

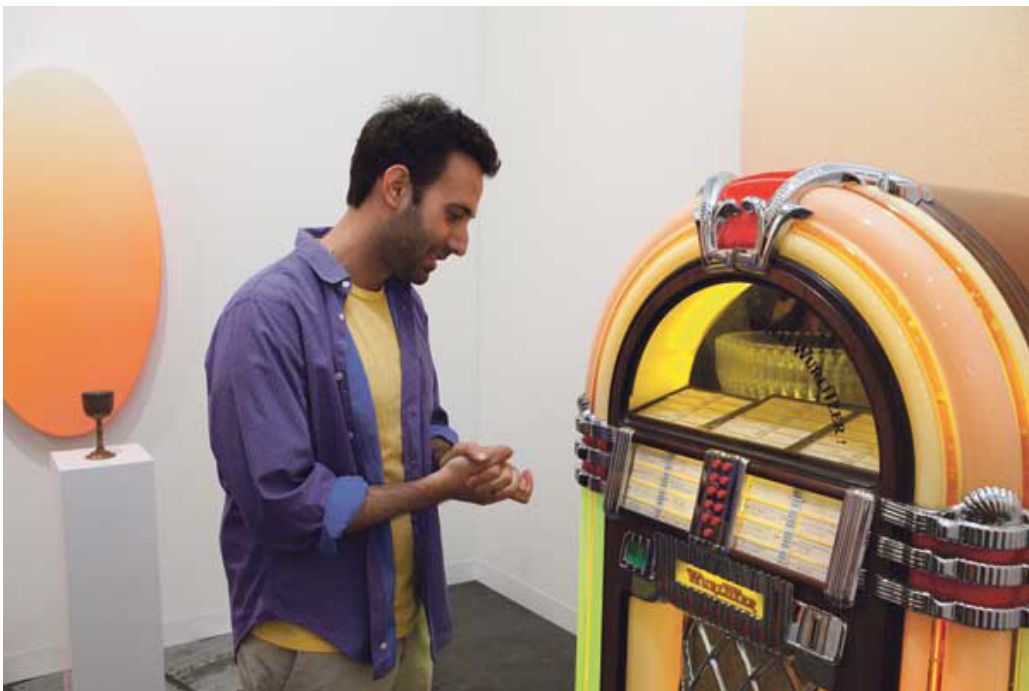
Ruiz, Cristina, "Curators turn East but Art Basel looks to the US," *The Art Newspaper*, June 12, 2012

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Curators turn East but Art Basel looks to the US

Documenta, Manifesta, La Triennale and the Kiev Biennale strike a different tone to the art market

By Cristina Ruiz



The Los Angeles artist Alex Israel, 29, stands in front of a jukebox he rented from the Babelsberg film studio in Berlin, one of seven props on show with Peres Projects (S25) in Art Statements

What's wrong with being a white American male artist under the age of 45? The odds of getting into an international survey of contemporary art in Europe right now are stacked against you.

Four large exhibitions taking place this summer—Documenta in Kassel, Germany; the itinerant biennial Manifesta, which has landed in Genk, Belgium; Paris's La Triennale; and the new Kiev Biennale in Ukraine—present a vision of the world that focuses on countries at the centre of recent political upheavals or on the fringes of

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Western awareness. Americans count for just over 9% of the total number of 550 artists included in these shows. The US artists whose work is on display tend to be over 50, if they are still alive at all. Younger ones are often female or African-American.

"Institutions, audiences and the media in many parts of the world... do not any longer feel that the US has a special status among the different cultural regions of the world," says Cuauhtémoc Medina, one of the curators of Manifesta 9, which is showing a total of 116 artists and collectives, including just four Americans (Charles Demuth, William Rittase, Robert Smithson—all dead—and the African-American artist David Hammons, born in 1943).

The art market tells a different story. Visitors to Art Basel will see work by 2,500 artists on the stands of 300 galleries from six continents. But artists from just three countries account for nearly half of the work on show, with Americans by far the largest contingent. We took a sample of 1,000 artists and found that more than 23% of those with works on sale are American. Their German and British counterparts are in second and third places, each accounting for nearly 12% of the total. Artists from France, Italy and Switzerland represent a further 18.2%. Despite the hype surrounding China and the addition of a fair in Hong Kong to the Art Basel stable, few Chinese artists have made it to the floor. Only 12 of the 1,000 artists in our survey are Chinese (1.2%). Africa has only 15 artists (1.5%).

So why the discrepancy? "The market is somewhat behind the developments since the 1990s, when the art world began 'opening up'," says Katerina Gregos, another curator of Manifesta 9. "Collectors still prefer to buy works that can more easily translate into an ascribed economic value, hence the continuing preference for painting and sculpture and less [preference] for experimental or 'difficult' works of art. So it is understandable that what one will find in Basel will come from countries with a tradition of producing such art, mostly through safe, tried and tested, recognisable names."

"An international exhibition is a very different animal to an art fair," says Jane Cohan, the press director of New York's James Cohan Gallery. "It's an incubator of ideas, and very much the vision of the curator as auteur. None of the curators of the exhibitions you mention are American... it is likely that you will not see many of the artists featured in the recent Whitney Biennial at Basel either, but all of them are American."

All of the curators approached by The Art Newspaper denied that they had deliberately excluded artists from the US. "I don't think there is any anti-American feel-

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ing, but many curators' eyes are looking where there have been more dramatic cultural, economic and political developments," says David Elliott, the curator of the Kiev Biennale. He has included four Americans in his show: Daniel Faust, Fred Tomaselli, Bill Viola—all over 55—and the African-American artist Trenton Doyle Hancock, born in 1974.

More Americans of all ages are on show in the 13th edition of Documenta, but there is a strong emphasis on the Middle East. "I've been told it's the first time that there have been so many Arab artists at Documenta," the exhibition's artistic director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev told our sister paper *Il Giornale dell'Arte*. "There are quite a few Americans, but not many if considered in proportion to the population of the country. The country that is most represented, proportional to its population, is Lebanon." Christov-Bakargiev's show also includes ten artists from Afghanistan, four from Pakistan, ten from Africa and the highest number of female artists ever shown at Documenta.

One important factor is the substantial funding Documenta receives. Unlike the Venice Biennale, which relies heavily on the support of commercial galleries, Documenta is more financially independent. The City of Kassel provided €4.4m towards the exhibition's total cost this year of €25.6m. A further €4.4m has come from the German state of Hesse, and the German Cultural Foundation has given €4m. A spokesman for Documenta said that, of the remaining €12.8m, "the majority is from ticket sales", with a small amount coming from independent organisations and commercial galleries.

Meanwhile, in Basel, dealers are getting on with the business of selling art—and US artists do well. "We are not despairing in any sense of the word," says Stuart Krimko, a director at Los Angeles's David Kordansky Gallery, which is showing work by young American artists such as Kathryn Andrews and Matthew Brannon (2.1/L6). "There are still plenty of cases of young, male American artists appearing in shows in Europe."