

THE ART OF COLLECTING

# Mapping Out New Plans for Art Basel

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“Untitled,” by Teresa Burga, an 80-year-old Peruvian artist, will be shown at Art Basel this year.  
Teresa Burga/Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin/Photo by Nici Wegener

Fresh on the heels of the New York auctions that gave the art market its first-ever \$2 billion week, Art Basel, the original high-end art fair, opens its doors for the 46th time from June 18 to June 21 in the Swiss city.

Some 284 dealers from 33 countries will gather in the exhibition hall on Messeplatz, in the center of Basel, for the last springtime stop on what the New York dealer Jack Shainman has called “the art world’s moveable feast.”

For those wowed by the recent headline-grabbing records, Marc Spiegler, Art Basel’s director, pointed out that the artists in question — Picasso, Rothko and Giacometti — represented only a tiny sector of the market, and of the fair’s offerings.

“It’s also a fair where you can discover new artists’ names all the way to the last day,” said Mr. Spiegler, who also leads the Hong Kong and Miami editions of the fair.

But, he added, the sales records don’t hurt the mood, either: “Better to have good auctions before our fair than terrible ones.”



An artist's rendering of "Do We Dream Under the Same Sky," an installation by the conceptual artist Rirkrit Tiravanija outside the main Art Basel building. The work mixes the functions of both farm and restaurant and will eventually form part of "the land," a self-sustaining artistic community in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Rirkrit Tiravanija, Nikolaus Hirsch, Michel Müller and Antto Melasniemi

Dealers are certainly betting on continued buoyancy. Marc Glimcher, the president of Pace Gallery, said the atmosphere at Basel generally was "no holds barred," even when compared to the fair's notoriously revved-up Miami edition.

"You don't worry about something being too expensive there," Mr. Glimcher said. "You can sell a \$20 million painting in Basel."

The Pace booth features several works by the Pop Art icon Robert Rauschenberg, a longtime star in the Pace stable, in addition to pieces by Brice Marden and Louise Nevelson. "Bob was like family to us," Mr. Glimcher said.

The works, which come from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, will be priced from \$500,000 to \$1 million, Mr. Glimcher said, and include the painting "Porcelain (Salvage)" from 1984.

The big news in Basel this year comes in the fair's layout. Even veteran collectors will need to study the map before entering with checkbook or credit card in hand.



“Retina #21” (1990) by Shinro Ohtake. Some 284 dealers from 33 countries will be present at the Art Basel fair.

Shinro Ohtake, courtesy of Take Ninagawa, Tokyo/Photo by: Kei Okano

“We have done a fairly radical reconfiguration of the floor plan,” Mr. Spiegler said of the fair’s main section, Galleries. “It’s pretty big. We’ve moved dozens of galleries.”

The rearrangement was not capricious. Over the years, dealers trading in similar artworks had ended up at opposite ends of the fair.

“It didn’t have the kind of coherence that we have in our Hong Kong and in our Miami shows,” Mr. Spiegler said. “What we’ve really done is to put all the galleries that deal exclusively or partially in work from pre-1970 on one side of the hall.”

Another change is that the Feature section, for focused presentations, has been expanded to 30 galleries from 24.

“It allows us to work with a broader range of galleries,” Mr. Spiegler said. “It also allows us to have more precise curation, because the Feature projects are chosen specifically based on a proposal.”



“I Looked and Looked but Failed to See What so Terrified You,” a 2003 photograph by the American artist Carrie Mae Weems.

Carrie Mae Weems/Jack Shainman Gallery, New York/Photo by Jeremy Lawson

He added that Feature was “extremely popular with connoisseur collectors, museum directors and curators.”

In this year's section, the Berlin-based dealer Barbara Thumm is showing the work of the 80-year-old Peruvian artist Teresa Burga, who merges the figurative and the conceptual in her self-portraits and images of other women. Some of her past work has incorporated analysis of own blood and other medical data.

"She asks what is it that comprises a person," Ms. Thumm said. "Is the data a person?"

Although self-portraits are an age-old artistic tradition, the practice is not encouraged for fair-goers. Mr. Spiegler noted that selfie sticks were banned from the fair. "And if I could ban selfies, I would," he said, because of the "million close calls" that have involved visitors backing up precariously close to valuable artworks.

Ms. Thumm said Basel was the right place to have Ms. Burga's works on display, since "it's the top fair worldwide, and all the museum curators go there."

She added, "There are so many gaps in museum collections for fantastic female artists."

Also in Feature, Mr. Shainman will be showing works by the American artist Carrie Mae Weems, a MacArthur fellow best known for her work in photography, including the image "Untitled (Woman Brushing Hair)," from 1990.



"Bananas," 2013, a watercolor by Alexis Rockman, one of several works on the theme of food that are sprinkled throughout the fair. Alexis Rockman/Sperone Westwater, New York

“It’s so fast-forward at an art fair,” Mr. Shainman said. “But when you have the chance to present just one artist, you can really take something away from the experience.”

Food-themed pieces are sprinkled throughout the fair this year. The New York gallery Sperone Westwater will be showing Bruce Nauman's neon work "EAT DEATH" from 1972 and Alexis Rockman's watercolor "Bananas" from 2013.

In the Statements section, the New York gallery Wallspace is presenting Nancy Lupo's mixed-media installation "One, Two, One and Toe," which tackles fad diets and alternate sources of nourishment, among other topics. "'Green' is often a technique to sell you something," Ms. Lupo said.

Perhaps the fair's most ambitious project also deals with food, but will take place outside the walls of the exhibition hall. The fair organizers asked the conceptual artist Rirkrit Tiravanija to do a project on the Messeplatz, and he has enlisted an international team to help recreate part of "the land," a self-sustaining artistic community he created in Chiang Mai, Thailand, with the artist Kamin Lertchaiprasert.

"Do We Dream Under the Same Sky," as the work is known, will mix the functions of both farm and restaurant, and will have a purpose-built structure that will get shipped to Thailand to be part of "the land" once Art Basel is over. His collaborators on "Do We Dream" are the German architects Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller and the Finnish chef Antto Melasniemi.

"We will serve food, and it's free — but it's not catered," said Mr. Tiravanija, who said he was influenced by the activist food writer Michael Pollan. "It's a lab for growing it, preparing it, serving and talking about it." Some of the cooking will involve produce from a Swiss supermarket chain that would normally have been thrown away.

Mr. Tiravanija said that he liked doing something outside the confines of the red-hot art market.

"Art fairs are always a bit problematic: It's a commercial space, and trying to do public art is a little battle," he said, adding, "We are a bridge between these two spaces."

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