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[How Has Art Basel Affected Miami's Art Scene?](#)

By [Evelyn McDonnell](#), December 9, 2008

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When [Art Basel](#) was imported to Miami Beach from Switzerland in 2002, the annual visual arts fair raised the profile of Miami's already thriving creative community. But now that Basel is booming, and has become a lucrative international feeding frenzy for collectors, some of the locals are feeling left behind. What's next for them, and for Basel?

Michael Loveland turns everyday commerce into art. He cuts billboards into pieces, then places them sideways. “Buffalo Tiger’s Everglades Rides.” “Salon de Beaute.” “Immigration parking.” These are signs of Miami, Loveland’s home, recontextualized, pop art gone punk. Loveland could be the next art star to emerge from a city that’s produced more than its share this decade. The only problem: For the last few years, [Diana Lowenstein Fine Arts](#), the gallery that represents Loveland, has been shut out of Art Basel Miami Beach, the colossal art fair that has become synonymous, some say unfairly so, with the rise of the Miami art scene.

It was just six years ago that Art Basel -- the annual Swiss-based gathering of collectors, dealers, curators, artists and art lovers that has, since 1970, been visual art’s biggest European trade show, rivaling the Venice Biennale -- changed the landscape of the art world by opening its first satellite fair in Miami. Corporate owners Messe Schweiz were, in part, drawn by Miami’s emerging role as a contemporary art center. “The greater Miami area has a lively art scene, strong museums and magnificent private collections, and is therefore an interesting destination for art lovers,” says Art Basel Miami Beach (ABMB) co-director Marc Spiegler. But as the fair returns to the Miami Beach Convention Center from December 4-7, some denizens of the host city are grumbling that Basel has neglected some of the gallerists, artists and curators who helped make it a success.

“It hurts a lot not to be included,” says Diana Lowenstein, who for years was an official participant in both the Swiss and Miami fairs. This year, she will be presenting her artists at two of the leading satellite events that have sprung up during Basel week, as well as at her own gallery in the Miami district of Wynwood. “Without discrediting other art fairs and their importance, Art Basel Miami Beach is the best fair, and not being able to participate, after past years of being a participant, restricts my contacts and communication with many international collectors who often do not make it to the satellite fairs.”



Michael Loveland

in his studio in Miami.

THE NEW MODEL Rarely do art and commerce merge as spectacularly as they do during the week when Miami and Miami Beach open their doors for artists and buyers (literally -- among Basel's most coveted invitations are those to the home of collectors Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz). It's hard to overstate the success of a fair that has quickly become second only to its parent in terms of prestige. And some go so far as to say that it is the most influential, fun and lucrative of all the world fairs. "It has become the new model for other cities hosting art fairs," says Bonnie Clearwater, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami.

Besides, perhaps, Messe Schweiz, no one has benefited more from Baselmania than the South Florida art scene. There are some, like Wynwood gallerist Kevin Bruk, who provocatively says that Basel "created the scene." Certainly, the city's collectors, museums, gallerists and artists have been thrust onto the international stage like never before. Even those who have become disappointed with the politics surrounding Basel praise the impact of the fair. "Art Basel put us in the eyes of the curators," says Lowenstein. "It gave us a fantastic opportunity to be able to attract these people all year round." Of course, any affair consummated as quickly, vigorously and noisily as that between a revered institution and a new-world dynamo is bound to leave a trail of tears.

ROGUE'S GALLERY Fred Snitzer is at the center of the connection between Basel and the Miami art scene -- and the controversy. In the more than three decades since the Philadelphia native opened a gallery in Miami, he has become a nurturer of the city's young talent, not only representing them as a dealer, but teaching artists their craft at the New World School of the Arts. Snitzer has helped lead Hernan Bas, Naomi Fisher, Bhakti Baxter, Norberto Rodriguez, José Bedia and Michael Vasquez, among other bright

lights, to esteemed careers. He is effusive about the city's "pool of very talented young artists," as he puts it. "Miami is like Paris in the '20s, or New York in the '40s: There's this chemistry of a mixture of first-generation cultures. When you get lots of people from lots of different places in the same place vying for the same dollar, there's a cultural pool and edge to things that just spawns artists."

At the turn of this century, galleries like Snitzer's and Lowenstein's, alternative art spaces like the House and Locust Projects, museums such as MOCA and the Bass, and globe-trotting collectors like the Rubells and Martin Margulies were tapping into fervent Miami activity. "There was a complex underground scene that existed for a long time," says Carlos Betancourt, a Miami artist also repped by Lowenstein. Standing in his ground-floor bayfront Miami Beach studio, surrounded by the items of history and kitsch that often decorate his photographic tableaux, he cites a long list of modern artists who worked in Miami: Morris Lapidus, Christo, Keith Haring, Ana Mendieta, the Arquitectonica architecture firm. "Because of the light, and the idea you can come here and be whatever you want," Betancourt says. "It's a place of living culture. People live life here as art."

Officially scheduled to make its debut in the fall of 2001, but derailed by the World Trade Center attacks, the Art Basel Miami Beach fair launched in 2002 was a smashing success. That year, four Miami galleries had booths in the Convention Center: Snitzer, Lowenstein, the Ambrosino Gallery and the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery featured many works by Florida and Latin American artists, as did other exhibitors (Betancourt was repped by Robert Miller in the '02 Basel, for example). Tapping into the talents, and the wealth, of the Americas was one of Basel's goals in Miami -- and it succeeded wildly.

"It was so beautiful at Art Basel at the beginning," says Betancourt. "It got excitement in the community." Betancourt's rococo, Caribbean pop art is now found in major museums' collections. He hangs out with Hollywood celebrities like Jennifer Aniston and has been dubbed one of *People* magazine's 50 Most Beautiful People. "Basel made my career," says the artist. In another success story, the Fred Snitzer-hosted first solo show by artist Hernan Bas at the premiere Basel drew major figures like gallerist Jeffrey Deitch and sold out. The 32-year-old Bas has now been collected and shown worldwide, including in the Whitney Biennial. "I don't think that it's coincidental that success has happened the years Basel has been here," he says. "I've grown up alongside the city." The art market was exploding, and Basel Miami was its supernova. Year after year, booth after booth sold out. "The way Basel Miami is different from any other fair is people go here to buy," says Bruk. "It has this unbelievable energy."

The official fair added events and exhibits, such as Design Miami. Two dozen satellite fairs sprouted around it, including such crucibles of new talent as NADA, Scope and Pulse. Collectors opened their spaces, and museums launched important new shows. Now drawing 45,000 visitors to town, Basel has been such a boon to Miami Beach that the city gave Messe Schweize a stake in the convention center, in return for a three-year commitment from the fair.

But increasingly left out of the excitement are some of the very Miami galleries that fostered the local art scene. In 2008, Fred Snitzer and Kevin Bruk are the only Miami galleries being presented inside the convention center, and, as part of the Art Nova focus on emerging artists, and compared to other exhibitors, Bruk's is a smaller (albeit important) booth. The Parisian gallery Emmanuel Perrotin opened a Miami space in 2005 -- another boon to the city -- and is also in the fair. The David Castillo Gallery will be part of the Art Positions show, a cluster of postal shipping containers on the beach where some of the coolest artwork is presented. But Diana Lowenstein, Bernice Steinbaum and the Ambrosino Gallery have all been shut out of the convention center the past few years.

"I understand and respect the selection committee's decisions," says Lowenstein, whose gallery was represented in Basel Switzerland even before there was a Basel Miami. But, she adds, a sting accompanies the rejection. "Not only the galleries, but the Miami-based artists that these galleries represent, deserve the chance to be seen."

Fred Snitzer, who is on the selection committee and has been in the fair every year, says Basel Miami's success has brought increased competition for a limited number of spots. "There's a vision for the kind of material they want for the fair," he says. "Being rejected is not a message that you show bad art."

Gallery owner Bruk is less kind. "There's only so much that's really good here," he says. "The cream really rises to the top."

But ABMB co-director Spiegler says he stands by his committee: "We have great trust in their decisions."



Carlos Betancourt

in his studio in Miami.

BEYOND BASEL Basel has certainly forced Miami dealers to up their game. Even Lowenstein agrees with that. "We need to build a strong presence and gallery system and

discipline ourselves,” she says. “It will be nice to see in the following years the inclusion of more galleries, even if not mine.”

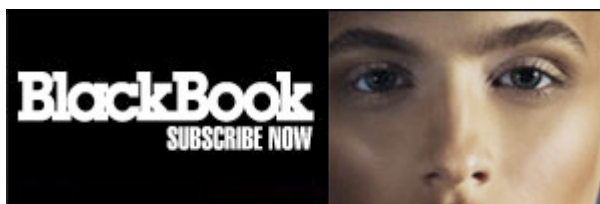
Whatever vision the fair is aiming for, during the past few years the art presented inside the convention center has frequently been eclipsed by the activities outside it -- by the work presented at thriving satellite fairs Scope and Pulse (Lowenstein will have booths in both this year), or in the galleries themselves.

“Art in general has to keep itself in check of becoming too elitist. Then it misses the point,” says Betancourt. His work will not be in the convention center this year, but he is one of several local artists whose studios will be visited on Saturday as part of the official schedule, and he has a new work, *The Supper*, which will hang on Lowenstein’s walls.

Few would agree with Kevin Bruk that Basel created the Miami art scene. “Art Basel recognized the fact that Miami was already on the ascent as an international art center,” MOCA director Clearwater says. “It validated the activities that were going on here.”

The year-round ramifications of Baselmania on Miami are monumental. Since the fair came to town, the Miami Art Museum lured a new director, Terence Riley, from New York City’s MoMA, and is planning a new home on Biscayne Bay designed by Herzog & de Meuron. MOCA is also expanding. Tens of thousands of people now flock to Wynwood year-round for the monthly gallery walk. Artists once had to leave Miami to get recognized. Now, “it seems like people are actually moving here to have an art career,” Bas marvels. “That’s something you would never have heard before: What, you’re going to air-brush flamingos on T-shirts?”

Miami native Michael Loveland says he moved home in 2001, after eight years in New York, and has been making sculptures out of urban artifacts ever since. During the ’03 Basel, he and painter Raymond Saá pulled their art around town in a fruit cart they’d built, and the guerrilla project got great press. But despite his growing stature as one of Miami’s brightest new talents, Loveland has still not been given the Basel seal of approval. “I think I’ve done really well,” he says. “But would it be nice to be invited to the big ball? Absolutely.”



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