



ART BASEL/MIAMI BEACH DAILY NEWSPAPER

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International art fairs

Will ABMB consume its own mother?

Not only is this fair now at the top of the tree in the US, but it may even overtake the original Art Basel

MIAMI BEACH. In an art world distinguished by its rapid metabolism, the ArtBasel/Miami Beach Fair (ABMB) has already had a marked effect on many fronts. For one thing, it has transformed this hedonist's paradise into one of the art scene's temporary epicentres, like Kassel during Documenta, Venice during the Biennale and, of course, Basel in Switzerland each June.

But the impact goes beyond that. From its 2002 launch, ABMB represented a new kind of art fair, notable for its packed schedule and the way events spilled over: "There's a magic when the whole city seems to be living to the rhythm of a fair," concedes Jennifer Flay, artistic director of FIAC Paris. "That groovy feeling has certainly had an impact in terms of other fairs, although it's hard to replicate in New York,

London or Paris."

Sabrina van der Ley of Art Forum Berlin echoes Ms Flay, pointing to both the "massive attack of parties" in Miami Beach and the fair's success at getting private collectors to open up their homes and collections. This innovation was brilliant marketing, with the aim of keeping the art-world hordes occupied, since the city's normal cultural offerings are hardly comparable to London during Frieze or New York during the Armory Show. "The fair is a brilliant if utterly artificial environment," says one art-world insider. "Of course, one has to wonder how many years running people will want to see those private collections."

Which brings us to the next point: ABMB's position in an art market that this autumn gave us no less six serious fairs in Europe alone.

No one questions that ABMB today ranks among the contemporary market's top fairs, the other "musts" being Frieze, the Armory and Art Basel (ABMB has administered the coup de grace to Art Chicago, though the Armory probably started the Midwestern event's demise).

The bigger question is whether or not the Miami Beach event has eclipsed the Armory Show in America. The Chelsea fair's co-director, Katelijne De Backer, plays down ABMB's effect: "Estimated sales at the New

York fair rose from \$24 million in 2002 to \$43 million in 2004," she points out. That said, Ms De Backer hardly seems complacent in face of new competition. She has increasingly positioned the Armory as a venue for young artists rather than classic contemporary work, and for the 2005 edition, the Armory responded to longstanding exhibitors' complaints about the fair's cramped quarters, reducing the number of galleries by 15% and raising the largest booth size by 50%.

Other fair directors ques-

tion Ms de Backer's sang froid: "Clearly, Miami Beach poses a challenge to the Armory, forcing it to refocus on younger galleries," says Ms Flay. "And the Armory no longer benefits from the huge charisma and connections of Pat Hearn and Colin de Land," two of the New York show's four founding dealers, now both deceased. "Miami Beach is already the best fair in America," opines Art Cologne director Gérard Goodrow. "The Armory is super-sloppy, which works fine for hip young galleries,

but rules out a certain top-level works and collectors." Longer term, Mr Goodrow suggests ABMB might even cut into Art Basel's business, much as art fairs in general have heavily cannibalised the passing trade in galleries. "The major art collectors are still mainly Americans," he points out, "and for them Miami combines Swiss efficiency with the added bonus of being both an easy trip and a quick vacation, making it more attractive than going all the way to Basel."

Marc Spiegel

Facts

■ Yesterday, **19** private jets flew in for Art Basel Miami Beach (the normal daily average is 2 or 3).

■ There are **700** journalists in town from all over the world; that is over three for every gallery exhibiting at the fair.