
Art Basel Miami: Offbeat Highlights from the Fair Trail

By Margery Gordon

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MIAMI—Beyond the seemingly endless line of booths at this year's **Art Basel Miami Beach** and multitude of satellite fairs, there were also some unusual opportunities to experience art in different contexts in Miami.

At the Fountain Fair

Across the street from **Pulse's** spacious tent, a handful of New York galleries and collectives and a couple of Miami-based artists crowded into 5,000 feet of raw space for the **Fountain** fair. Brooklyn-based **Capla Kesting Fine Art** was the organizer of the expo, which debuted during last spring's **Armory Show** and sports a Marcel Duchamp-esque urinal as its logo.

"We're appealing to the young collector with affordable work," said **Dave Kesting**, professing his penchant for illustration, figurative work and political and social commentary. (Kesting's gallery generated plenty of commentary earlier this year when it displayed a nude sculpture of Britney Spears giving birth and a bronze replica of Suri Cruise's first poop.)

While the small works hung salon-style at Fountain left an unpolished impression, **Steven Gagnon's** *Time Machine* made the trip worthwhile.

The artist's video sculpture grounded the Art Basel experience in local history through letters written to his grandmother in Massachusetts in 1936 by his grandfather, who was working in Miami Beach as an auto mechanic. In the artwork, the letters are read aloud on an audio track while images of the documents, inter-cut with period footage provided by the **Louis K. Wolfson Moving Image Archives**, flickers on the windows of a shiny, black 1930 Ford Model A.

Soon it will be moving to the home of a collector who bought it for \$60,000.

With Grendel in a Guttled Bodega

For an artistic encounter unlike anything else in Miami this season, New York's **Jack the Pelican Presents** organized a temporary exhibition in a gutted bodega across from the **Rubell Family Collection**. "Grendel," named for the ambiguous untamed monster of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*, uses the 5,000 feet of gritty space to its advantage.

"We recreated an old-school Williamsburg space," explained Jack the Pelican's **Don Carroll**. "This is raw, brutal, direct and yet incredibly friendly. We wanted to show art as big as it wants to be."

Dominating the main room of the show was a massive tree made of recycled clothing by the Miami artist collective **Guerra de la Paz**, which Jack the Pelican offset with **Kelly Sturhahn's** hanging black sheets adorned with intricate cut-outs and glimmering mirrored ornaments. New Orleans artist **Shawn Major** stitched talismans, plastic doll heads and glow-in-the-dark constellations into elaborate quilts. And **Peter Caine's** "Cabana Boys" greeted visitors at the entrance with bobbing totems sheathed in colorful hosiery.

In a separate small room, another Williamsburg gallery, **Dam, Stuhltrager**, stationed **Mark Esper's** kinetic light sculptures next to **Loren Munk's** painted maps of the New York art world, then and now, which added a temporal and spatial perspective to the show.

And **Rupert Ravens Contemporary**, which opens in Newark next spring, mounted an installation by **Matthew Gosser** that riffed on an abandoned Pabst brewery in the New Jersey city. In the space, furniture made from assembly-line machinery was flanked by photographs of the factory's mangled remains and ephemera from its white- and blue-collar workers.

Yet even with so many memorable works, the overall effect of "Grendel" lingers more powerfully than any single element. As Carroll explained: "We created, using this collective energy, something that's larger than any work."

In the Soil Suite at Aqua

After an auspicious showing at Aqua last year in more modest quarters, the Seattle artist-run gallery **Soil** showcased the 11-year-old collective's 22 members in a suite that had been painstakingly transformed with panels covering walls and windows to allow for maximum display area.

Nicholas Nyland's crafty color patterns on a fabric floor runner coated the entranceway beneath **Isaac Layman's** photographic studies of quotidian domestic objects. **Vaughn Bell** played on the travails of *Closest Travelers*, with a site-specific installation in a large closet that playing footage shot out of airplanes.

"It's a more ambitious show than we had last year, with more space," said artist **Etsuko Ichikawa**. The Tokyo native, who has worked in the Seattle studio of glass heavyweight **Dale Chihuly**, captures the ethereal beauty of fire with her haunting burn-marks on paper.

In *Noli Me Tangere*, **Susie J. Lee's** curved mound made from crystalline flocking lures the observer into a projected video of a finger pushing against the surface. (SOIL sent collectors interested in Lee down the hall to Seattle's **Lawrimore Project**, which sold two from the edition of five at \$3,400 apiece.)

Much about the perceptive presentation can be owed to Seattle curator **Jess Van Nostrand**, who helped members choose which works to bring and was able to bring out connections across media. "It exemplifies the diversity of the membership of the gallery, while also presenting a cohesive voice," Van Nostrand said.

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