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Report: contemporary

Soft landings in hard times

The pace has been slower, the prices lower, but collectors are still buying art

Expectations were low as the seventh edition of Art Basel Miami Beach opened to VIP guests last Wednesday. The November auctions had been disappointing in New York, and the Florida fair was the first opportunity to assess how much life there was still in the market. Three days in, it was becoming clear that sales had indeed been affected, but for some it marked a return to the way the fair used to be before the "irrational exuberance" of the art market boom. For others, it was the start of a new kind of fair.

Dealers were realistic. "The art market cannot remain immune to the financial meltdown," said Gerd Harry Lybke of Eigen+Art (B7): "We have sold 80% less than last year, and what's happening in the outside world affects us." Nevertheless, he had placed Neo Rauch's *Der Altar*, 2008, with a British collector for well over \$100,000 and a Tim Eitel with a US collector. Other dealers reported drops in sales running from 30% to 50% compared with last year—at the height of the art market boom. However, many found the level of sales reassuring, especially in comparison with the general state of financial markets and the overall economy.

"I've seen fewer curators, celebrities and collectors, this is a completely different fair," said Gertraud Presenhuber (D10), who nevertheless had sold Mark Handford's large bronze *Black Candle*, 2008, for \$185,000 to a European collector. But Ms Presenhuber, like many, said: "We now have the chance to take care of the artists and the collectors."

Floor Wullems of Dutch gallery Annet Gelink (N33), selling conceptual work by the likes of Ryan Gander, added: "Sales are taking more time but the good thing is that people are taking more time to get to know the work. In previous years, people were just rushing onto the stand and saying I'll take this, this and this."

Compared with last year, the high-priced, extremely large-scale works, aimed at institutional purchasers or mega-collectors, had all but disappeared. Gone, for the moment, are the days when Mary Boone (F7) could clinch a single \$10m deal for five paintings that would require a



Neo Rauch, *Der Altar*, 2008, sold for over \$100,000

wall at least 43ft long, as she did last year. This year there were only eight such outsized pieces on offer.

Nor indeed were there many major Richters, million-dollar Gurskys or pricey Murakamis this year. Many dealers had chosen to bring more modestly-priced works, in anticipation of constrained budgets.

"I made some strategic decisions in what I was bringing," said Barbara Gladstone (E11)—and it paid off. She sold Anish Kapoor's blue *In Out*, 2008, in the high six figures. London's Lisson Gallery (E8) also reported selling a red fibreglass Kapoor (*Untitled*, 2008) for \$1m. The Project (C21) sold Julie Mehretu's huge *How They Rise How They Fall*, 2008, for \$700,000 to a European foundation.

"We have made quite a few sales but generally under \$100,000," said Art Dealers Association of America president Roland Augustine of Lühring Augustine (F9), noting sales at prices between \$6,000 for *The Schumann Machine*, 2008, a video work by the rising Icelandic star Ragnar Kjartansson, to \$95,000 for Pipilotti Rist's shelf-installation, *Enlight My Space*, 2008, bought by a private Swiss collector for \$95,000.

Other dealers declared they had done better than predicted. "We were expecting a crash, but we got a soft landing," said Xavier Hufkens (H13). "I was not going to buy anything this week, but as I walked from the

back of the hall to my booth, I bought five pieces."

Another encouraging sign was stronger buying by Latin Americans. In October this year the organisers hosted a VIP event for 350 collectors during the São Paulo Bienal. The fair's Junior Host Committee is 80% Latino, said Annette Schönholzer, fair co-director. These efforts seem to have paid off, with a number of dealers reporting sales to Latin Americans. Strina Gallery (E14) from São Paulo sold three "ladder" sculptures by Cildo Meireles, who is currently enjoying a major solo show at Tate Modern. All the works, entitled *Descala*, 2002, and priced at \$300,000, went to South American buyers. At Max Hetzler (D11) Mona Hatoum's mesh *Cube*, 2008, went for €160,000 to Venezuela.

Compared with last year, buyers are taking longer to make decisions, and many dealers are still talking of "holds" rather than "solds". "The rhythm of the fair has changed; before all the sales were at the first moment," said Elena Tavecchia of De Carlo of Milan (C14).

Georgina Adam and Brook Mason

□ For more reports, see p4



To whom the bell sells...

The largest work at an art fair is rarely the most poignant, but Kris Martin's three-ton bronze bell, which swings from a steel frame that is bolted into a concrete plinth, is surprisingly poetic. Titled *For Whom...*, 2008, and exhibited by Sies + Höke (N34), the sculpture sold for \$200,000 to Adrienne Arsht, former chairman of Totalbank and a well-known Miami patron. Ms Arsht became a local hero when she saved the Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County, which now bears her name, with a donation of \$30m.

The bell was cast and installed in a church near Antwerp in 1929, then looted during World War II, found in Hamburg in the 1960s, and

used until 1971 when it developed a crack. The bell, the steel frame and the concrete plinth spent ten days at sea to travel to Art Basel Miami Beach. The work had to be installed before the fair's internal walls were constructed. Sies + Höke would not give a total cost for the production, shipping and installation of the work, but admitted that it was "a fortune".

This bell is one of three works by the Belgian artist that bear the title *For Whom...*. The first bell is in the collection of Christian Boros of Berlin. The third edition is yet to be fabricated. It awaits the moment when, as Alexander Sies put it, Martin "finds another great bell".

Sarah Thornton

Craig Robins to open private museum in Design District

Miami developer Craig Robins is to open a private museum in the Design District to show his art collection. The new building, designed by Spanish architects Abalos and Herreros, will include 40,000 sq. ft of display space. Construction should begin in nine months' time and the gallery should open by January 2012.

The private museum will exhibit changing selections from Mr Robins' 1,000-strong collection, which includes works by US artists Richard Tuttle, Paul McCarthy and John Baldessari as well as younger artists such as Kehinde Wiley. International artists in the collection include the Argentinian Guillermo Kuitca, German artist Kai Althoff, Indian artist Subodh Gupta and a growing number of works by Chinese artists such as Huang Yong Ping, Liu Wei and Wang Xingwei.

Speaking to *The Art News-*



paper, Mr Robins said he is hoping to collaborate with "another collector, or maybe two, in other cities so shows could move around between galleries". When asked if these collectors might be based outside the United States, Mr Robins said "definitely".

In 2005 Mr Robins launched Design Miami in the Design District; the fair is now part-owned by Messe Schweiz, the parent company of Art Basel and Art Basel Miami Beach. Design Miami has played a key role in the renewal of the area over recent years and its ongoing transformation from a deserted downtown slum into a hub for furniture and design stores.

Cristina Ruiz

Craig Robins (inset) may include work from his collection, such as this Kai Althoff installation (left), in his new museum

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Satellite fairs

Limited sparkle at makeshift Scope

Sales thrive in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 range but expensive pieces fail to find buyers

There was something makeshift about the Scope fair: no carpets, noisy air conditioning and panel discussions that took 15 minutes to find, hidden in a room behind an admittedly hip bar/lounge. But what most exhibitors talked about was the economy.

Their reactions veered between extremes. Some

found their stands were never empty, while others had a palpable air of desolation. The Keszler Gallery (330), Southampton, was buzzing with buyers mesmerised by British artist Russell Young's screenprint multiples, which he produced live on the opening day, and unique prints sprinkled with Swarovski crystal dust.

By the end of the second day, four screenprints of Barack Obama and Marilyn Monroe had sold for \$9,000 each, while an Austrian collector paid \$26,000 for *Liz Taylor Diamond Dust*, 2008.

"I'm very pleased with Scope," said Stephan Keszler. "People are trying to negotiate, but this shows they like the work. I'm not going to argue over a 10-15% discount if it means they buy."

Collectors included Melva Bucksbaum, Beth Rudin DeWoody, Richard and Eileen Ekstract, Arnold Lehman, Stephanie Ignacio and Takashi Murakami. The Fine Art Society (200), London, had a "frenzy of good collectors" for a series of eight small oil portraits by Annie Kevans, each priced at \$4,300. All buyers were American, including the client who bought Steve Goddard's *To Repel Ghosts*, 2008, for \$27,800.

Yet Scope regular Gagliardi Art System Gallery (340), Turin, had no takings after two days. Having had a profitable event in Miami last year and at Basel in June, proprietor Pietro Gagliardi felt demoralised. "People are thinking hard about buying work," he said. "Maybe the problem is that I have tried to raise the level of the work I brought with me. Last year I sold easily at \$20,000 to \$30,000, but this year nobody wants to spend \$60,000 to \$70,000."

The consensus was that

sales were slow but steady, with no knee-jerk decisions or buyer competition, and price points of \$10,000 to \$20,000. Sean Ryan of Rare (410), New York, sold two large oil canvases by day three: two versions of Jean-Pierre Roy's large oil canvases *The End of the Old Model*, 2008, each \$20,000; one was acquired by Miami collector Sean Gelb. At the Christopher Cutts Gallery

(101), Toronto, each of Richard Stipl's *1-4 Figures*, 2008, sold at \$8,900, three of the four to the same New York collector.

Dealers of Chinese art at Scope seemed to fare better than those at Art Asia next door (see below). Eli Klein (456), New York, sold \$300,000-worth of work in the first half of the week, including a \$102,000 oil painting, *Untitled*, 2007, by Xiao Se, who is rep-

resented in Charles Saatchi's collection, London. Potentially "difficult" works of art proved no barrier to collectors: Shen Shaomin's *Unknown Creature No. 20 Bat*, 2002, made of animal bones, sold for \$81,000. Like the Byron Cohen Gallery (496), Kansas City, Eli Klein had booths at both fairs, pricing the emerging artists in Art Asia significantly lower.

Viv Lawes



Russell Young, *Liz Taylor Diamond Dust*, 2008

Economy hampers inaugural Art Asia

The rumour among stand holders at the inaugural Art Asia in Miami was that nine Korean galleries withdrew from the event following September's collapse of the won. Three Seoul galleries turned up, but the crisis left the new fair unable to stand alone. Its tent was attached to Scope's to allow free-flowing traffic between them. "It was always meant to be presented alongside Scope, so it seemed smart to cut contractor costs," said Ethan Cohen, Art Asia director and exhibitor, who confirmed the withdrawals but declined to say how many.

The scarcity of good contemporary works by established Chinese artists was evident. "The best pieces of work, in my opinion, were the prints and multiples by older Chinese artists at the Ethan Cohen and Ullens Foundation booths," said Larry Warsh, a collector and publisher of academic tomes on Chinese contempo-



Yoshitomo Nara, *Untitled*, 2008, \$120,000

rary art. Mr Cohen (301) found an eager audience for Yue Minjun's screenprints and woodblocks at \$6,000 and \$7,500 respectively, while Bai Yiluo's photographs sold well at \$3,000.

Others disagreed with Mr Warsh. Willem Kerseboom (501), Amsterdam, celebrated the sale of Yoshitomo Nara's

Untitled, 2008, for \$120,000 to a European collector, while Kashya Hildebrand (355), Zurich, sold Tianbing Li's *Drawbridge*, 2008, to a New York architect for \$250,000. Other Chinese art dealers' comments ranged from "absolutely brilliant" to "weakly presented"—both from galleries that had sold nothing by the end of day two.

The only Vietnamese art dealer present, Raquelle Azran Vietnamese Contemporary Fine Art (022), Tel Aviv/New York, found a trickle of sales in the \$2,000-\$9,000 range. She noted that all her collectors were Westerners; this may reflect fewer Asian collectors in Miami this year—which many dealers commented upon—or the fact that modern Vietnamese art was influenced by the Western tradition after friends of Matisse established the Hanoi University of Fine Art. VL.

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