

DIARY

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

June 16, 2012 • Basel • Linda Yablonsky at the 43rd edition of Art Basel



Left: Paul Schimmel, chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, with dealer Larry Gagosian. Right: Architect David Chipperfield with artist Peter Fischli and Serpentine codirector Julia Peyton-Jones. (All photos: Linda Yablonsky)

AT 6 PM on Monday, June 11, the sun is still high over the Messeplatz in Basel, and we're two hours into the opening of Art Unlimited, the kickoff event for Art Basel 43. In his inaugural turn as Unlimited curator, Swiss Institute director Gianni Jetzer has set in motion a fair that will prove big, brand-conscious, and bonkers.

Half the convention center plaza is fenced off for the construction of new buildings, while the Schaulager museum, closed for renovation, takes up more real estate with a satellite space designed to look like home by Herzog & de Meuron. There's no one in it, but outside Hall 1, the alley is clogged with fairgoers, as many coming out as going in. "Once you see the Paula Cooper portrait by Rudolf Stingel," says dealer Dominique Lévy, "it's impossible to think about anything else."

But there is plenty to see, or gawk at. Damián Ortega's multistory *Architecture Without Architects*, a weirdly delicate collection of found furniture suspended from the ceiling, is the first work in a show dedicated to absurdly large gestures and overweening ambitions. "See the Laura Owens, says Nasher Sculpture Center director Jeremy Strick. "It's a joy." Further in, viewers pack the room containing Richard Phillips's noirish, sex bomb video portrait of Lindsay Lohan, transfixed by a work many claim to loathe. "It's meant to be exploitative," Phillips says, as a dapper Ryan McGinley saunters past. "You see her past, her present, and her future," Phillips adds. "It's giving me chills to think about it."



Left: Art advisor Sandy Heller and collector Dasha Zhukova. Right: Artists Ryan McGinley and Richard Phillips.

Dealer Sean Kelly speeds by Franz West's enormous bubble gum–pink twist of intestinal tubes, and I come abreast of the Cooper gallery's awesome Stingel. It's truly poignant. "He wanted to make a big statement," says gallery director Steve Henry, noting that the black-and-white image of a young, wistful Cooper has moved several people to tears. I wonder if François Pinault, who reportedly paid \$3 million to take it home, is one of them.

High-concept installation rules the day, but this sixty-one-project Unlimited includes enough films and obsessive text works that require close reading to give the show a modicum of intimacy and restraint. Some of the evening's dinners, in fact, take place on a much grander scale.

At the Teufelhof Atelier, dealers Eva Presenhuber, Sadie Coles, Gavin Brown, Lisa Spellman, and Toby Webster combine forces for one gargantuan feast, while Barbara Gladstone, Monika Sprüth, and Philomene Magers receive their 250 guests at the Villa Wenkenhof, a vast eighteenth-century suburban estate. During cocktails on the villa's terrace, collectors from New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, Brussels, and London outnumber the artists and curators

present, who are speaking not of Art Unlimited but Documenta 13, which had opened a few days before.



Left: Artists Carroll Dunham and Damián Ortega. Right: Dealers Steve Henry and Paula Cooper.

When dinner breaks up, Colección Jumex director Patrick Charpenel brings me to a party that the Tanya Leighton and Monclova galleries are giving at Ladybar, a new competitor for the crowds that return to the Kunsthalle Basel garden every night of fair week like swallows to Capistrano. This place is thick with sweaty revelers rushing the bars in the former bordello. It's mostly a young crowd, though Maja Hoffmann slips in around midnight, as Jetzer emerges from the darkness on the patio, where he is getting a breath of air. "I didn't think it would be appropriate to experiment with the first one," Jetzer says of his show, though some might consider his insertions of the subtle into the bombastic a radical move.

It's raining when Tuesday comes, and umbrella-carrying VIPs jam the doors of Hall 2, impatient to get in for the 11 AM opening. After a brief stop at the Ramada's thirty-first-floor Bar Rouge for the breakfast launch of the *BMW Art Guide by Independent Collectors*—a kind of Michelin guide to publicly accessible private collections that no one ever thought of doing before—it's time to hit the fair. A class war is brewing. Thanks to a new, two-tiered system meant to separate the serious from the speculative, VIPs have been awarded either black cards or purple ones. Those holding the black have four extra hours to spend their money over two full days before Thursday's public opening. If the purple crowd is grumbling, dealers are happy to have their best clients to themselves, free of pesky advisors or intrusive auction house specialists. And these people mean business.

On the ground floor, occupied largely by galleries selling secondary works priced in the

millions, going into the dealers' stands is like sitting down to tables at the World Series of Poker. The stakes are high and the players are not in the game just for fun.



Left: Collector Eli Broad with dealer Shaun Caley Regen. Right: Stedelijk director Ann Goldstein with dealer Matthew Marks.

L&M Arts, installed with all white artworks, is to my eye the best-looking booth on the floor. Competition there is fierce, as Sarah Watson and Lévy parry clients vying for the same work. Wandering into Gagosian, I find an early van Gogh painting of two rats hanging in a room with Warhols and Picassos. Outside it, LA MoCA curator Paul Schimmel pulls Larry Gagosian's coat about a Richard Hamilton show he's bringing to the museum. "Let's have lunch," the dealer says. "It's impossible to talk here."

I'm waylaid by the line of 1980s Andrew Masullo paintings and collages hanging on an outside wall of Doris Ammann's booth. Pauline Karpidas, touring the fair with dealer Curt Marcus, says she bought five of these gems during a studio visit with Thomas Ammann back in the day, when I bet she didn't have to pay the €14,000 some are going for now. Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset appear in Victoria Miro's booth upstairs and bring me to the new works they've installed in a gray-walled room of Emmanuel Perrotin's space, opposite the Cosima von Bonin missile pointed at it from Galerie Neu.

The clock strikes three and the purple-card people are in the house. Toby Webster is so busy writing up sales I can't even get close, while five different people press Casey Kaplan about a Garth Weiser sold early on. Lebanese collector Tony Salame is just as insistent, pleading with Michele Maccarone to sell him an Alex Hubbard and a Carol Bove that others have on reserve. Gavin Brown's booth is a riot: Rob Pruitt's "dinosaur dung" sculpture on the floor, Sturtevant's daisy chain of plastic sex dolls against a wall, Alex Katz paintings on another, Urs

Fischer tables in between, and Hope Atherton ceramic bowls on top.



Left: Art Unlimited curator Gianni Jetzer. Right: Art Basel codirector Marc Spiegler with dealer Tanya Bonakdar.

My dogs barking, I sink into Tim Blum and Jeff Poe's couch. Their booth is restful; everything's sold. Andrew Kreps says to come back on Thursday, when the fruit and vegetables that Darren Bader has placed on pedestals will be cut up for a salad. I'm hungry now, ready for the dinner that Eva Presenhuber is giving for Doug Aitken, the sole focus of her booth. On my way out of the fair, I pass Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner, who sum it all up in a single pronouncement. "We bought a lot," Westreich says. "It's the end of the day and we're broke!"

Wednesday night brings the opening of Paul Sietsema's show at the Kunsthalle. I'm missing Kathryn Andrews's performance at Jens Hoffmann's Art Parcours, but the stately Sietsema show makes a fine prelude to the zap-pow dinner that Dasha Zhukova, Tina Brown, Credit Suisse CEO Urs Rohner, and Hollywood talent agent Bryan Lourd are giving at the Fondation Beyeler. Brown isn't there—her plane stalled on the tarmac in New York—but two hundred other swells are seated in the central gallery for a conversation on the future of museums between architect Rem Koolhaas—the designer of Zhukova's new Garage Center for Contemporary Art building in Moscow's Gorky Park—and Hans Ulrich Obrist. It's almost unfathomable to everyone, except perhaps to architects Zaha Hadid and David Chipperfield, who are in the audience.

"I loved it," says dealer David Maupin, the lone thumbs-upper in a crowd that threw Tobias Meyer, Simon de Pury, Alberto Mugrabi, Ann Philbin, John Elderfield, Richard Chang, and Michael Ringier together with Francesco Vezzoli, Tracey Emin, and Gagosian, whose dance party for his artists in Unlimited was going on without him in a chandeliered barn on the other

side of town. “I bought a Picasso today,” Emin says, showing me a cell phone photo of a sculpture about the size of a fingernail.



Left: Dealer Nicky Verber. Right: New Museum associate director Masimilliano Gioni and High Line Art curator Cecilia Alemani.

“*You!*” Chipperfield exclaims when he sees Massimiliano Gioni. Chipperfield was only recently appointed director of the Venice architectural biennale that opens in a couple of months, and he can’t help but envy the time Gioni has to prepare his biennial of art set for next year. “I walk in and I see tape on the floor that you put there,” he says in mock anger. “You have time and money. I have nothing.” Gioni doesn’t miss a beat. “If it makes you feel any better,” he says, “I paid for the tape myself.”

The Kunsthalle is rocking when we get there. The dinner for Sietsema is winding up in the side room, while outside in the garden, Jay Jopling, Matthew Higgs, and hundreds of others are saying God knows what, but David Nolan is still doing business with a client.

And it isn’t over yet. On Thursday, I meet dealer Alexander Hertling at Theater Basel for Robert Wilson’s staging of *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*. The show stars the artist, Willem Dafoe, and Antony, who composed the songs. No one else we know is in the sold-out house. Backstage after the show, Antony calls it a “suggestive scatter,” a term that also describes my week at the fair. “No one cares about art,” Shafrazi had said. “They only want to know the myth.”

On Friday, back at JFK, those words ring in my ears when I tell an immigration agent I’ve been in Basel. “You were at that art fair, weren’t you!” he exclaims. “That’s the big one, right? People have been coming through from there all day. I’ll tell you, if I had any money, I’d put it in art.” He stamps my passport. “Welcome home,” he says. “Have a nice day.”



Left: Dealer Lawrence Luhring with collector Peter Brant. Right: Dealers Alex Logsdail and Nicholas Logsdail.



Left: Dealer Alex Hertling with artist Nikolas Gambaroff and dealer David Lewis. Right: Artist Andro Wekua.



Left: Collectors Ethan Wagner and Thea Westreich. Right: Curator Nicolas Trembley.



Left: Dealer Howard Read with collector Jane Holzer. Right: Jeffrey Deitch, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.



Left: Dealer Johann König with collector Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo. Right: Curator John Elderfield.



Left: Dealer Philomene Magers. Right: Dealers Monika Sprüth and Barbara Gladstone.



Left: Dealers Sarah Watson and Dominique Lévy. Right: Artist Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili, Carey Hart, and Art Production Fund codirector Yvonne Force Villareal.



Left: Artist Francesco Vezzoli. Right: White Columns director Matthew Higgs with dealer Andrew Hamilton.



Left: Art Basel codirector Annette Schönholzer. Right: Collectors Cardiff Loy and Alan Hergott.



Left: Architect Zaha Hadid with dealer Kenny Schachter. Right: Artist Tracey Emin.



Left: Tate Modern director Chris Dercon. Right: Dealers Victoria Miro and Cristian Alexa.



Left: Mary Moore and Gregor Muir, director of the ICA London. Right: Artist Doug Aitken.



Left: *Pin-Up* editor Felix Burrichter. Right: Kunsthalle Basel associate curator Fabian Shoeneich, artist Paul Sietsema, and Kunsthalle Basel director Adam Szymczyk.



Left: Consultant Jonathan Crockett and PressRoomGroup director Alan Lo. Right: Artist Ryan Gander with dealer Tanya Leighton.



Left: Dealer Daniele Balice with collectors Elhan and Tony Salame. Right: Dealer Doris Amman.



Left: Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin. Right: Dealer Cornelia Grassi with collector Igor da Costa.



Left: Dealer Jeff Poe. Right: Artist Pierre Huyghe.



Left: Colección Jumex director Patrick Charpenel and Mariana Charpenel. Right: Architect Rem Koolhaas.



Left: Artist Melvin Edwards with Nasher Sculpture Center curator Catherine Craft and dealer Alexander Gray. Right: Collector Ulla Dreyfus.



Left: Artist Payam Sharifi with collectors Shelley Fox Aarons and Phil Aarons. Right: Artist Ragnar Kjartansson.



Left: Artist Marina Abramović. Right: Art advisor Mark Fletcher with Sotheby's head of contemporary art Tobias Meyer.



Left: Artists Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen. Right: Curator Vito Schnabel.

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