

A festival revels in its global flair

16 June, 2016 | Ted Loos

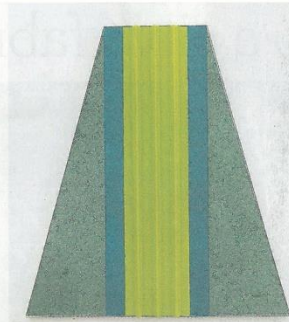
page 1 of 2

THE ART OF COLLECTING

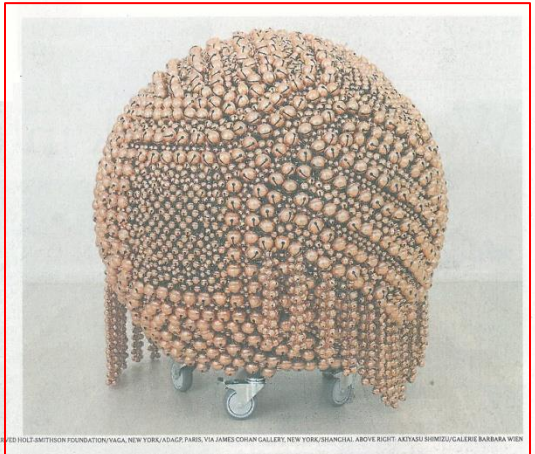
Art Basel



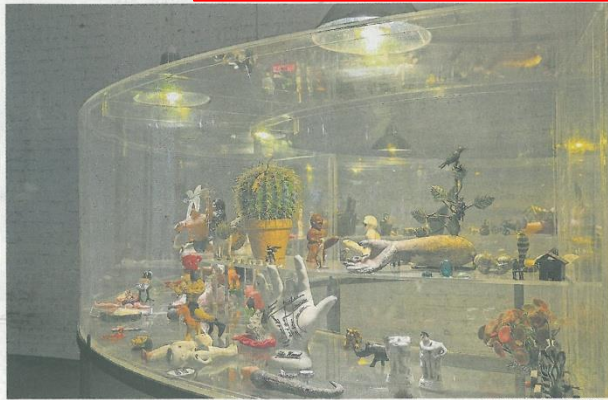
PHOTO BY LORENA ANCONA/PALETTE, OAXACA AND JOSE GARCIA, MX



ABOVE LEFT: ALL RIGHTS RESERVED HOLD SMITHSON FOUNDATION/YAGA, NEW YORK; ADAGP, PARIS, VIA JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK; SANCIAL. ABOVE RIGHT: AKTASU SHINGU/GALERIE BARBARA WIEN



All-embracing art
Clockwise from left:
"Un hombre, una
mujer, un camino
polvoso, un coche y
una pistola" (2015),
by the Mexican artist
Tania Pérez
Córdova; "Fling"
(1965), by the
American artist
Robert Smithson;
"Sonic Sphere —
Diagonally-
ornamented
Copper" (2015), by
the South Korean
artist Haegue Yang,
and "Museum of
Unbelongings"
(2012-2016), by
the Indian artist
Mithu Sen.



MITHU SEN AND CHEMOUND PRESCOTT ROAD

A festival revels in its global flair

After nearly five decades, Art Basel settles in but keeps pushing the limits

BY TED LOOS

As Art Basel opens its 47th edition on June 16, what is now the world's most prestigious art fair will attempt to demonstrate a robust middle age.

Two hundred and eighty-six galleries from 33 countries are gathering at the Messe Basel exhibition hall through June 19. A dizzying array of artworks is spread over six sectors at the fair, with satellite events spilling all over the Swiss city.

Cutting-edge contemporary pieces make up a large percentage of the offerings, and modern works from the 20th century are strongly in evidence too, more so than at other top fairs.

"We want to feed the entire ecosystem of the art world, which means we have to be different things to different people," said Marc Spiegler, the global head of Art Basel.

He said the staff took pride in the fact that the fair organizes noncommercial elements like "Zome Alloy," the artist Oscar Tuazon's wood-and-aluminum installation, in Messeplatz, the outdoor square in front of Art Basel.

But sales are the live-or-die factor. Despite the economic vicissitudes that have buffeted the world economy — especially in Europe — Art Basel still styles itself as the hub for connoisseur-collectors who can pay dearly for art.

As Mr. Spiegler put it, speaking about the dealers, "If they can't sell great works in Basel, they can't sell them anywhere."

The New York photography dealer Edwynn Houk, who has been showing at the fair for 30 years, said there were slight differences among the three editions of Art Basel (Miami Beach and Hong Kong are the other two).

"For us, Basel in Switzerland is exceeded by Basel in Miami Beach in terms of sheer sales," said Mr. Houk, who shows in both locations. "But no other fair compares to the Swiss edition in terms of getting a terrific representation from museums and the most important collectors of the U.S. and Europe."

This year Mr. Houk is showing the work of 14 photographers, with an emphasis on early modernists like Laszlo Moholy-Nagy.

The nationality of dealers, artists and collectors becomes less important every year at all art fairs as the market essentially ignores borders. Mixing it up is the guiding principle for many.

Barbara Wien, who runs a gallery in Berlin bearing her name, is showing the work of Indian, Mexican, Korean and Swedish artists, among others.

"I have an international view of culture," Ms. Wien said. "That's very important to me."

Ms. Wien first showed at the fair in 2006, but this edition is her first in the Galleries sector, which features the heaviest hitters from around the world.

"Basel is not a new place for me, but this is the next step in a way," she said. She also organized a piece for this year's Unlimited sector, for large-scale projects that don't fit in traditional booths.

The gallery JoséGarcía.mx, based in Mexico City, shows mostly European artists, and is also making its debut in the Galleries sector.

"We want an exchange of ideas," said Ana Castella, the gallery's director.

The booth's works by Nina Beier, Marie Lund, José León Cerrillo and Edgardo Aragon have something in common, Ms. Castella added: "They

"No other fair compares to the Swiss edition in terms of getting a terrific representation from museums and the most important collectors of the U.S. and Europe."

are mostly abstract, and materiality is very prominent — they rely on metal like copper and bronze."

This year's Unlimited sector is the biggest ever at the fair, with some 88 works.

"It's an extraordinary effort on the part of the galleries, but more people than ever want to do it," Mr. Spiegler said, adding that they received a record number of applications for the sector.

The size of the Unlimited projects means they are not oriented toward being picked up by average collectors.

"Most people wouldn't buy what's at Unlimited," said Gianni Jetzer, who organized the sector and serves as curator-at-large at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington.

"They're too process-oriented, or too big, too esoteric," he said. "We're not trying to be a museum, but we're challenging the limits of what contemporary art can be."

The global flavor of the fair is well in evidence in Unlimited, too. In showing pieces by Archana Hande, Prabhavathi Meppayil and Mithu Sen, Mr. Jetzer said, "We have three of the most important contemporary female artists from India."

The Feature sector, for what organ-

ART BASEL, PAGE 54