

Diddy and Eli Broad Buy Sophisticated Fare at a Workmanlike Art Basel Miami Beach VIP Vernissage



Photo by Andrew Goldstein

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“A lot of things here are safe, have you noticed that?” said Miami art collector **Don Rubell**, leaning

against a wall and watching the crowds swirl past at **Art Basel Miami Beach**’s VIP preview. He was referring to the aesthetic choices made by the galleries in attendance. The United States’s premier contemporary art fair kicked off its tenth-anniversary edition on Wednesday with a heady mix of blue-chip works and a throng of collectors that included **Eli Broad**, **Dasha Zhukova**, and **Anita Zabludowicz** along with a sprinkling of celebrities, such as **Naomi Campbell**, **Brett Ratner**, and **Diddy** (who snagged a **Tracey Emin** wall sculpture from **Lehmann Maupin** for £45,000). The art on offer may not have been shocking or unexpected — solo shows of emerging talents and blinged-out novelty presentations were few and far between — and the mood may not have been electric, but sales by most accounts hummed along at a remarkably steady pace. (The stock market’s strong finish during the VIP session, with a 400-point gain, probably didn’t hurt the mood.) Works with a strong grounding in art history or with institutional support were snatched up, and many galleries reported six or seven-figure sales by the end of the day.

“It feels serious and the collecting, considered,” said **White Cube**’s **Tim Marlow**. **Damien Hirst**, whose career retrospective at London’s **Tate** is much anticipated next year and whose “Spot” paintings will soon be the subject of simultaneous exhibitions at **Gagosian** galleries around the world, sold out briskly at White Cube’s booth. A stainless steel vitrine filled with glistening surgical instruments sold for £1.5 million, while a Hirst spot painting was sold from the gallery’s back-office stash for €500,000.

Hirst isn’t the only artist with strong institutional support to sell well on opening day. A number of works by **Nathalie Djurberg** flew from New York gallerist **Zach Feuer**’s booth, including two videos for \$35,000 each. One of the Swedish artist’s rarely-seen sculptures, which will be part of her upcoming **New Museum** solo show in April, were scooped up as well. Meanwhile, a wall full of alphabet paintings by **Sister Corita Kent** — laboriously assembled by Feuer, who only just managed to track down the “g” — was on sale as a group for \$120,000. “Hopefully we’ll place it in an institution,” the dealer said, noting

that four editions of individual letters had sold for \$38,000 apiece.

At Los Angeles's **Blum & Poe**, a painting of a Tuskegee jumper against a bright blue background by **Henry Taylor**, who has a forthcoming show at **MoMA PS1** in January, sold for \$35,000 to a New York City collector. A preview of an upcoming museum-quality show focused on the Japanese Mono Ha movement also saw success, with six of the seven being snapped up by American buyers and the seventh — a floor piece by **Lee Ufan**, recent recipient of a **Guggenheim** survey — on reserve for \$275,000.

New York's **Metro Pictures** sold a 2010 **Cindy Sherman** self-portrait as a silver-haired dowager for \$350,000. The gallery also showcased the artist, whose highly-anticipated **MoMA** retrospective opens in February, with recently unearthed pre-"Untitled Film Still" work, "Cover Girl (Redbook)" from 1976/2011, comprised of three separate toned gelatin silver prints. Priced at \$150,000, the images were discovered in the artist's archives as a result of research into her catalogue raisonne, and Broad is possibly the buyer. "We really like the new **Kara Walker** work and the early Cindy Sherman but we're still looking," he told **ARTINFO**.

The Walker work in question, the gritty and mural-like "Pastorale" from 2010 in graphite and pastel relating to the drunken, chaos-filled time in American history when African-Americans moved from the countryside to unfamiliar urban areas, sold from Chelsea's **Sikkema Jenkins** near the \$175,000 asking price. Gallery founder **Brent Sikkema** said the opening hours of the fair felt like "a stampede," just like the old boom days: "Art is fully and fundamentally perceived as the new asset class. A client told me, 'it's either gold or art and I prefer to invest in art.'"

And just like the old days, banner names continued to draw big prices. Three editions of **Paul McCarthy**'s "White Snow Dwarf (Bashful)" sold to European collectors for \$950,000 from the London-based **Hauser & Wirth**. At New York's **Luhring Augustine**, **Christopher Wool**'s patterned abstraction, "Untitled" from 1993, in enamel on aluminum, sold in the region of the \$3 million asking price. At Lisson Gallery, meanwhile, four **Anish Kapoor**s sold for sky-high prices: £750,000, £575,000, £500,000, and £250,000, respectively. Two **Ai Weiwei** watermelon sculptures went for €60,000 apiece. "It's been amazing," said gallery director **Matthew Drutt**. "We're this close from our target for the fair, and our target is double what it was for last year. I doubled our sales target in this fair to inspire us, and by the end of the day we should reach it." **David Zwirner** sold five works by **Carol Bove**, whom he recently began to co-represent with **Maccarone Gallery**. One large piece, a collection of objects inspired by **Magritte**'s "La Traversée Difficile," sold to the **Colección Jumex** in Mexico City.

Among the most talked-about booths at the fair was that of **L&M Arts**, devoted to over 150 drawings by **Andy Warhol** spanning four decades and ranging in price from \$18,000 to \$420,000. The stunning display ranged from a simple still life of a Coca Cola bottle drawn with black ballpoint pen to an image of a gold shoe adorned with real gold leaf. The gallery had sold fewer than 20 drawings by late Wednesday afternoon, but secured many fans. "This is the best installation I've seen at the fair," said Broad. "Maybe at any fair ever." (When asked whether this year's fair felt any different from that of last year, the Los Angeles collector answered literally: "I love all the carpeting — I'm not sure if it's new, but it is easier on the feet.")

While there was less over-the-top flash on the cutting-edge contemporary side, there also seemed to be less mad money lavished on classic works by dead, revered artists — at least during the preview. Munich's **Galerie Thomas**, for instance, produced an engaging display focused on the artists who passed through La Ruche, the Parisian flophouse that at one point sheltered **Chagall**, **Soutine**, **Modigliani**, **Brancusi**, **Diego Rivera**, **Leger**, and other famed moderns. A \$3.95 million Leger hangs on one wall, a wonderfully impastoed work-on-paper by Chagall is priced at \$495,000, and a rare Brancusi portrait and **Gauguin**-esque Rivera add a tang of discovery to the booth. But what sold? Two small **Gerhard Richters** kept in the back, one 1994 work-on-paper for \$95,000 and a tidy 1996 "Fuji" painting for \$300,000.

At **Helly Nahmad** gallery, a \$7 million **Picasso** self-portrait from 1963, an \$8 million 1952 Leger of a young couple, and a \$3 million Magritte were awaiting suitors. A cluster of blue-chip historical emporiums — **Landau Fine Art**, **Acquavella**, and **Richard Gray Gallery** — were also hoping for sales. Dour-

looking with a darkened booth filled with expensive, evidently first-rate artworks by Picasso, **Dubuffet**, and others, Landau was outshined by Acquavella, its next-door neighbor, which spiked its assortment of modern greats with a fiery **Cy Twombly**, "Crimes of Passion I" from 1960. A bare canvas scrawled with snaking clouds of smoke, explosions, Roman and Arabic numerals, and what looks like a vagina dabbed with vermilion paint, the piece has an asking price of \$12 million, according to **Nicholas Acquavella**, scion of the namesake proprietor. As for whether it will sell, "it's too early to tell," he said. Also of note in the booth are a gorgeous late Picasso drawing of a bullfighter, ripped from a notepad in 1970, which sold near the asking price of \$1.2 million, **Giacometti's** imposing 1954 tabletop sculpture "Diego au manteau," and a black-and-white **Calder** from 1952, "Moel for Rosenhof."

Waddington Custot Galleries, meanwhile, was able to sell a Magritte — a fine 1960 gouache on paper, "La recherche de l'absolu," depicting a moon rising behind a tree surreally shaped like a leaf — most likely because of its less imposing asking price of \$650,000. It sold an hour into the fair to a European collector. "It's top quality. He's done other moons, he's done other trees — but it's the best of its kind," said dealer **Leslie Waddington**. A gallery worker loudly saying "one point four million pounds" into a telephone could betoken bigger sales to follow.

More recent art history seemed to pay off at **Peter Blum** gallery, where the sleek totems of California minimalism are on display. "We made a few sales here, and a few prior to the fair," said Blum, including a \$200,000 **Ken Price** sculpture, a \$15,000 **John Altoon**, a \$26,000 **John McLaughlin**, and an \$8,000 **Peter Alexander** drawing. Has the interest generated by the West coast's sweeping "Pacific Standard Time" exhibition helped sales? "Yes it has," replied Blum. "It hasn't increased the value, but it has increased the sales so that things that would not move before now sell. I think this stuff is a bargain — in time this will all look remarkably cheap. I have been doing this for 25 years, and I remember when Judds and Flavins were \$10,000. Pacific Standard Time is positioning the work historically, and it has had a very direct impact."

At **Michael Werner** gallery there was a selection of four diverse works by the late **Sigmar Polke**, ranging from \$350,000-900,000, including an exquisite untitled 1986 canvas bathed in a yellow artificial resin and embellished with ancient designs. It had been reserved within the first hour. "No sales yet, but the fair is still young," said gallery director **Justine Birble**.

- *With additional reporting by Judd Tully*