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Art Basel Miami Beach, Usually Sun-Soaked, Is Just Soaked This Year

By NICK MADIGAN DEC. 7, 2015



The Art Basel Miami Beach fair reported 77,000 people had attended the four-day festival despite heavy rain. Gustavo Caballero/Getty Images

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MIAMI BEACH — The annual Art Basel extravaganza, one of the largest art fairs in the world, ended Sunday after being swamped with almost ceaseless rain for most of its four-day incarnation.

Outdoor exhibitions were canceled or pulled inside; parties in tents were washed out; and well-heeled art patrons in expensive shoes were forced to wade through flooded streets and sidewalks to get to galleries, exhibitions and parties. The traffic, stultifying at the best of times, ground to a standstill during the worst of the downpours.

Adding to the gloom, a woman was stabbed on Friday inside the main Art Basel exhibition hall, an act that some witnesses initially assumed was performance art. The victim was taken to a hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, and a suspect was quickly arrested, the police said.

On Sunday, despite a forecast that called for scattered thunderstorms, the rain held off for much of the day, increasing attendance not only for the 267 Art Basel galleries in the Miami Beach Convention Center but also for the various satellite art fairs on this barrier island and in Miami, on the mainland.



The Freedman Fitzpatrick Gallery on Saturday, a day after a woman was stabbed there. She was taken to a hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, and a suspect was arrested, the police said. Mike Coppola/Getty Images

“It was a nightmare,” said Mathias Rastorfer, the co-owner of [Galerie Gmurzynska](#), which operates three galleries in Switzerland. “We had appointments with clients who said, ‘I’m coming,’ but they kept postponing because of the weather. Logistics is always an issue — getting cabs, waiting out in the rain — but when you get this weather on top of it, it’s even worse.”

On Thursday, when flooding overtook parts of Collins Avenue, a main thoroughfare here, officials grew concerned about a possible economic hit to exhibitors, dealers and others who had invested heavily in bringing art and other entertainments to Miami.

But the consensus on Sunday seemed to be that, while some local businesses lost money, the larger exhibitions did well over all in terms of attendance. On Sunday evening, Art Basel Miami Beach reported 77,000 people had attended the fair, roughly four thousand more than last year.

A spokeswoman for Art Basel said business had been strong in the last days of the fair, citing the sale of a Francis Bacon oil on canvas, “Man in Blue,” from 1954, with an asking price of \$15 million by [Van de Weghe Fine Art](#), and Picasso’s “Buste au Chapeau” oil from 1971, with an asking price of \$10.5 million, from the same gallery. Mazzoleni, a gallery in Turin and London, reported the sale of three works by Alberto Burri from the 1960s, including a “Plastica” which sold for \$2 million.

Several exhibitors said that the downpours actually prompted visitors to spend more time with the art rather than venture out again into the elements. “For us, it’s quite favorable if it rains, so that people stay inside,” said Carmen Kabel, manager of the [OMR gallery](#) in Mexico City. “Otherwise, they might go to the beach to take advantage of the sun, and come to see us only for a little bit.”

Sitting in her temporary gallery at Art Basel on Sunday afternoon, Mary-Anne Martin, a former member of the Art Basel selection committee, whose eponymous gallery is on East 73rd Street in Manhattan, said this was “a good year” for the gallery, and that she had sold “quite a few works” in the \$20,000 to \$200,000 range.

At Scope, a huge satellite art fair in a tent on the beach, John Ferrère, co-owner of Galerie de Nevers in Paris, said there seemed to be fewer people at the fair on Friday and Saturday, but that he had nonetheless sold about \$35,000 worth of art — a healthy amount given that his offerings of three artists’ works were in the range of \$1,500 to \$2,200 each.

“The weather was too violent here,” he said. “I know collectors in high heels who ruined their shoes on the flooded path outside.”

Kat Sambor, who handles exhibitor relations at Scope, said that at the height of one of the storms, water began seeping into the tent from below. “We had a crew running around sealing up the cracks,” she said. “We got the water under control.”

At another fair nearby, known as [Untitled, Art](#), officials made a sudden investment in several hundred umbrellas, so that visitors going to and from shuttle buses would remain dry. Amanda Schmitt, the fair's director of programming and development, said that approximately 29,100 people had visited the fair this year, compared with 23,000 in 2014 and 17,000 the year before.

Correction: December 7, 2015

An earlier version of this article misidentified the person who said, "We had a crew running around sealing up the cracks. We got the water under control." She is Kat Sambor, not Jeffrey Walkowiak, who was working at the front desk of Untitled, Art.

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