



## Franc Art: Cash and Creativity at Basel 43

By Gabriella Fuller

At last count, there were 189 international art fairs, enough to keep the affluent & avant-garde in champagne and envy 365 days a year. But on the heels of Documenta and at the apex of the spring fairathon that started with Frieze NY back in early May, Swiss mothership Art Basel – now in its 43rd year – is still the biggest, the brightest, the only fair the art crowd literally can't afford to miss: last year, Gagosian sold \$45 million-worth in the *first 45 minutes alone*, and, at yesterday's VIP preview, someone with a good eye and an even better balance-sheet snagged a Gerhard Richter for north of \$20 million, which is hella high even in those rarified climes, and a price-point generally reserved for auction houses.

That's because Art Basel is special: where its Miami Beach iteration has a "Woodstock for the Wealthy" vibe and Documenta is cloaked in anti-commercial intellectualism, Basel distinguishes itself as a serious forum for the exchange of ideas *and* cash. Which is why, as we speak, 65,000 art-lovers are rendez-vousing on the banks of the Rhine.

There will, of course, be work by some 2,500 lauded and emerging artists, plus Lindsay Lohan. (Though you won't see David Shrigley's morally relativistic Public Enemy N.1. Shocker, I know.) But we're most excited for the third installment of Basel's site-specific Art Parcours section, because it seems a crystallization of fairs' very essence: the potent marriage of art and commerce.

This year, its 14 installations are tightly packed off-site, in the corporate-wasteland-cum-design-hub of St. Johann – a nexus of urban renewal noteworthy for being helmed not organically and cheaply by artists, but meticulously and very expensively by pharmaceutical giant Novartis, which hired a bevy of starchitects to turn its drab corporate campus into a design mecca. In picking the neighborhood as venue, Parcours seems to be granting its seal of approval. Yet its installations also embody a rejection of creativity4cash: Where the rest of AB43 is an international marketplace devoted to sales of foreign art to foreign entities, curator Jens Hoffman is proud Parcours "engages directly with the city and creates [art] for its citizens to enjoy," free of charge.

Some of his – and our – favorites:

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**Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Autoconstrucción* (film, 2009)**



**Two sides of urban renewal! Cruzvillegas documents his Mexico City neighborhood's transformation from rural badland to thriving community. The difference being that Ajusco's rebirth was grass-roots, resident-driven, and hand-hewn, and St. Johann's was fastidiously arranged by the \$46 billion creator of Ritalin.**

**Kathryn Andrews, *Voix de Ville* (performance, 2012)**



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**Like a vaudeville variety hour gone conceptual: with no stage to separate the two, performers and observers are forced to interact, blurring the line between artist and spectator. Plus: clowns!**

Dieter Roth, *The Studio of Dieter and Bjorn Roth* (studio recreation, 1995-2008)



The most literally site-specific installation of the lot: this actually IS the late provocateur's atelier! His son, and frequent collaborator, has filled it with art, objects, and other atmospheric reminders of Dad. Meta, but moving.

Allan Kaprow (by Mateo Tannatt), *Push and Pull : A Furniture Comedy* For Hans Hoffmann (interactive installation, 1963/2012)



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**Another recreation: the LA-based Tannatt relates the late performance artist's seminal Happening to the fair's inherent transience: the audience is invited to rearrange the furniture at will, raising questions about agency, permanence, and the value of a good decorator.**

*Art Basel runs from June 14-17; [artbasel.com](http://artbasel.com)*

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