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Sales Kick Off Slow But Steady at Art Basel Miami Beach

BY JUDD TULLY | DECEMBER 03, 2015



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William Copley's "Untitled (The Card Players)," 1981.
(Courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery)

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MIAMI BEACH — The 14th edition of Art Basel Miami Beach, the venerable and polished Swiss imported event presenting contemporary art, appeared to lose a bit of market steam on Wednesday during the elite, VIP-only sessions. Sales were episodically brisk at times, but the sweet spot of transactions hovered at the \$100,000 mark and thinned out above \$500,000 during those crucial opening hours.

"The first hour was quite busy and we're very happy with it," said Adrian Turner, a partner at New York's Marianne Boesky Gallery. "Everything under \$60,000 sold."

Van de Weghe Fine Art
Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac
Cheim & Read
Salon 94
Paul Kasmin Gallery

ARTISTS

Frank Stella
Julia Dault
Kon Trubkovich
Thornton Dial
David Salle
George Condo
Gunther Uecker
Rudolf Stingel
Kelley Walker
Tauba Auerbach
Sol LeWitt
Alighiero e Boetti
Alberto Burri
Pablo Picasso
Francis Bacon
Chuck Close
Robert Mangold
Robert Longo
Robert Rauschenberg
Georg Baselitz
Alex Katz
Lynda Benglis
Juan Usle
Tal R
Jonathan Lasker
Lorna Simpson
Sylvie Fleury
William Conley
Matt Connors
Tracey Emin

There were reserves on two major [Frank Stella](#) wall reliefs, “Il Palazzo delle Schimmie” from 1984 and “La Colomba Ladra” from 1985, each priced at a million dollars plus, according to the dealer, but they hadn’t as yet found new homes. Stella, of

course, is the focus of a major and critically well-received retrospective on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art and not surprisingly, there were plenty of other Stella works to pick and choose from.

Boesky sold Julia Dault’s multi-colored and patterned abstraction “Cat’s Cradle,” in acrylic and dibond panel from 2015, and Kon Trubkovich’s figurative “Stealing Fruit from Arbie,” also from 2015 and measuring 84 by 72 inches. Both were priced at under \$60,000.

Trubkovich is featured in the ambitious and rollicking exhibition “Unrealism,” presented by Larry Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch in the Moore Building located in the Design District, a painfully slow cab ride away from traffic choked Miami Beach. More than 50 artists are presented, ranging time-wise from the Neo-Expressionist ‘80s to today. The exhibition offers, at least to this viewer, more excitement than the carefully pruned selections at Art Basel. Still, the ultra temporary show wouldn’t have come about if it weren’t for the Big Daddy Art Basel art fair.

Back at Boesky, the gallery also sold a [Thornton Dial](#) work on paper, “The Eagle Worlds of Many Ways,” a 2003 graphite and watercolor work on paper featuring the depiction of floating Viagra pills. It sold for under \$100,000.

Brisk sales at modest price levels also took place at Brussels’ Xavier Hufkens, with three untitled oil stick on paper works featuring starburst landscapes by Harold Ancart, selling at \$35,000 apiece, and Evan Holloway’s two-part bronze, oil, and enamel sculpture “RWBY,” from 2015, a construction jauntily painted in shades of red, white, blue, and yellow, which sold in the \$35-45,000 range. An untitled [Matt Connors](#) abstraction from 2015, in acrylic on canvas and scaled at 28 by 22 inches, went for \$24,000. Additionally, Hufkens sold a new [Tracey Emin](#) neon, “Always More,” in red and pink shades, from an edition of 10 plus three artist’s proofs, for \$67,000.

The price points moved up several notches at New York/London Skarstedt Gallery with a new, large-scaled [David Salle](#) painting in oil, acrylic, archival digital print, and pigment transfer, “Pouring, Leaving” from 2015, featuring, in part, a white princess rotary dial telephone and other arresting images. It went for \$275,000. Skarstedt also sold a new, Picasso-inspired [George Condo](#) painting, “Artist and Muse” in acrylic, silver paint, and pencil on linen, measuring 58 by 65 inches, for \$400,000.

A Zero Group wall relief by [Gunther Uecker](#), “Untitled” from 1962 and consisting of pounded nails and white paint on canvas stretched on a wooden panel, sold for \$1 million to a European collector, according to gallerist Per Skarstedt.

There were isolated yet impressive bursts of market activity, as evidenced at New York’s Paula Cooper Gallery, starting with a pair of [Rudolf Stingel](#) “Untitled” patterned abstractions from 2011, executed in oil and enamel on linen and scaled at 32 by 32 inches, which sold at \$500,000 apiece.

“We could sell those Stingels 10 times over,” said gallery director Steve Henry. He added: “And the first half hour was very active.”

He wasn’t kidding, as the gallery sold two works by [Kelley Walker](#), including “Screen to Screen” from 2015, in acrylic ink on silkscreen, MDF board, and aluminum frame, in the \$150-200,000 price range, and Tauba Auerbach’s 60 by 40 inch weave painting “Metamaterial/Hole” from 2015, at approximately \$200,000.

After jotting a few of those notes down, Henry came by and happily announced another sale, Sol LeWitt’s freestanding, shard shaped sculpture “Complete Form MH 17” from 1990, in painted aluminum, which sold for around \$600,000.

Though it's still early in this edition of Art Basel Miami Beach, some of the knock-out, multi-million dollar entries had not yet sold, including the fair's star piece, Alighiero Boetti's mural-scaled "Tutto" from 1992-94, in embroidery on fabric, at Paris gallery Tornabuoni Art, which is priced at \$20 million.

The same waiting game for action was the case at first-time exhibitor Mazzoleni from London, which showcased a stunning [Alberto Burri](#) "Plastica" from 1962 at \$9 million.

During a sterling moment of art fair mini-drama, Christophe van de Weghe of New York's van de Weghe Gallery verbally jostled with collector Dimitri Mavrommatis over the \$10.5 million asking price of the late Picasso painting "Buste au Chapeau," from 1971, hanging 10 feet away from their haggling. The collector walked off after his \$9.5 million offer was spurned, but later returned and bought the painting for \$10.5 million.

The gallery also sold Francis Bacon's "Man in Blue VI" from 1954 to an American collector for \$13 million. The painting last sold at auction in February 2013 at Christie's London for £4.9/\$7.7 million.

Other stand out moments during the VIP preview included the entry of celebrated artist [Chuck Close](#) as he wheeled into a solo, retrospective-style presentation of Robert Mangold's paintings at Madrid's Elvira Gonzalez Gallery.

"I try never to be in one," said Close, referring to the art fair animal, "but I enjoy looking at other people's art."

Pausing a moment, Close observed, "For an artist to go to an art fair is like cattle given a tour of a slaughterhouse."

The transaction register picked up again at Paris/Salzburg's Thaddaeus Ropac, one of the art fair circuit's most successful galleries, as Robert Longo's "Untitled (Potemkin, Black Square)" from 2015, in charcoal mounted on paper and featuring on one panel a trio of three anchored sailing ships, sold to an Istanbul collector for \$450,000. The gallery also sold Robert Rauschenberg's "Appalachian Latch Spring Glut" from 1989, in assembled and distressed metal, which went for \$770,000, as well as Georg Baselitz's imposing sculpture "Bundel (Bunch)" from 2015, cast in bronze and part of an edition of six plus one artist proofs, which sold for €700,000. Additionally, Ropac sold two freshly minted [Alex Katz](#) paintings, "Four Trees" at 60 by 84 inches and "Choichun," depicting a swimsuit-clad beauty in stop-action motion and much larger, at 72 by 144 inches. They sold at \$400,000 and \$550,000, respectively.

"There are fewer Europeans this year," said Thaddaeus Ropac, "but we made up for it with our American and Latin American clients."


The steady but hardly electrifying cavalcade of sales continued at New York's Cheim & Read, where Lynda Benglis's "Untitled" wall relief from 1968-70, in pigmented bees wax, damar resin, and gesso on wood and Masonite sold for \$250,000, and Juan Usle's handsome abstraction "Hacia la Aurora" from 2014, scaled at 78 by 44 1/8 inches in vinyl dispersion and dry pigment on canvas, sold for \$90,000. The gallery also sold Tal R's figurative painting "Rosa Wave" from 2014, in pigment, rabbit glue, and oil on canvas, to an otherwise unnamed celebrity for \$65,000, as well as a 60 by 80 inch, richly impastoed [Jonathan Lasker](#) abstraction, "The End of Relevance" from 2015, for \$165,000.

"It's all very positive," said founding partner John Cheim, describing the current atmosphere. "It's not frantic but more considered."

There was more activity at New York's Salon 94 as a stunning and image-rich [Lorna Simpson](#) composition, "Moveableness" from 2015, executed in screenprint on wood panel, sold to an American collector in the vicinity of the \$235,000 asking price. The gallery also sold Sylvie Fleury's Pop-lite patterned and gold-hued abstraction "Past, Present, and Future" from 2012, for \$75,000.

The range of taste, medium, and price point possibility was evident along every aisle making up the core sector of some 191 galleries, as illustrated at New York's Paul Kasmin Gallery as the strangely quirky yet distinctive [William Copley](#) painting "Untitled (The Card Players)" from 1981, executed in acrylic on linen, sold for approximately \$200,000, and Ivan Navarro's vertiginous sculpture "Nothing Will Come of Nothing" from 2015, in neon, LED lights, aluminum, wood, paint, mirror, one-way mirror, and "electric energy" sold for \$120,000.

The fair runs through December 6, hopefully enough time for someone to pull the trigger for the \$20 million Boetti.

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