

Art Basel 2017, Switzerland

ART BASEL 2017 WE ARE THE (ART) WORLD

There once was a small city at the crossroads of three countries – Switzerland, Germany and France – that became the epicenter of the global art market. Coming from across the world, artists, gallerists, buyers and art lovers co-exist for a week in a quest for the perfect art piece; the willing buyer; or the fame to advance or initiate an art career, a fortune or a collection. Art Basel's fame

and fortune can only be explained by the art public's recognition of the quality and breadth of work presented at the annual art fair of all art fairs.

Now the biggest and best, Art Basel harks back to the first "art fair," an exhibition open to the public and charging for admission. The Paris Salon, which opened in 1667 and was held in the Grand Salon of the Louvre,

determined the reputation and price of French artists' work. Not to be outdone, London's Royal Academy opened its fair in 1768 (and is making preparations for a huge 250th show next year), often changing direction to appeal to critical taste or popular demand, followed in short order by a Manchester fair. 1863's Salon de la Refuses provided exposure for those shut out of France's Royal Academy Salon.

A century later, in 1968, Cologne opened its fair with rival Dusseldorf, also operating in the fall. This convinced three Basel galleries to join – pre-empting the Germans – opening their fair in early summer; it would soon become the world's most important art fair.

Art Basel chooses the best galleries, sells the most work at the highest prices and attracts the most and richest buyers, building relationships while showcasing new artists and galleries. Over 4,000 artists are represented in 226 galleries chosen by Art Basel's Selection Committee in the Galleries sector; 76 projects, large sculptures, paintings, installations and videos, plus artist-proposal-driven work at Features/Statements are curated into shows by individual gallerists. At the Conversations sector, curators, gallerists and directors discuss their perspectives on current art scene issues for the Art Basel audience.

The Film Sector shows 34 new films by and about artists with talks by directors, filmmakers and screenwriters. Offsite, but part of Art Basel, the Parcours sector, at the Cathedral Square and beyond, has 22 site-specific sculptures, interventions and performances by invited renowned and emerging artists, and hosts a final night's party and performance marathon.

Although a commercial fair aiming to sell work, there is something for

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Sue Williamson, *Messages from the Atlantic Passage*, 2017, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.

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Monster piano form covered with blue fake fur and sporting Cookie Monster eyes – too friendly to be frightening.

Michal Rovner's video projection, "Anubis" (2016, Pace, New York, Galleries sector), records her nights in dark fields, in Israeli/Palestinian territory where soldiers lie on hills, watching, in turn observed by jackals. As surveillance cameras recorded, she watched jackals as they watched her, putting the viewer in the animals' place.

Creating awareness of The Other, "Amos' World," (Cécile B. Evans, 2017, Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna, Statements sector), is an architectural video installation following an architect as he creates a housing project who runs into difficulty when the occupants don't conform to his expectations. Viewers see the videoed lives of occupants through windows and doorways cut into a life-size building resembling a housing project.

In Olafur Eliasson's sculpture, "Seasonal Shades Diagram" (2017, Galerie Neugerriemschneider, 156 glass spheres, silver, paint, stainless steel, Galleries sector), circular globes reflect viewers as they are mirrored in the globe's top half. Arranged in five concentric circles, dissipating into black or reflecting our image, depending on the angle of approach, the globes of this universe-like sculpture reflect all of us.

TOP: Nick Cave, *Speak Louder*, 2011, installation, mixed media including black mother of pearl buttons, embroidery floss, upholstery, metal armature, Jack Shainman Gallery.

BOTTOM: Peter Regli, *Reality Hacking No. 313*, 2014, Lévy Gorvy, New York, courtesy Art Basel (© Art Basel).

everyone. Whether social justice/environmental/political work, art for art's sake, beginning or adding to a collection, investing in art, choosing art for a collector or institution, seeking humor to alleviate concerns about the Earth and its inhabitants, or just wanting to laugh, to dance, hear great music, see great art and elucidate words, it's all here.

Attending from the world over, people meet and learn about each other's cultures, lives and tastes via the mediums that know no language barriers: visual, musical and performance arts. Some bring home the work and some will see it in museums and public collections; the rest can enjoy it here, and enjoy it we did.

The work was more exuberant, brighter and more hopeful than at last year's fair, with work begging us to approach without fear, speaking to the sociopolitical problems of communication and acceptance of refugees worldwide. As opposed to last year's concentration of works on refugees being refused entry at borders, this year's concern is integrating refugees into communities. The art is tamer, more hopeful and encouraging. There is less anger.

In Kathryn Andrews' "Riddler" (2017, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, stainless steel, urethane foam, fiber-glass, epoxy resin), mirrors reflect a furry snake crawling inside a stainless steel tube pierced with question marks, allowing the viewer to see their own image reflected inside, as they become part of the artwork. Although the outside cage of "Riddler" protects us, it is like Stefan Tcherepnin's "Chariot of a Secret Order" (2016, Galerie Francesca Pia, fake fur, wood, amplifier, bass shaker, CD player, stones from Niesen) Cookie



Nick Cave's "Speak Louder" (2011, Jack Shainman Gallery, Unlimited sector) utilizes reflective material in creating seven-foot high creatures with tuba-like heads whose music has obviously been silenced. They stand mute, having no mouths to speak, nor eyes to see, begging us to communicate louder. Uniting people from different backgrounds, who would not normally meet, Unlimited sector's "Cooking the World," by Subodh Gupta, (2017, Hauser and Wirth, Zurich) uses donated aluminum pots to cook and hold up the walls of a bar, feeding strangers who dine and talk together.

As cultures merge, we must retain the art and crafts of each. An emphasis on traditional craft techniques showcases immigrants' contributions to their new communities, and serve as extensions of their cultures' craft into the art world. Ai Weiwei's "Iron Tree" (2016, Galerie Neugerriemschneider, cast iron, Parcours sector), a metal tree that ages, accumulating patina to void the original shine, recalls the traditional bonsai tree, slowly growing, being trimmed as it grows, to live on.

Australian artist Andrew Rogers (Galleries sector) constructs land art projects with community help, educating people about their region's historic symbols. He integrates these citizens into the creative process by allowing them to inform him in his projects that can be seen from and photographed by satellites' cameras, and by doing so he stretches our minds to see symbols of all cultures.

At Art Basel, Rogers showed photographs of his work – stones outlining symbols of cultures native to the desert places he works in. Many of these symbols are forgotten and no longer used, but Rogers resurrects age-old forms, using modern technology to record and further interest in them.

Sue Williamson's "Messages from the Atlantic Passage" (2017, wood, paper, bottles, rope, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Unlimited sector) is an installation composed of water from the enslaved Africans' points of departure mixed with water from their points of entry in the New World, contained in a wooden tub bearing the name of the ship that brought them and the number of souls who survived the voyage. Supported by ropes holding bottles inscribed with the African and New World names and other vital information about the passengers, this installation makes sure we do not forget.

Many works in this show cross borders – geographic, subjective, material and performative. Martha Atienza, winning the Baloise prize this year ("Our Islands 11.16'58.4"N 123°45'07.0"E" single-channel HD video, Statements sector) speaks to crossing borders as she enlists actors to participate in a traditional Pilipino parade while underwater. The marchers are holding small statues of baby Jesus, carrying guns, pushing people ahead, wearing signs on their shirts identifying them as drug users; we notice the dearth of fish due to dynamite fishing, leaving little source of income for the people who are being pushed to emigrate. This merging of performance, ritual, costuming and video crosses borders of subject and media as people cross into another country for social and economic reasons.

Phyllida Barlow's "100banners" (2015, Hauser and Wirth, Zurich, Unlimited sector) – where abstract designs decorate flags displayed overhead, their supporting poles in shoes ready to walk to another location – shows that abstract designed flags belong to no nation. We are the world.

The work at Art Basel presents artists intent on communicating with other people, furthering their cultural art practices, remembering history and protecting our Earth, a worthy art practice.