

Clutch of new fairs open to coincide with the main event

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

Seven fairs, 461 galleries, four and a half days. The numbers simply don't add up. Within the American art world, Los Angeles collector Dean Valentine is notoriously energetic when it comes to seeking out new work and staying informed on emerging artists. Yet last winter he reached his breaking point here in Miami. "When my buddies decided we had to go see the Scope fair after we had already gone to ArtBasel/Miami Beach and NADA, I was almost in tears," recalls the entertainment executive. "But this year is literally insane, you'd have to do 100 booths a day to see it all."

Actually, Valentine is underestimating the dimensions of the current lunacy. Assuming, quite conservatively, that each gallery booth displays 15 pieces, a visitor would have to inspect 192 pieces an hour, for eight hours per day, from today's noon opening bell at ABMB through Sunday night's fair closures to see it all.

Of course, the major challenge

of attending ArtBasel/Miami Beach has always been negotiating one's way through the overwhelming opportunities, in a city teeming with ancillary exhibitions and collector open-houses. And this year the addition of four new events—Aqua, Pulse, Design05, Pool—to last year's trio of ArtBasel/Miami Beach, NADA and Scope has created an unprecedentedly dense situation.

"We consider it a compliment, because it shows the attractiveness of ArtBasel/Miami Beach," says ABMB director Samuel Keller. "In Basel we've had a good experience with Liste as a place where young dealers learn to do fairs before we later select among them for our fair. I don't want to start giving advice, but galleries need to develop their own individual profiles. Just because we reject 450 of them doesn't mean they all need to come do other fairs here."

Faced with such a ludicrous situation, collectors and consultants are adopting a wide range of



Curators Gary O'Dwyer and Pierre Coinde of the Centre of Attention, a curatorial initiative in London, are staging a bed-in at the Frisbee art fair (1-4 December) to protest the rampant commercialism of the contemporary art fair scene. In a haiku-like statement, the duo complain: "Art

fairs are disgusting/ They make us feel sick/ Is this the best way to show art?/ And curate art?/ It is revolting/ We are against it/ We are for/ Freeing the Tiananmen 126/ Stopping dictators/ Cleaning the world's water supply/ Stopping child abuse/ And other stuff..." Helen Stoilas

attitudes and tactics. Some actually insist on remaining comprehensive, no matter how much it hurts. "I will try to see everything in Miami," says Florida-based collector Mickey Cartin. "The only problem with looking at so much stuff is that I actually find my eyes starting to hurt."

Slightly less masochistic, Miami mega-collector Don Rubell says he and his wife Mera hope to see it all, despite being heavily occupied with their own exhibition space's activities all week. "You have to prioritise, so we'll start with ArtBasel/Miami Beach and NADA, and then work through the others," he says. "It's probably way too much. But the problem is, 'Who's to say which fair is the one fair too much?' Next year's hot gallery could be at a minor fair here. Just remember how everyone was wondering whether it was worth going to the Zoo fair in London last year and then discovered some of the best new London galleries there."

Valentine, by contrast plans to overhaul his approach completely. "I'm getting much more Zen about it," he explains. "I can't conceive of going to more than two fairs, frankly. But if I was looking for a third fair, it would be the one with youngest, most untested galleries, because most collectors won't go there."

That new-found serenity is underpinned by a sense that he won't be missing much in a milieu glutted with emerging artists. "What's happened in Miami mirrors a market in which we have too much art chasing the same group of collectors," he says. "There's nowhere near enough good art to fill all those booths."

Also, like most other insiders,

Valentine is expecting that an informal network of collector friends, curators and dealers will keep him posted on any work that they think he would like.

Meanwhile, the professional advisors, paid precisely to do all the legwork their clients want to avoid, will be bringing extra reinforcements. "We'll have an assistant down there and he will scout out the other fairs for us," says Andrew Ruth of New York art advisors Ruth Catone. "We want our clients focused on what's relevant to their collections, not running all over Miami."

In all likelihood, ArtBasel/Miami Beach and NADA stand most to benefit from this year's situation. When there were three fairs, collectors tried to see it all, diluting their attention. Today, faced with the near-impossibility of seeing all seven fairs taking place, the consensus seem to be that ABMB and NADA are musts, and that the other fairs will be visited where possible. Nevertheless, NADA director Heather Hubbs says the situation is disquieting. "Every major fair today has these satellite events, but it's never been like this before," she points out. "We're trying to create an environment where people can see art and have fun, not feel pressured and confused because they might be missing something."

Marc Spiegler

■ The fairs in Miami this week

Art Basel Miami Beach	Miami Beach Convention Center, Collins Park at 21st Street	The main event: 195 internationally prominent galleries	www.artbasel.com. 1-day ticket \$22, permanent pass \$50
The New Art Dealers Alliance Fair	The Ice Palace Film Studios 59 NW 14th Street, Miami	84 of the hottest galleries, more than a third from New York or Brooklyn, but otherwise strongly international	www.newartdealers.org. Free
Scope Miami	Townhouse Hotel, 150 20th Street (at Collins) Miami Beach	67 galleries, two-thirds North American, many untested, but with some veterans, too	www.scope-art.com. \$10 admission
Pulse	2700 NW 2nd Avenue Miami	48 galleries, with a mix of young and well-established contemporary dealers	www.pulse-art.com \$10 admission
Aqua	Aqua Hotel, 1530 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach	36 galleries, almost all American, with many from the Northwest and West Coast, mixing the known and less-known	www.AquaArtMiami.com Free
Design.05	Moore Building, 191 NE 40th Street, Miami	15 heavy-hitter design galleries, half of them foreign	www.design05miami.com \$16 admission
Pool Art Fair	Econo Lodge, 1435 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach	Video-heavy, with 15 videos out of 16 works exhibited by dealers, agents, emerging collectives, and non-profits	www.poolartfair.com Starts December 2. Opening night \$15 afterwards \$5