

CLASSIC DRIVER

Art Basel 2012: 'Someone is getting rich'

Lead

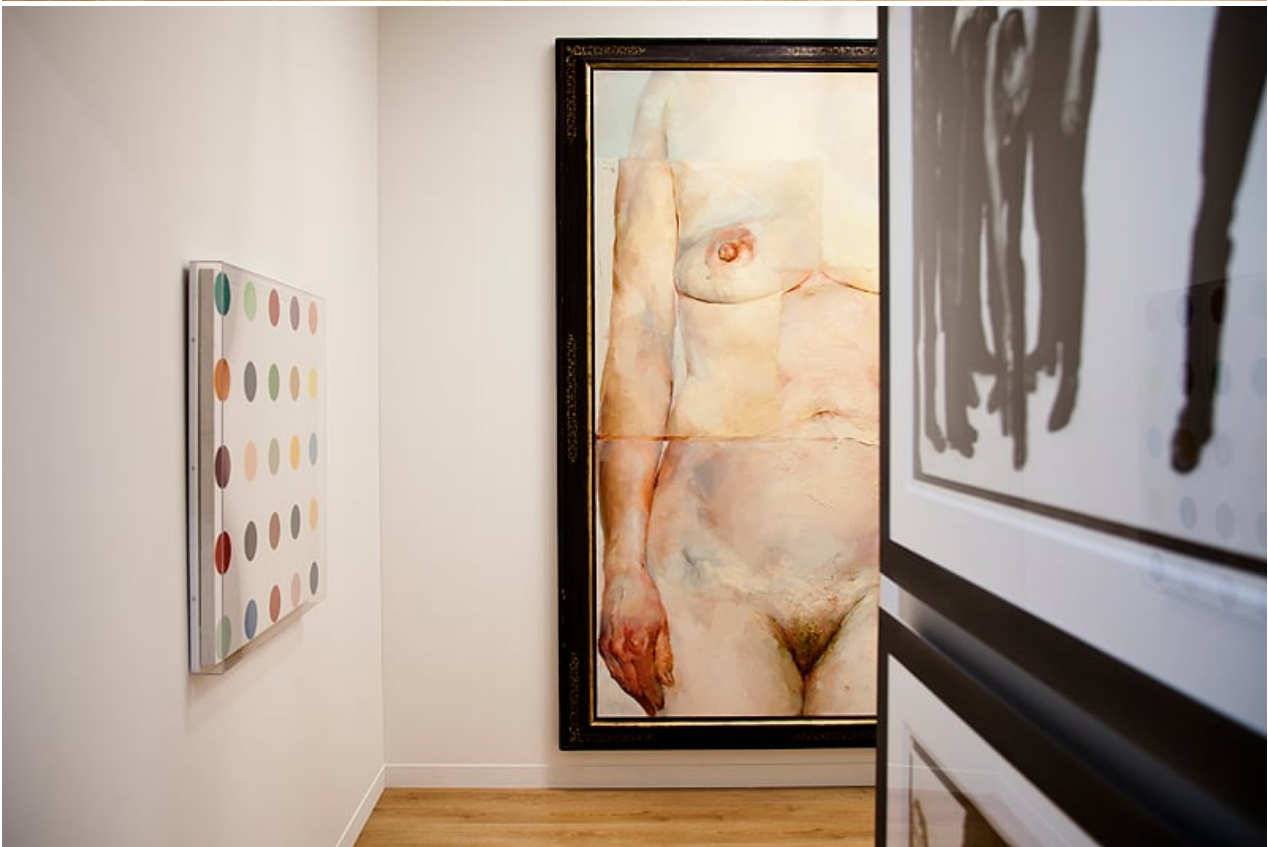
They sure are. And it's most likely to be the dealers and artists' agents handling the multi-million-Swiss-franc pieces at one of the most important art fairs in the world: Art Basel.

While auctions in New York and London continue to break records, it's at Basel, with its satellite exhibitions 'Art Unlimited' and 'Design Miami/Basel', where buyers flock to purchase expensive works of contemporary art and design straight 'off the wall' (or floor).

('Someone is getting rich' is a neon work by Claire Fontaine based on graffiti found in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. It is being exhibited at Art 43, Basel by the Regina Gallery.)

Art Basel





With 300 galleries from 36 countries showing many 100s of works of art to around 60,000 visitors, the Art Basel event is clearly big business. Business that is booming; if the preview was anything to go by, the world economic crisis that has crippled worldwide stock markets has hardly touched the art market.

Above all, it's the established artists of the 20th and 21st Centuries that make the running. Over two floors of exhibition space, countless Rondels, Picassos, Warhols, Richters and Hirsts put their stylistic differences aside, united by the number of zeroes on their price tags.



Since Edvard Munch's 'The Scream' achieved \$120m in May, the top-end art market hasn't looked back. In Basel, the doors had only been open for a few hours when a Gerhard Richter sold for 20m euros. Meanwhile, the bright orange work 'Untitled, 1954' by Mark Rothko is priced at - and expected to sell for - \$78m. The common theme of what sells is pieces with 'living room appeal'; works in traditional media such as oil-on-canvas, acrylic, photography or sculpture. The bulkier conceptual (and too confrontational) political art is hard to place.

Art Unlimited





At the associated event 'Art Unlimited', refugees from the main exhibition searching for video, live performances and large installations will find what might not be so suitable for the sitting room of a Central Park apartment. There is, for example, a glassfibre Porsche 550 Spyder replica awaiting an impending collision with a brick wall. 'If I Should Die in a Car Crash, It Was Meant to Be a Sculpture, 2011', by the German artist Michael Sailstor, is a typical piece at Art Unlimited.



The videos include the 18-minute 'First Point, 2012, Video projection with sound, directed by Richard Phillips and Taylor Steele' that has actress Lindsay Lohan confronting paparazzi while she surfs Malibu, and 'Belle Comme le Jour'. The latter, 13-minute single-channel video projection is a short film and prequel to Luis Buñuel's Belle de Jour (1967) and Manoel de Oliveira's Belle Toujours (2006). It is the modern-day story of the adventures of a young Parisian student, a passionate moviegoer – and Catherine Deneuve look-alike – who re-enacts Deneuve's filmography.

Design Miami / Basel





Another satellite show to the main event, Design Miami/Basel is an Audi-sponsored exhibition of furniture and industrial design for the home. For us, it was the most interesting area of Art Basel 2012.

At the entrance to Hall 5 stands Jean Prouvé's 'Maison Métropole', a pre-fabricated aluminium house from 1949. "Already sold", said a representative from the Paris gallery Patrick Seguin, smiling apologetically. There were two other Prouvés; though, for reasons of space, simply represented by intricate steel beams.

Even more recent pieces such as the chrome-and-foam chair by Roger Tallon (the man who styled the TGV) were in demand. And, as you'd expect, many items from the Scandinavian school were on show. There was an original Hans J Wegner chair for 125,000 euros; and the Dansk Møbelkunst Gallery and Hostler Burrows from New York were showing teak and wicker classics... at truly classic prices.

As a change from frequently found Bauhaus, the selection of early 20th Century cubic furniture from designers in the Rudolf Steiner circle was another highlight.

But it wasn't all retrospective: many modern pieces were displayed alongside timeless designs from the last 100 years. The Swedish partnership of Per Emanuelsson and Bastian Bischoff showed a row of analogue clocks, and Italian design house Fendi commissioned Formafantasma (also Italian) to make a range of leather and fabric accessories that seemed to come straight from Robinson Crusoe's beach hut.

For anyone visiting Art Basel, Design Miami/Basel is a 'must'.

Photos: Jan Baedeker

Gallery

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