



**That's me**  
Dennis Hopper  
admires a Warhol  
Hopper with the  
director of Art Basel,  
Samuel Keller;  
and the installation  
'Nach jugendstil  
kam Rocokko' by  
Urs Fischer

# NONE BUT THE RICH DESERVE THE FAIR

**Marc Spiegler**  
**ART**

**Art Basel Miami Beach**



When the Art Basel Miami Beach fair began in 2002, the event could have been described in a simple phrase: 'The artworld goes to Miami'. Hoping to capitalise on the booming art market in North America and the nascent one in Latin America, the organisers of the legendary Swiss fair set up shop in South Beach, a place hardly known for high culture.

For an artworld more used to meeting up in New York or Paris, the setting was surreal. In the VIP rooms of booming nightclubs, aesthetic types found themselves surrounded by silicone-enhanced sirens. 'There's something truly humorous about having a Swiss chic fair in such a tacky city,' artist Candice Breitz observed at the time. One dealer spent her whole time in a bikini selling pieces at the Art Positions section, where roughly two dozen galleries installed their works inside beach-front shipping containers. Most major local collectors opened their private collections to the public, seemingly competing to see who could leave artworld visitors most gobsmacked by the depth of their holdings and the sumptuousness of their homes.

Five years later, much has changed. The once down-beaten South Beach strip of hotels infested with 'cocaine cowboys' on Ocean Drive and Collins Avenue has sprouted several luxury resorts per year, driving its average room-rate above New York City's. Likewise, contemporary art has become a full-on luxury brand – magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *W* and Germany's *Park Avenue* have devoted massive space in their December issues to the artworld.

Thus, while dealers, collectors and curators geared up for the 2006 fair – which ran from

6 December and entailed five days of frenetic buying and fabulous fetes – many insiders wondered whether this would be the year that the event's essential character would change irreversibly. And even before the last work had been sold and the final champagne quaffed, the answer was clear: Once 'the artworld goes to Miami', Art Basel Miami Beach has become 'the artworld goes Miami'.

The first fair had virtually no celebrity wattage, with *Showgirls* star Elizabeth Berkley topping the low heap. The 2006 edition drew Keanu Reeves, Dennis Hopper, Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones. For the first time, music superstars such as Pharrell Williams, Kanye West, Jay-Z and Beyoncé attended – though none of them is known to collect art. Hard-partying hotel heiress Nicky Hilton reportedly quipped, 'Yeah, I'll probably see some art. At some point.' Once a predominantly American fair, it attracted buyers ranging from an Armenian museum, to Shanghai real-estate king Dai Zhikang, to a posse of the Russian *nouveau riche*.

When discussion among artworld types turned to these developments, comparisons were often made to Cannes, which went from being a true cinema festival to ranking as the jetset's annual European event. In terms of being flooded by the random rich and other assorted beautiful people, Art Basel Miami Beach 'certainly has all the elements of awards season in Hollywood', hotelier André Balazs told the *Miami Herald*. 'It also has elements of Fashion Week in New York.'

Actually, it might just as well have been Fashion Week in Miami. Everyone from *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* to the far edgier *Visionaire* magazine and the Paris boutique Colette hosted parties, and designers such as Calvin Klein and the Proenza Schouler pair popped up. For while the artworld tends to snipe about the superficiality of the fashion set, it has hardly stopped them joining forces. The Jimmy Choo dinner hosted by Tamara

Mellon was put on in conjunction with the Whitney Museum of American Art. Likewise, Banana Republic teamed up with Manhattan's MoMA. Other luxury brands hopped aboard the bandwagon, too; dealer Perry Rubinstein teamed up with NetJets, the purveyor of private planes that landed 216 aircraft on the Miami tarmac for the fair, almost twice as many as in 2004.

And what about the art itself, ostensibly the reason everyone came down to Miami in the first place? There certainly was plenty of it. In addition to Art Basel Miami Beach, there were 13 other concurrent fairs, bringing the total gallery count to well over 700. Yet despite the massive supply, demand seemed strong all over. 'It's been amazing, people are selling art here in Miami that you could not sell anywhere else in the world,' observed local collector Don Rubell, one of Miami's half-dozen heavy-hitting collectors. His show of LA artists triggered a buying frenzy among the many herd-like 'baby collectors' who follow his every move.

Doing her first art fair and racking up well over \$10 million in sales, iconic 1980s dealer Mary Boone was telling everyone that 'it feels like a sunny Saturday in SoHo in May 1988 – on steroids', a reference to the art market's last boom.

The works on offer ranged all over the map. There were blue-chip contemporary pieces such as a Jean-Michel Basquiat painting reportedly sold for \$5.5 million, and a suite of 10 Andy Warhol Marilyn prints priced at \$1.5 million. But the art-crowd favourite was *Nach jugendstil kam Rocokko*, an installation by Swiss artist Urs Fischer – a rotating armature that slowly swung around an empty cigarette pack suspended by a fishing line. Insiders loved the piece for its simplicity – three 'editions' of it were sold at \$160,000 per piece – for its simplicity, but perhaps most of all because dealer Gavin Brown's booth had no other artwork except two benches, making it the single calmest place in a maelstrom of buzz and buying.

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