENICE/BASEL. On the opening day of Art Basel, Turin gallerist Franco Noero is standing at his booth when an American collector strides up to him, asking about Francesco Vezzoli's *Flower arrangement, homage to Bruce Nauman*, a bouquet of 100 crimson roses posed high upon a pedestal in a pastoral basket. "Are you familiar with his work?" Mr Noero asks. The collector responds, "Well, I saw the video in Venice," referring to Vezzoli's *Caligula*, a spoof trailer that so stirred the art world's blood at the Biennale.

Welcome to the Venice effect, in which the profile of artists suddenly rises at Venice, causing a run on their work in Basel, in this case somehow infusing a \$25,000 bouquet with the frisson of a Roman orgy.

In an idealistic vision of the art world, biennials and fairs may be opposite sorts of events, but in the reality of today's art market, the exhibitions offer dealers a prime opportunity to rocket their artists a few rungs up the market hierarchy. Not surprisingly, dealers actively lobby to get their artists into the non-commercial event, then often subsidise the production, transport and installation of works once the



A still from Mark Wallinger's *Sleeper* (2004). With Anthony Reynolds. Edition of 200

artists are selected. "Fairs are the new biennials," the critic Jerry Saltz once wrote, but just as important a factor in the global trade is the extent to which even ambitious biennial art gets rapidly fold-

ed into the market.

Following the classic Venice-effect, an artist whose name is widely known but whose work has hardly saturated the market pulls off a coup at the Biennale and his or her dealers capitalise on it at Art Basel less than a week later.

The other big-buzz video in the Italian Pavilion, Candice Breitz's *Mother & Father* spurred a frenzy on the stand of Sonnabend Gallery that had long ago chosen her for its season-opening show this September in Chelsea. Sonnabend director Jason Ysenburg was approached by The Art Newspaper just as he explained to collectors that the exact details of how the piece could be sold—the edition size, installation requirements and whether the *Mother* and *Father* components might be divorced—remained under negotiation with the artist. The price of the piece has been set—€120,000—and there are collectors jousting to pay it.

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Fables et récits by Annette Messager, 1991. With Marian Goodman Gallery

The Venice effect

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Mr Ysenburg says that already in Venice he was fielding calls about Breitz: “The video was so arresting that people started wondering, ‘Who is this woman?’”

Well respected but not quite world-famous Brazilian artist Rivane Neuenschwander also had her profile boosted by an idiosyncratic installation at the Arsenale, entitled “...”[sic] an office space filled with typewriters re-jigged to write only full stops. “We had people coming to us looking for all three artists we had in the Biennale,” says Alexandre

Gabriel of São Paulo’s Fortes Vilaca gallery that represents Neuenschwander. One collector was asking me about shipping costs while we were standing in the Italian Pavilion.” Yesterday morning, Neuenschwander’s piece, list-priced at \$85,000, went to Argentina’s Costantini museum.

Not surprisingly, many galleries highlight emerging artists selected for Venice by giving them prominence in Basel. At the booth of Zurich gallery Peter Kilchmann, who had no less than six artists at the Biennale, the exterior walls

featured an image drawn from Adrian Paci’s entrancing Arsenale video *Turn On* and a word-art piece by Jorge Macchi.

It is not just the rising stars who benefit from the post-Venice bounce. Thomas Ruff’s highly pixellated architectural photos, prominently featured in the Italian Pavilion’s central chamber alongside Rachel Whiteread’s stairs. Galerie Mai 36’s Victor Gisler, who had placed (and sold) works by the artist in the biennale, reported strong interest at Art Basel in similar Ruff works (€60,000, edition of three).

At the booth of London’s

Anthony Reynolds, there were many inquiries about the photo of a bear suit-bedecked Mark Wallinger wandering through the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, an image from the video *Sleeper*, which was another art-crowd favourite featured in the Italian Pavilion. “Everyone saw the piece in Venice and is asking about the photo,” says Mr Reynolds, who had sold one of the three images for £30,000 just two hours into the fair.

Close by Wallinger’s video in Venice hung paintings by Gabriel Orozco, the Mexican artist who abandoned the medium in favour

of installations and photography for almost a decade, then recently returned to it. The room functioned as prime launching pad. “Many people in Venice where very surprised to see Orozco paintings,” says his Mexican dealer, Jose Kuri of Mexico City’s Galeria Kurimanzutto. While the works in the Biennale came via Marian Goodman, Kurimanzutto fortunately had two more from the same series, now already sold at Basel. And yesterday, early in the afternoon, it had clients for two more yet-to-be-painted works, priced at \$200,000 a piece.

Meanwhile, Polish artist

Mirosław Balka, a conceptual sculptor much loved by the critics, was drawing strong interest in a domestic-sized, James Joyce-inspired sculpture *Sweets of Sin*, which at €45,000 was twice-reserved by mid-afternoon. “We started getting a lot of private clients and institutions inquiring about Balka,” said Berlin and Stockholm-based dealer Claes Nordenhake: “While Venice was a fairly safe show, he had such a tough piece and it was right next to Thomas Schütte’s work. Somehow it all works together to get people excited.”

Marc Spiegel