

SPELLBOUND ART

*Big sales at blue-chip galleries for heavy weight artists affirmed the current safe taste for established names at 48th edition of **Art Basel**, writes Rebecca Anne Proctor*

In Gianni Jetzer's gargantuan Unlimited section at this year's Art Basel, the late Los Angeles artist Chris Burden's *Ode to Santos Dumont* (2015) circles around in the cavernous exhibition hall for 15 minutes at a time so that it doesn't overheat. The artwork, which took Burden a decade to produce, was inspired by the hardly known Brazilian aviation pioneer Alberto Santos Dumont. In 1901, his pioneering airship flew around the Eiffel Tower. Crowds gathered round the artist's engineering feat like children at a parade, eager to get a glimpse of the artist's rarely-before-seen magnificent flying machine. The performance sculpture pays tribute to the ideals of optimism, persistence of experimentation, innovation, and failure—character traits needed during times such as ours.

While past years witnessed collectors rush to pick up emerging contemporary artists, this year saw the yearly pilgrimage rush to the fair's Tuesday high-energy VIP opening to the 291 galleries to buy the trusted greats of Modern art, reaffirming the current trend for the big names and otherwise safe bets—signs of the uncertainty of the present economy. Among the early sales were Pablo Picasso's *Homme Assis* (1969), priced at \$11m, and Wassily Kandinsky's 1924 *Berührung* (*Contact*) for \$3.5m at New York's Helly Nahmad gallery. Montreal's Landau Fine Art, known for its abundance of Modern masters, sold Picasso's *Homme à la pipe* (1969) and René Magritte's *La corde sensible* (1960), for \$29.5m each. Works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose *Untitled* (1982) sold for a record \$98m (\$110.5m with fees) at Sotheby's in May, were found in abundance on the ground floor.

More adventurous, cutting-edge work could be found on the first floor of the fair, generally the area for younger artists with smaller



Reza Aramesh, *Site of the Fall, Study of the Renaissance Garden*, 2016-17. Sculpture. Courtesy of Lolita Heller Gallery, Dubai and New York

prices. "There's been a real rejuvenation of the secondary market galleries," says Marc Spiegler, Art Basel Global Director. "One of the things that's always interesting are the new galleries coming into the fair. Traditionally, more galleries have tended to come in upstairs, but we have also focused on bringing in young, dynamic, secondary market galleries downstairs. This rejuvenation is necessary notes Spiegler because younger gallerists are working hard to get "great material in order to develop great collectors." For example, New York-based gallery Luxembourg & Dayan, which previously made appearances in two Art Basel Feature sections, graduated this year to the gallery sector, showcasing highlights from Post-War Italian art, including Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri, Pino Pascoli, and Domenico Gnoli, among others. Making a statement to mark its arrival is Italian Tornabuoni gallery, which pulled together four of Lucio Fontana's rare, late *La Fine di Dio* (*The End of God*) (1963-64) works. Regular participant Johannesburg and Cape Town-based gallery Goodman sold several editions of Candice Breitz's 2017 video *Profile* (€10,000 each)—a work that references the artist's showing at South Africa's pavilion in the

Venice Biennale this year. Dealers such as Emmanuel Perrotin, known for more cutting-edge contemporary art, joined forces with Simon Lee on a three-tier booth dedicated to the 1980s where they sold several works by Hans Hartung for around €70,000 and €300,000.

Among galleries from Dubai was Green Art Gallery who exhibited in the Statements section with a solo booth of works by Pakistani-born US-based artist Seher Shah. "We had a great response to her work, both commercially and institutionally and we were able to the work in great collections," said the gallery's Yasmin Atassi. "The Pompidou is going to include Shah's work in a group show in October." Five years ago

Green Art Gallery participated in the Statements section with a booth dedicated to the work of Shadi Habib Allah. Dubai and New York-based Leila Heller Gallery made its first appearance at the fair in the Feature and Parours sections. In Features the gallery showed the work of French artist Arman's *Poubelle* series, assemblages of rubbish that the artist placed in Plexiglas vitrines. "Postcards of Sol LeWitt, Robert Rauschenberg's empty whisky bottles, and Bernar Venet's disused exhibition announcements: each of these poubelles was given to Arman's artist colleagues in the early 1970s and filled by them with refuse from their studio," explained Heller. Situated in Wettsteinbrücke, along the quaint Rhine Promenade, was *Action 181, Site of the Fall: Study of the Renaissance Garden*, part of the Parours section. "Reza's site-specific sculptures, which were universally celebrated by critics, curators and collectors, continue his series of work rendering in alluring detail the bodies of victims of 20th and 21st century armed conflict—from Iraq to Vietnam—as taken from media images," added Heller.

Waving the torch for Cairo was Gypsum Gallery, just four years old, and who made its first appearance in Statements with work by Maha Maamoun. "Maha and I have been working together in various capacities in and out of Egypt since 2003," explained the gallery's Aleya Hamza. "Her project, *The Subduer*, was at once political, playful and humane. It triggered strong reactions from curators and collector's alike for its portrayal of an anachronistic place, and how we behave in it." The work was born out of a regular visit by the artist to one of the many public notary offices in Egypt. In these offices, citizens, state functionaries and legal/bureaucratic processes operate on a daily basis with and against each other.

And there were political works on view, more so than other editions of Art Basel this year. "We are living in particularly political time which



Above: John Baldessari, *Ear Sofa; Nose Sconces with Flowers (in Stage Setting)* in the Unlimited section, 2009/2017 Courtesy of Sprueth Magers and Marian Goodman Gallery; Left: Paolo Icaro, *The Metallic Forest* in the Unlimited section, 1967. Courtesy of Galleria Massimo Minini
Below: Ei Arakawa, *Gutai Under Feet (Basel LED)* in the Unlimited section, 2017. Courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery

"THERE'S BEEN A REAL REJUVENATION OF THE SECONDARY MARKET GALLERIES"

- Marc Spiegler

means we are getting particularly political work and that's a good thing," says Spiegler. New York dealer Jack Shainman sold Hayy Kahraman's *Mnemonic Artifact* (2017) for \$50,000. The work reveals the displaced memories of the Iraqi-born artist who fled to Sweden in the 1990s and is now based in Los Angeles. Athens and Thessaloniki-based Kalfayan Galleries, exhibiting in the Feature section, revealed a solo show of post-war Greek artist Vlassis Caniaris (1928-2011). For over two decades the Greek gallery has exhibited artwork from the Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa, in many ways acting like a bridge between Eastern and Western culture. Active internationally during the sixties and seventies, one of the standout works was *What's North, What's South? (Children and Testimony)*, a haunting installation work showcasing a group of children without heads and which seemingly reference today's plight of refugees. "Caniaris focused on socio-political themes and issues of immigration, displacement, history and memory which in the current global economic and socio-political turmoil are timelier than ever," said the gallery's Yuli Karatsiki.

But Art Basel is also, like art, about having fun. John Baldessari's *Ear Sofa; Nose Sconces with Flowers (in Stage Setting)* (2009/2017) via Marian Goodman Gallery and Sprüth Magers in the Unlimited section displayed an intriguing scene: part Art Deco tableau vivant and part surrealist-like dream sequence: a model reclines with her puppy on a sofa in the shape of an oversized ear, while the white sconces on the wall are actually upturned noses. Or head over the Indian artist Subodh Gupta's living restaurant to indulge in one of his family's recipes. "It's a crowd pleaser," says Unlimited curator Jetzer. "All the works that have a 'live' aspect seem to get the most social media attention. Still, a flat photograph might reproduce the likeness of the work but it can never replace the act of eating in Subodh's restaurant. That's impossible."

artbasel.com

