

Diary

As the Design Miami/Basel fair reminds us, the convergence of art and design has given rise to new ideas about art that can also be functional. Lining one wall of Gavin Brown's booth in Art Basel (2.1/N4) is a chorus line of 11 inflatable sex dolls, not all of them fully inflated. Some of

them are slumping to the side, collapsing into the others. "It's on reserve," Brown says of the piece by the artist Sturtevant, then emphasises, "I'm selling it as art." One would hope so. It's priced at €175,000. "That," Brown says, "would be a very expensive sex doll."



Photo by David Owens

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First among equals

So much for new opening times and extra VIP days. It seems that no cunning plan is able to prevent a tide of art collectors from forming an irate scrum in their attempts to get into the fair on the first of the two preview days. Add in some copious downpourings of rainfall and sturdy crowd barriers to prevent all but the earliest of birds from taking shelter, and tempers soon frayed to breaking point. "It's worse than usual," bemoaned the British collector David Roberts, who battled through the throng and was overheard saying: "There must be a way in—is there a back door?" Meanwhile, another Brit, who chose to remain nameless, retorted: "I wish I'd brought my Oyster card [London Tube pass], it might have been more effective!"

Digging deep

Many of us have commented on the extensive building works that have engulfed the Messeplatz, but few as poetically as the director of Tate Modern, Chris Dercon, who declares that "people seem to long for modernity as our... Antiquity," citing Pedro Reyes,



Naked aggression

You may have noticed that in order to enter one side of Sean Kelly's booth (2.1/N2), you must pass through a narrow space between two stark naked people engaged in a stare down. They are recreating Marina Abramovic's famous performance *Imponderabilia* (1977/2010). Although they take shifts, one of the female performers fainted yesterday afternoon, but made a quick recovery. When the piece was recreated two years ago for Abramovic's retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art, a few performers complained that they'd been fondled by museum visitors. At Art Basel, there are pre-arranged hand signals they can give to the gallery's associate director Lauren Kelly if things get inappropriate. We spoke with one of the performers, Mike Winter, a British dancer based in Geneva. "It's incredibly intimate," he said. What if someone fondled him? "I'd remember what they looked like and go and get them afterwards." ■

Effusive sponsors

"If no one ever looked at art, would anybody even create it? And how much does art actually need buyers?" Inspiring words from BMW, one of Art Basel's major sponsors, which then goes even further on the cover of its new

guide to the world's private collections by asking: "Who are these collectors anyway? Privileged or unloved individuals? Men and women of conviction or mere unloved investors? Show-offs or idealists?" Things take a somewhat sober tone inside the book, which provides a country-by-country guide to the world's "private and publicly accessible collections of contemporary art". But by the last page, the offerings are once again overheated to a positively Oscar-ish level: "Art is a gift... we say a wordless 'thank you' to all the artists that fascinate, inspire and sometimes even change us... [and to] everyone who lives with art and who has opened their spaces to like-minded spirits from around the world..."

The only way to fly

Waxing lyrical in a recent issue of the German edition of *Interview Magazine*, Marc Jacobs, the handbag designer and general adorer of the art

world, provided an unexpected insight into the joys of air travel declaring: "It would be a wonderful thing to have a private jet all the time. I know people who do fly by private jet all the time, like Larry Gagosian, who is a big art dealer. He has a private jet and flies all the time, and luckily I've hitched a ride on his plane a few times and it is not overrated at all. It's a great way to travel!"

Have your say



Want to rewrite American foreign policy? Locate your inner Rumsfeld or perhaps penetrate the psyche of the current US Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta? The artist Mark Dion is offering visitors the chance to don an outfit of their choice, assume full officialdom and take up their position at the iconic lectern emblazoned with the US Department of Defense insignia. *Mess Conference*, 2004, on Galerie Christian Nagel's stand (2.1/H5) provides a rack of white shirts, military fatigues, an assortment of headscarves and even aviator shades to complete either a Hawk- or Dove-ish look, with a tripod and camera set up to immortalise the whole experience. Participants can receive a jpeg of their Pentagon alter egos for a mere €40 or if you want to rerun the fantasy in the comfort of your own home, the cost of the entire piece (excluding the camera) is €65,000 excluding VAT.

Basel kickoff

Newsweek's art critic Blake Gopnik recently called Documenta the Olympics of the art world. But Basel gets its own share of sports analogies. "If it's [American] football, I like the Super Bowl. This is the art version," says the artist Melvin Edwards. And he should know; decades ago, he got into the University of Southern California on a football scholarship. His minimalist barbed wire sculpture *Pyramid up and down pyramid*, 1970/2012, is on view at Art Unlimited (Alexander Gray, U18). It was shown at the Whitney in 1970, but subsequent appearances use newer wire. In Texas, he informed us, people collect barbed wire, the barbs of which come in different shapes and distributions, depending on

the year. So, what vintage is this? "This is barbed wire ordinaire," he says, slipping into wine lingo. "2012."

Don't steal this book

Standing in her display at Art Unlimited, painter Laura Owens reflected on her first Basel experience, in 1999, in Art Statements. The booth featured just one painting. "People were freaked out," she says. They were wrong to be—that year she won the very first Baloise Prize. In Art Unlimited (Brown, Captain, Coles, U5), she's showing more paintings—91 more. But the collection of works form one piece, *Untitled*, 2012, along with a group of books she designed and spread out on a table. She has shown books before at a fair, but it didn't go too well. One was stolen. "So I made a website, *YouStoleMyBook.com*." Did that sour her on fairs? "Dealers try to protect artists from the art fair experience," she says, "but it's a reality."

Make a wish

One of the more subtle works in Art Unlimited is Yvon Lambert's display of *Untitled (Empty Room)*, 2012, by the Israeli-born, New York- and Berlin-based artist Ariel Schlesinger (U28). At first sight, this seems like just a locked space with a glass door holding some standing gas tanks. But as you come closer, a tiny nozzle in the glass feeds a flickering flame—leading to the assumption that the gas-filled room beyond is fuelling the fire. "That's what it seems like," said an Art Unlimited minder guarding the work on Tuesday, "but it is some kind of illusion." And what happens if a breeze blows out the flame? "Then, we call the gallery."

Green day

At the booth of New York dealer Andrew Kreps (2.1/H6), there is a salad bowl and napkins on the table. There's a very practical reason for this: on Thursday, to the delight of art-loving health nuts, Kreps will take the fruits and veggies—an ear of corn, lettuce, and so forth—and make them into a big salad. It will be first come, first served, and a culmination of a work by Darren Bader that was recently installed at New York's MoMA PS1. "Yes, alert your readers," Kreps says. "It will be a good way to get your vitamins." ■

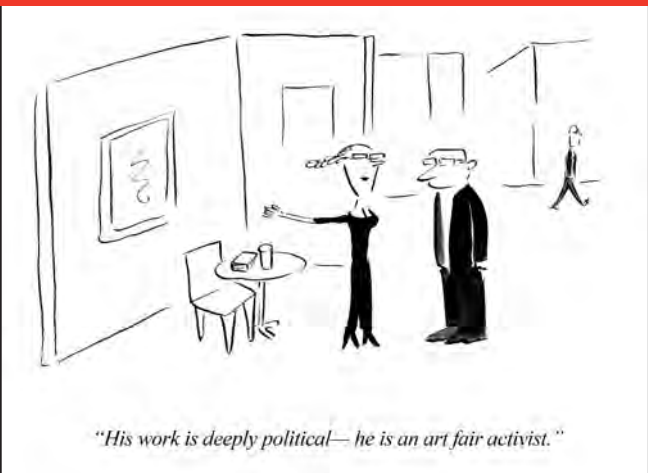


Photo by David Owens



Anna Maria Maiolino, Lygia Pape and Thomas Schütte, among others. He then goes on to describe the uprooting of the Messeplatz car park to make way for Herzog & de Meuron's extension as being "like the archaeology of the [recent] past. That is why so many people—including myself—are so fascinated by the machines and workers at the building site. Is it an excavation or demolition site?"

Artoon by Pablo Helguera



"His work is deeply political—he is an art fair activist."