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## In the VIP zone: Day One at Art Basel Miami Beach

From the scrupulously curated Gmurzynska booth featuring modern masters and a Baz Luhrmann / Catherine Martin film to a Damien Hirst "pill" cabinet priced at \$7 million, the 13th edition of Art Basel Miami Beach was chock full of temptations for art-loving, well-lined pockets. And many, it seemed, were giving way.

"I bought it, just don't tell anyone it was me," said one Miami collector after committing to a \$55,000 photograph by Misrach, who admitted hours later that he'd bought event more.

Just a few hours into the show, Mathias Rastorfer of Galerie Gmurzynska said the gallery had sold several works in the \$100,000 range and had serious interest in some \$1 million-plus works.

Gmurzynska's curated booth received raves. Entitled "A Kid Could Do That," – a comment often heard at art fairs – the booth brings together 20th century masterworks by Joan Miro, Kazimir Malevich, Wifredo Lam, Cy Twombly, Francis Bacon and others in a selection of abstract works that often befuddle viewers who aren't familiar with the history and context essential understanding the works' importance. The booth is set up like a school room, with a large table for sitting and reading. The idea, said Rastorfer, was to help people better understand the works. Among them is a film by Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin revisiting an original video of the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo incorporating a Miro painting that appears in the booth.

With strong sales in the recent New York contemporary auction sales, most art watchers were predicting – at least hoping – for brisk business at the opening of today's fair in the Miami Beach Convention Center. Fair hours have been reshaped to give gallerists more time with serious collectors. Unlike any fair in its past, said director Marc Spiegler, 100 percent of the 267 galleries from last year reapplied to exhibit. (Some were denied to make space for some new galleries, including Miami-based Michael Jon.)

And while the fair is a commercial event, even those without deep pockets will find plenty of reason to visit the fair, with works including a trench coat lined with jewels by Nick Cave at Jack Shainman Gallery, geometric chandeliers by Pae White at the neugerriemschneider booth and light works by Richard Turrell works at OMR. And at the Beyeler Foundation booth, a project for the weary by the Marina Abramovic Institute: cots with bright coverlets and soothing sound headsets.

"There's a lot of really good work here," said Bonnie Clearwater, director and chief curator of NSU-Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale.

Nazy Vassegh, director of London's Masterpiece Fair, agreed. "In Europe last year there was a lot of press about how this is was just a party fair," said Vassegh, who was making her first visit. The fair's social aspects were clear, she said. "Most people here are in groups, more groups than you would see an an European fair," with many families. Still, "I've been pleasantly surprised. Being social and vibrant doesn't take away from serious attention to the art. "

Visitors familiar with the fair in years past will find a slightly more Zen atmosphere, with more breathing space thanks to a new spatial arrangement. "I think it's beautiful," said New York-Miami artist Michelle Oka Doner. At Basel, her work is showing at Marlborough; a retrospective of her work opens in New York's Christie's auction gallery in March, and in 2016 the Perez Art Museum Miami will host a show. "It's very serene."

-- Jane Woolridge

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