

DIARY

## PLUG 'N' PLAY

June 18, 2011 • Basel • David Velasco around the 42nd edition of Art Basel



Left: Artists Cerith Wyn Evans and A. A. Bronson. Right: Dasha Zhukova, Wendi Murdoch, and Art.sy CEO Carter Cleveland.

**IN THAT “DEAD” WEEK** between Venice and Basel, what did *you* do? Did you follow the 2011 art bus to Berlin or Città della Pieve? Retreat to Geneva, Milan, Helsinki, Bedford? If you were lucky, perhaps you spent the entr’acte in London, saw Michael Clark’s premiere of *th* in the Tate Turbine Hall and a Mark Leckey performance at the Serpentine, attended a Dennis Cooper–divined group show (“The Weaklings”) at Five Years Gallery in Regent Studios, immersed yourself in Stuart Comer’s screening of *Community Action Center*, etc. . . .

“Like one long evening,” as John Tremblay put it.

Then, on the plane to Switzerland, you might have read from John Kelsey’s collected essays, *Rich Texts*, out now on Sternberg Press. Listened to some xclusv Ghe20 Goth1k mix on your new Bose QuietComfort 15 acoustic noise-canceling headphones, which somehow cost twice as much as the easyJet flight (even with Speedy Boarding). Caught up with the Art Basel piece

in *easyJet* magazine, where the author “rounds up five of the hottest tickets” around the fair: Andre Butzer, Sudarshan Shetty, Lisa Oppenheim, Mattis Leiderstam, and Mai-Thu Perret. “It’s probably the best fair in the world in terms of quality,” Perret advises in the pull quote, which is as far as you get before it’s time to deplane.

“We all have something to sell at the fair,” Marc Spiegler later observed. “Quality” art to match “quality” homes. To match quality shoes, products, and lifestyle.



Left: Swiss Institute director and Art Unlimited 2012 curator Gianni Jetzer. Right: Art Basel directors Annette Schönholzer and Marc Spiegler.

But on Tuesday, at the opening of the forty-second edition of the big fair, it was all about quantity. It’s by now an old adage that there are more VIPs than non-VIPs ticking around Basel, just as it’s axiomatic that “art’s the new rock ’n’ roll,” which I was told over and over as we squeezed through the throngs. How’d we all end up with a backstage pass? Anyway, the only rock-star artist around was Cerith Wyn Evans, the latest Marc Jacobs muse whose wit always arrives long before the staircase and who also happened to have the best dinner of the week (at Osteria Acqua on Monday).

“People ask, ‘Why year after year do you go to Art Basel?’ Art Basel! How could you not?” Mera Rubell parsed it out at Eva Presenhuber’s booth. “Here you see things you must have or *else*. Look at that Franz West moment over there.”

YOU WANT IT

YOU NEED IT

YOU BUY IT

## YOU FORGET IT

read her Barbara Kruger tote.

Our memories are always being tested here, but among the (momentarily) unforgettable: Henrik Oleson and R. H. Quaytman at Daniel Buchholz; Laura Owens at Sadie Coles and Gavin Brown; Richard Aldrich at Bortolami, Trisha Donnelly at Presenhuber and Casey Kaplan; Adrián Villar Rojas at Ruth Benzacar; Matias Faldbakken at Standard (Oslo) and Simon Lee; Ai Weiwei at neugerriemschneider. “We have to keep the story in the public’s memory,” Burkhard Riemschneider said.



Left: Dealers David Kordansky and Stuart Krimko. Right: Artist R. H. Quaytman.

David Kordansky talked up Kathryn Andrews, whom he was presenting in Art Statements. “It’s amazing. There are these rented clown costumes and they’re covered in cum.”

“Whose cum?” asked Team Gallery’s Miriam Katzeff.

“It’s not important. I’m using ‘cum’ loosely here. I mean shit.”

“Whose shit?”

Kordansky shook his head.

That night, Thea Westreich was sitting next to me at the dinner thrown by Standard (Oslo) and Johann König at Ristorante Roma. “You’re a dude,” she told Standard’s Eivind Furnesvik. “You’re a clever, smart, sexy guy. But you also know how to communicate the context of a

work. I'm tired of hearing who bought something or for how much. Fuck it! That doesn't tell me anything about whether it's a great work of art."

We were eating our grilled turbotin with lemon sauce and debating the hive mind of collectors, the bloodbath of the auctions. "It's possible that there are people out there thinking on their own, calibrating things according to their own intellect," Thea's husband, Ethan Wagner, considered, shaking his head. "If there aren't, I give up."

We finished our tiramisu and walked across the Rhine to the Kunsthalle's Campari Bar, which was loud and boisterous as ever, a distinct counterpoint to the armed guards who stood at the entrance. Didn't remember seeing those last year. Furnesvik perked up as he regarded the crowd: "To have a really global network you need a delimited space where you can interact, yearly. It's here"—looking around, making eye contact—"where we renegotiate trust."



Left: Artist Christian Marclay and curator Lydia Yee. Right: Dealer Roland Augustine.

I'm not sure what was being negotiated at the "intimate" dinner for two hundred cohosted by Tina Brown, Wendi Murdoch, Dasha Zhukova, and Credit Suisse chairman Urs Rohner at the Fondation Beyeler the next evening, but I at least enjoyed the "variation of chocolate with raspberries, lychees and paprika" prepared by "Chef, Restaurateur and Author" Ivo Adam, and the iteration of Christian Marclay's *Shuffle* performed by Maya Homburger, Hans Koch, and Okkyung Lee. With so many names inscribed in the glossy menu-catalogue, it was hard to know who was being celebrated, launched, or stuffed in our mouths.

The meal was "in honor of" Marclay, who looked a bit fatigued. "Ever since the video came out it's been a whirlwind of events like this," he said, before pausing for a photo op with

Zhukova. The schizophrenic dinner also doubled as a plug for Zhukova and Murdoch's new Pandora-inspired website, Art.sy. Developed by Carter Cleveland, a photogenic twenty-four-year-old Princeton grad ("our Mark Zuckerberg," they called him), the site functions as an "aggregation system" that divvies up art according to cross-referenced "attributes" ("Pictures Generation"; "New York School"; images "with cows in it," according to *The Observer*), and lets viewers browse those works that have been lucky enough to get uploaded into the "genome." Giacometti was notably absent from the iMac demo; Aaron Young was not. It's an addictive-looking, pajama-friendly environment with some press-release "context" to give it an "educational" veneer. (A cynic might argue that learning is really about the acquisition of new stupidities, not just a perpetual filling-in-the-blanks.) The site appears to privilege more saleable works, i.e., "2D" things with high-contrast graphics: Warhol will continue to reign even in the twenty-first-century art school/mall. It seemed an incongruous match for Marclay, whose twenty-four-hour video *The Clock*, probably the most celebrated work of the past year, is the kind of art the site seems least prepared to apprehend.



Left: Dealer Burkhard Riemschneider. Right: *Newsweek* and *Daily Beast* editor Tina Brown with Eva Chow.

So maybe someday people won't have to go to art fairs or galleries or leave their art-filled houses at all. Though if they do, they can always get the iPhone app. One form of capitalist streamlining is integrated into or maybe overwrites another, the anesthetic ceremonies of the "art festival," as Jack Smith called it, blending or giving way to the anesthetic ritual of the swipe-and-pinch. Thank goodness we lose all that "intimidating" sociality along the way.

I boarded the 6 tram with Will Ferrell and the Rubells and headed back toward the Messeplatz. Art Basel has its "moments," one might point out, but there are all these *people* to talk to and

unwieldy things to manage and at some point your Robert Kinmont *Source Support* is leaking all over the floor and the Swiss have swept up all the cigarette ashes under your vintage David Hammons chandelier and you're bussing the cheeks of total strangers in the streets and you realize you've been too long at the fair.

And it's time to go home.

— David Velasco



Left: Dealer Alex Logsdail. Right: Dealer Lisa Spellman.



Left: Artist Gardar Eide Einarsson. Right: Artists Nina Beier and Simon Dybbroe Møller.



Left: Dealer Kristina Kite and artist Kaari Upson. Right: Dealer Isabella Bortolozzi.



Left: Dealer Eivind Furnesvik. Right: Dealer David Zwirner.



Left: Kunsthalle Basel president Peter Handschin. Right: Dealer Jan Mot.



Left: ICA London director Gregor Muir. Right: Dealer Orly Benzacar.

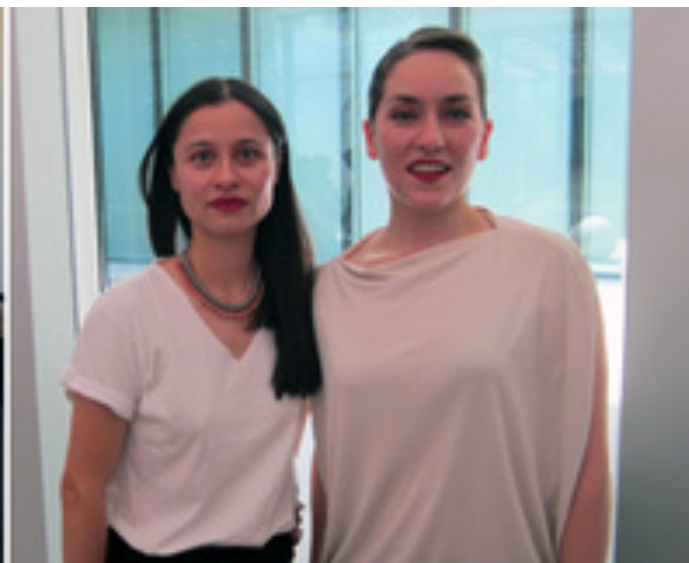




Left: Artist Angela Bulloch. Right: Dealer Kamel Mennour.



Left: Dealer Patrick Seguin. Dealer Nathalie Karg.



Left: Dealers Fabienne Stephan and Mari Spirito. Right: Artist Mai-Thu Perret (left).