

# ARTSY

## What Sold at Art Basel in Basel

By Anna Louie Sussman Jun 17, 2018



Installation view of Doreen Garner's *Red Rack of those Ravaged and Unconsenting* (2018) at JTT Gallery's booth at Art Basel in Basel, 2018. © Art Basel.

Marc Spiegler, the global director of Art Basel, knows there is a problem. And even if he didn't know, people are telling him: Art Basel has to do more to help mid-tier galleries succeed.

Spiegler said he and Noah Horowitz, director of Art Basel in the Americas, were "summoned," in his words, to one collector's office last year for a 90-minute conversation about what the issues were for these galleries, and where Art Basel, as an entity, might do more to help.

The problem, Spiegler said, is that the costs over which Art Basel has direct control—the cost per square meter for a booth, and incidentals such as lighting or wall spaces—are only a small portion of the expenses of doing a fair. Consider that Basel is a city where a mediocre bowl of ramen will set you back around \$30, and galleries, even mid-tier ones, are expected to host lavish dinners for their collectors.

Still, he is giving more thought to how the fair, which closed Sunday, can ensure that galleries of all sizes leave Switzerland with more than just "really great conversations" and outlandish hotel bills. Spiegler said the fair tracks (literally tracks, with an app that has a geolocation feature) its VIP relations team to ensure they bring important collectors to a range of booths, not just the blue-chip destinations that make up the physical core but not the majority of the 290-gallery strong fair. The fair has a new program for young collectors, aimed at inspiring the kind of middle class art buying that's been a staple of previous generations in Switzerland and the Rhineland. It's developing an editorial presence, with former staffers from *Sleek Magazine* and *artnet News*, which includes video interviews that showcase young dealers appearing at each fair. Art Basel also highlights mid-tier galleries on its social media channels, which between Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram reach a combined 2.75 million users.



Sadie Benning, *Blow up 9*, 2018. Photo by Chris Austin. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.



Nicole Eisenman, *Morning Affirmations*, 2018. Photo by Matt Grubb. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.

Those visibility boosts can make a difference. Kevin Scholl, senior director of the 18-year-old Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, said one new collector had seen a painting by Sadie Benning featured on Art Basel's website, then came and bought it. It was the gallery's first time in the main, Galleries section, after three straight years in the fair's Feature section for curated presentations, and Scholl and his colleagues managed to move a lot of art: They sold four other Sadie Benning paintings, three Charles Gaines tree works, a painting by Nicole Eisenman, three paintings by Samuel Levi Jones, and a large selection of over a dozen photographs by Pope.L that all went to a single collector in Vancouver. Prices in the booth started at around \$10,000 and went up to around \$200,000 Scholl said.

They were helped by Vielmetter having had a space in Berlin for two years around a decade ago, and having been at Art Basel in Miami Beach and Art Basel in Hong Kong in the past.

"We know what our clients like," Scholl said. "We already have our clients in Europe, so this is just a chance to engage with them in Switzerland."

London's Kate MacGarry Gallery was also appearing for the first time in Art Basel in Basel's main section, after having done Statements, a sector for solo presentations of emerging artists, last year. Director Lizzy Mason said Statements felt more like "an attraction," whereas being in the main section meant collectors were taking the gallery more seriously.



Pope.L, *The Table*, 2015. © Pope.L. Photo by Jeff McLane. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.



Samuel Levi Jones, Stephon Clark, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.

Founder Kate MacGarry said for every fair, Basel included, she tries to bring a mix of "dead certainties", works she knows she has interest in, and other works she'd like to expose to collectors but are less of a sure sale. More and more, she says, she's started to see the art fairs "as publicity, as marketing."

"We always have to do some long-term strategic things, so we put up things we may not sell," said MacGarry. "It's really, really, nice when they add up, but it's not always the absolute first priority in the decision-making we do."

The gallery did have a profitable fair, with multiple sales of works on the booth, including three sets of Samson Kambalu's *Mboya Series* (2016) for £15,000 each; some of B. Wurtz's pan paintings for £4,000 to £7,500; and Francis Upritchard's *Octopus with Fish* (2017), which had appeared in last year's Venice Biennale, for £30,000, as well as several works not on the booth.

Mason said appearing at Basel had introduced them to a new set of collectors, noting that everything had sold to people she'd never met before, from the U.S., Australia, Norway, Denmark, and England.



Sergio Camargo  
Untitled, 1970's  
Bergamin & Gomide



Mira Schendel  
Untitled, 1954  
Bergamin & Gomide

"Being here is just a completely different ballgame to being at another art fair," Mason said, noting how well-organized and well-run the fair was. "I guess it is a bit of a risk for us, but you have to be here. This is the place to be. The quality of the people that have come by is just head and shoulders above the rest of the other art fairs we go to."

And MacGarry noted the fair had been supportive, directing media attention their way and bringing groups by the booth.

Thiago Gomide of São Paulo's Bergamin & Gomide took a similar long-term view. As of Wednesday evening, he said he thought the fair had been profitable so far, but wasn't completely sure, as he still had reserves on several key pieces. He noted that Art Basel is extremely costly for a Brazilian gallery like his to attend, given the weakness of Brazil's currency, the real, which has lost nearly half its value in the past five years. But, conversely, good sales are worth a lot of reais when he gets home.

Most importantly, the five-year-old gallery, which focuses on

blue-chip Latin American artists from the 1950s through 1980s such as Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, and Mira Schendel, was helping cement its reputation as a serious gallery.

Gomide noted that his gallery sells expensive works by established historical artists, and being at Art Basel, especially with a full booth, helped give “a much clearer understanding of what the gallery is and is trying to be, which is to be the most important gallery working with Brazilian art from second half of the 20th century.”

“Even if we didn’t do well, we had so [many] people coming over and saying how great the booth looks and how amazing the artists are and how we’re doing a great job,” said Gomide, a co-owner of the gallery. “Even if you don’t make money, if you get great feedback, that turns into business in the future.”

Bergamin & Gomide did sell quite a few works, though: A sculpture by Sérgio de Camargo for \$130,000, a 1954 untitled gouache and watercolor on paper by Mira Schendel for \$90,000, and two untitled 1960s oil pastel on cardboard by Schendel for \$36,000 each.



Doreen Garner, *Red Rack of those Ravaged and Unconsenting*, 2018. Courtesy of JTT Gallery.

Jasmin Tsou of New York’s JTT Gallery, showing for her second time at the Statements section, sold the main work in the booth by artist Doreen Garner, which addressed the legacy of Dr. J Marion Sims’s medical experimentation on black women without their consent, for \$40,000 to a European collector.

“This is a sale that is only possible at Basel specifically due to the anticipation that collectors have when entering the Statements sector,” Tsou said. “They expect ambitious [work] here and are prepared to support it.”

Tsou said the fair was a profitable venture overall; more importantly, she said, it was an honor to be part of the fair with its other “incredible” participants, she said, calling the experience “very humbling.”

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Joan Mitchell  
*Composition*, 1969  
Hauser & Wirth



Joan Mitchell  
*Untitled*, 1958  
David Zwirner

If mid-tier galleries’ paths to Basel are paved with risk, the big guns can be counted on to do very, very well. The fair opened with Hauser & Wirth’s sale of Joan Mitchell’s *Composition* (1969) for \$14 million, followed by other Mitchell sales at Van de Weghe, David Zwirner (*Untitled* (1958) sold with an asking price of \$7.5 million), and Lévy Gorvy (a 1959 untitled work with an asking price around \$14 million). Mitchell’s work recently hit a new record, \$16.6 million, at Christie’s May Post-War and Contemporary art auction, and on Thursday, the Baltimore Museum of Art and SFMOMA jointly announced that a major traveling retrospective of her work will open in 2020.

That’s in part because, for many of the world’s wealthiest collectors, those eight-figure prices are drops in the platinum bucket in which their billions are sloshing around. The world has somewhere between 1,550 and 2,232 billionaires, according to estimates from UBS and Credit Suisse, respectively, and over 36 million millionaires, a historical high, according to UBS and Art Basel’s report *The Art Market | 2018*. Much of that new wealth is generated in regions without strong collecting histories, meaning there’s still a lot of runway for growth.



Installation view of Sprüth Magers’ booth at Art Basel in Basel, 2018. © Art Basel

As Spiegler points out, the art market is the one luxury market that is not yet saturated. Luxury cars? Pretty much anyone who can afford one has one. Fancy homes? Same—if you wanted one and could buy one, you probably have one already. But there are many people who could buy art who haven't gotten into the habit yet. It's reasonable to guess that many of those people could be getting their feet wet at Basel, invited by a wealthy friend to not just see the art but sample the glitzy lifestyle—the parties, the dinners, the museum tours—that surrounds it.

At Sprüth Magers, for example, director Andreas Gegner said the gallery's efforts to connect with Asian audiences had paid off in Basel. The gallery has hired several staffers with experience in Asian markets, one of whom is based in London, one in Berlin, and one in Korea; it also opened an office in Hong Kong.

"They know the Asian market very well," Gegner said. "They spend a lot of time in Asia, and keep sending information. It's also about education on all sides. So we need to get educated about Asia, about Asian art and about Asian sensitivities, and we have the potential to educate Asian collectors about Western art."

Two major works were sold to Asian collectors: George Condo's large *Green and Purple Head Composition* (2018) sold for over \$1 million to an Asian collector, as did Andreas Gursky's *El Ejido* (2017), one of an edition of six inkjet prints, which sold for €900,000 to an Asian collection. Gegner said Asian collectors also bought work by Thomas Demand, Jenny Holzer, and Jon Rafman, specifically the latter's *Dream Journal* 2016–2017 (2017) film that was shown in Art Basel's Unlimited sector for large-scale works.



Jon Rafman, *Dream Journal* 2016–2017, 2017 at Sprüth Mager's booth at Art Basel in Basel, 2018. © Art Basel.

Sprüth Magers also reported sales of John Baldessari's *Four Types of Balance (With Basketballs)* (1990) for \$550,000 to a U.S. collector; Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (I WIN YOU LOSE)* (2017) for \$375,000 to a European collection; Rosemarie Trockel's ceramic *Culture Dish* (2012) for €280,000 to a U.S. collection; Sterling Ruby's *ACTS/ALPHA BLOCKER* (2018), made of clear urethane block, dye, wood, and formica, for \$195,000 to a U.S. collection; and Kara Walker's *Another Ancestor* (2010) for \$125,000 to a U.S. collector.

Thaddaeus Ropac had a similarly robust fair. The booth's priciest work, a rare Robert Rauschenberg "Combine", hadn't sold as of Saturday evening. But Rauschenberg's *Ruby Re-Run (Spread)* (1978) went to a European museum for £1.45 million, and *Plosion (Borealis)* (1990) to a European collector for \$1 million; Georg Baselitz's *Noch kein Braun, aber Rosa* (2018) sold for €750,000 to a private collector, and *Man sieht noch etwas* (2018) sold for €550,000.

Adrian Ghenie's collage *Untitled* (2017) sold for €150,000 to a European collector, and *Hanyu (Yuzuru Hanyu)* (2018) by Elizabeth Peyton went for \$475,000 to a private European museum. A huge Robert Longo sculpture co-presented by Ropac and New York's Metro Pictures, *Death Star II* (2017/2018), sold from Art Basel's Unlimited sector for \$1.5 million to a European museum. The giant hanging sphere is studded with 40,000 bullets, one for each death by shooting in the U.S. last year, according to the gallery, and 20% of the proceeds were donated to Everytown for Gun Safety, an anti-gun violence charity.



Installation view of Robert Longo, *Death Star II*, 2017–18, presented by Metro Pictures and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac at Art Basel Unlimited, 2018. Courtesy of Art Basel.

Ropac said the sales seemed on par with last year, with a lot of outreach to clients ahead of time leading to swift decision-making once the fair opened on Tuesday, especially in the two hours between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

"It's really the same—the same dynamic," he said. "Last time was exactly the same: the first time I look at my watch it's around 1, [it's been] two hours, and most of our main business" was done.

Women artists and artists of color continued to see their market momentum build at Art Basel. Hauser & Wirth sold Louise Bourgeois's *The Three Graces* (1947) for \$4.75 million and Mira Schendel's *Untitled* (1963) for \$1.2 million. Two paintings by Kerry James Marshall sold at David Zwirner and Jack Shainman, respectively, although neither disclosed prices. Marshall's brilliant 1997 painting *Past Times* (showing black people enjoying a picnic, waterskiing, and golfing, among other activities typically associated with the lives of white suburbanites) hit a new auction record of \$21.1 million last month at Sotheby's; the buyer was later revealed to be musician and producer Sean "Diddy" Combs.



Louise Bourgeois  
The Three Graces  
Hauser & Wirth



Kerry James Marshall  
Vignette #12, 2008  
David Zwirner

Sam Gilliam, the 84-year-old African-American abstract painter, whose huge floor-through show at Basel's Kunstmuseum opened to coincide with Art Basel, had works at both Mnuchin Gallery and at the booth of his exclusive worldwide dealer, David Kordansky. The museum show featured mostly historical work—magnificently hued paintings, some draped from walls or ceilings, others on beveled canvases that give them a jewel- or tablet-like quality. Having the show on at the same time gave Kordansky's booth "a glow" said director Kurt Mueller, helping to sell out its first hanging on opening day.

"Coming to Basel is always exciting, but there's an additional energy that's really palpable," Mueller said. Two of Gilliam's beveled canvases, including *Repeat* (1971), sold for \$850,000 each, Mueller said. Additional sales included Jonas Wood's *Japanese Garden 2* (2018) for \$400,000; Mary Weatherford's *Trap* (2018) for \$350,000; Rashid Johnson's *Untitled Broken Men* (2018) for \$150,000; Tala Madani's *Disco Pussy* (2018) for \$120,000; and buzzed-about Los Angeles-based artist Jennifer Guidi's *Hot and Bothered (Black Sand SF #1T, Yellow-Hot Pink-Orange Gradient Ground, Black)* (2018) for \$120,000.



Sam Gilliam, *Untitled*, 2018, presented by David Kordansky Gallery at Art Basel Unlimited, 2018. Courtesy of Art Basel.

Madani's work was also on view at London gallerist Pilar Corrias's second-floor booth, alongside a number of other women artists that make up a significant share of Corrias's program, including Shahzia Sikander, Tschabalala Self, Christina Quarles, and Rachel Rose. Corrias said the placement of a gallery's booth at Art Basel can count for a lot; her booth, a bit towards the back, was "okay," though she seemed to be doing well.

She sold a corner painting by Madani; a glass mosaic work, *Zarina*, from a new series by Sikander for \$90,000; a set of Ian Cheng drawings; a painting by Self; and another painting by Quarles, with prices in the booth from \$20,000 to €250,000.

Now in her second year in the Galleries sector, Corrias said it takes a lot of planning, a lot of outreach, and ideally, a fair amount of pre-selling to make the trip financially feasible. This time, she pre-sold about half of her booth.

"I just worked very hard before the fair," she said. "I have realized that I need to be very careful with the amount of fairs that I do, because I don't have enough inventory...An average Basel fair will cost around \$170,000 to \$150,000, so if you're bringing five paintings by five young artists, you're not going to cut the mustard. You're going to fail."