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Important Arts Fair Looks for Balance in Miami Beach



A view of one of the Art Basel Miami Beach exhibition spaces in 2015. Organizers accepted 21 new galleries, an unusually large number, for the 15th edition of the fair, which runs through Sunday.
Credit Marcy Swingle for The New York Times

Some elements of Art Basel Miami Beach are as constant as the Florida sunshine. But Marc Spiegler, the global head of the event, said this was “a year of change” for the most important American art fair.

The 269 galleries showing their goods in the fair’s 15th edition, which runs Thursday through Sunday at the Miami Beach Convention Center, will try to find the tricky balance between art and commerce, as they do every year. There will be more wares on display than any visitor can reasonably be expected to see in a day.

And the same people who complain all year that the event is too much of a “scene” will be trolling the aisles, hoping for discoveries and to be spotted by other V.I.P.s.

But the convention center is in the midst of a three-year, \$515 million renovation, to be completed at the end of 2017, that will make it slightly larger and modernize its appearance. “It’s taking a very old convention center and bringing it up-to-date,” Mr. Spiegler said.

The fair will not look too different this year, especially inside the hall, but there will be an entirely new layout next year.

Mr. Spiegler and his team have focused their energies for 2016 on bringing in new blood (they also produce editions in Basel, Switzerland, and in Hong Kong).

There are 21 new dealers, an unusually large number.

That means some galleries were not invited back, given the limited space. “You have to make choices, or it becomes insufferably large,” Mr. Spiegler said. “Some galleries underperformed, and they won’t have the chance to do that again.” He declined to name those dealers.

First-time exhibitors include Marc Selwyn Fine Art of Beverly Hills, Calif.; Vigo Gallery of London; Edouard Malingue Gallery of Hong Kong; and Di Donna Galleries and Callicoon Fine Arts, both of New York.

“This is a whole other ballgame,” said Photios Giovanis, Callicoon’s founder, who used to show in the concurrent satellite fair staged by the New Art Dealers Alliance.

The idea is that new dealers will offer works that collectors did not realize they wanted. Keeping the regulars happy is paramount.

“I tend to buy something there every year,” said Pamela J. Joyner, a collector who specializes in abstract works by artists of African descent.

Last year, she bought a print by Julie Mehretu, an artist from John Berggruen Gallery, which coincidentally is in Ms. Joyner’s hometown, San Francisco, a transaction that provides a good example of why fairs still serve as a useful nexus in a global art world.

Noah Horowitz, the director of Art Basel Miami Beach, said the organizers had also made a big effort to help dealers “graduate” into the Galleries sector, the largest and most prestigious of the fair.

“The conversation was, how do we support younger galleries and carve a path for them,” said Mr. Horowitz, who was hired by Mr. Spiegler last year, making this the first Miami Beach fair he has overseen from start to finish.

One of those graduates is Pilar Corrias, whose London-based Pilar Corrias Gallery previously exhibited in the Art Nova sector. “I’m very happy about it,” said Ms. Corrias, who will be showing in Galleries alongside global heavy hitters like Gagosian, David Zwirner, Hauser & Wirth and Pace.

Because the other sectors of the Miami Beach fair require a proposal to be approved, the Galleries sector allows for a free hand.

“I can present whatever I want, and I have a freedom I didn’t have before,” Ms. Corrias said. “I can show one artist, or I can show 10.”

She is taking the mixed-grill approach this year, showing 10 artists who work in a variety of media, including the painter Mary Ramsden and the multimedia and performance specialist Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Among the best-known of the booth’s artists is Philippe Parreno, who will be represented by “With a Rhythmic Instinction to be Able to Travel Beyond Existing Forces of Life (Green, Rule #1)” (2014), a series of more than 200 drawings of fireflies animated on a large LED screen.

“Philippe’s work is about the relationship between the real and the imagined,” Ms. Corrias said of the piece, which has been displayed in several museums.

At every fair there’s an idea, a material or a method that, once you’re looking for it, seems to pop up everywhere. Textiles may prove to be one of 2016’s trends.

“As people have moved more into the digital space, there’s a bit of a return to the analog with textiles,” Mr. Horowitz said. “A real focus on craft.”

At Callicoon Fine Arts, Mr. Giovanis will show rugs by Ulrike Müller of New York, including “Rug (gato chico)” (2015), which was woven by a workshop in Oaxaca, Mexico.

“I do think there’s something in the air about it,” Mr. Giovanis said about textiles, adding that Ms. Müller’s rugs were partly motivated by “feminist concerns, showing that craft-based ways of working are just as important as other ways of working.”

New York’s 11R Gallery is showing the work of Mika Tajima in the Nova sector, including pieces from her “Negative Entropy” series. Ms. Tajima takes audio recordings from factory floors, assigns colors to the sound data and then has the work woven on a Jacquard loom.

“People are being more open-minded about mediums, and this is a good example,” said Augusto Arbizo, 11R’s director. “It’s conceptual work with textiles.”

For visitors who want to get outside of the convention center to see some art that is not for sale, Miami has steadily been

The Pérez Art Museum Miami, which renamed itself and moved to an ambitious new building in 2013, has opened three new exhibitions in time for the crowds, including “Julio Le Parc: Form Into Action.” The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami is showing the work of the artist Thomas Bayrle of Germany in “One Day on Success Street.”

Faena Art, an interdisciplinary nonprofit that stages some of its programming in the Faena Forum, a new building designed by Rem Koolhaas’s Office for Metropolitan Architecture, has been holding opening events all week. On the beach in front of the adjacent Faena Hotel Miami Beach is “Time Capsule,” a geodesic dome with an exterior by the artist Juan Gatti that will host a lineup of films, performances and events.

“People come not just for what’s in the hall, they are going for the whole experience: museums, events, pop-ups,” Mr. Spiegler said. “The richer, and stronger the institutional environment, the more people get out of the week.”