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Art Basel Invasion!

Screw the recession. The nation's number one art fest is bigger than ever.



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Artist Alette Simmons-Jimenez has toiled mightily on her ambitious project "Giants in the City" to prepare for this year's Art Basel, which runs from December 4 through 7. For months, she and nine others have been designing and constructing 30-foot-tall inflatable sculptures that will be lighted after dark, creating a whimsical display in Bayfront Park to counterpoint Miami's glorious skyline. "We have been laboring furiously since last February to raise funds for this ourselves," sighs Simmons-Jimenez, a member of Wynwood's Artformz Alternative. "This has been a grassroots effort and done for the benefit of the community alone. We had to raise nearly \$65,000 for it. At times it's been very depressing, but we were unwilling to quit. We told each other that we would do this if we had to blow these things up and celebrate with a cooler of beer by ourselves." The giants will include a whale sprouting from the earth by José Bedia, a gargantuan bottle of dish soap with "Joy" emblazoned across it by Michelle Weinberg, and a hot-pink lighthouse by Gustavo Acosta.

Simmons-Jimenez and her cohorts will switch on the lights at 7 p.m. next Tuesday. "We are having a concert on the green with local bands and inviting people to bring their picnic baskets and blankets to celebrate the affair." America might be mired in recession and gloom, but this year's Art Basel celebration will be bigger and more diverse than ever. Organizers of the Pulse, NADA, and Scope fairs, three of the largest events at Baselpalooza, all cite an increase in participant galleries. And the main event at the Miami Beach Convention Center will boast more than 220 elite galleries and upward of 2,000 artists from across the globe, a 10 percent upswing from 2007. Names such as Mark Rothko, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp, Damien Hirst, Takashi Murakami, and Richard Prince, as well as stellar emerging talent, will be on display.

Now in its seventh year, Art Basel Miami Beach has become the Western Hemisphere's largest commercial art event and has far outstripped its Swiss progenitor in scope and size. Nearly a thousand visiting dealers will add to the frenetic four-day extravaganza at 20-plus fairs scattered throughout Wynwood and Miami Beach. (Details for some of the biggest events appear at the end of this story and at miaminewtimes.com.) "The public and media attention this year has been better than ever," says Bob Goodman, South Florida spokesman for Basel. "We are going to have a free opening-night concert December 3 near Art Positions on the Beach. We will also be offering movie screenings, artists' talks, public art projects, and many, many activities the public can ... enjoy for free."

Outside the convention center, there will be several bleeding-edge activities, such as the Video Art Lounge at the Miami Beach Botanical Garden. The beachside Art Positions "container village" at Collins Park between 21st and 22nd streets will house 20 top-drawer upstart galleries, as well as daily performances including Christian Jankowski in "Above All, I'm an Artlover" Friday, December 5, at 8 p.m., which will be something

like an art market Home Shopping Network. The next day, artist Yoshua Okon will weigh in with "Art-Wrestling," during which the public can compete in a contest to win work from Art Positions galleries. The slogan: "Transform your muscle power into acquisition power."

Inside the convention center, there will be a mind-numbing arsenal of work by artists ranging from veritable newcomers such as Anj Smith and Tomasz Kowalski to historical figures such as Meret Oppenheim, Francis Picabia, Robert Smithson, and Marcel Duchamp. The Art Nova sector of the fair will include creations from more than 60 young galleries. In a gathering that sponsors call the Art Salon, there will be hourly artists' talks, book signings, and roundtable discussions.

Eighteen galleries will participate in something termed Art Kabinett (sort of a curio spotlighting an individual). Each will cordon off a section in a booth, allowing visitors to explore an extended body of work from a specific artist. New York's Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, for instance, will feature among the most complete collections of legendary Dadaist Duchamp (1887-1968). Among the offerings will be an edition of his famous *Boîte-en-valise* — a suitcase that contains small-scale reproductions of his work — and an example of the historic Green Box (1934). On the surrounding walls will hang a selection of posters that Duchamp designed and produced.

Gallery Lelong (New York/Paris/Zurich) will show Yoko Ono's *touch me III* (2008), the third in a suite of sculptural works. Laid out across a long table will be a female body created in silicone and separated into sections that are presented inside open compartments resembling specimen boxes. At the table's head will be a bowl filled with water and the following instructions: "Wet your index and middle fingers to touch the body parts." The gallery informs that Ono hopes to help the viewer connect with the female experience.

Even more unconventional will be new work by Peruvian artist William Cordova, who has strong Miami ties and tinkers with found materials and discarded consumer goods. The Arndt & Partner gallery (Berlin/Zurich) will debut Cordova's installation *Moby Dick (Tracy)* (after Ishmael, chico de cano y Carl Hampton), which presents a jalopy the artist sawed in half and converted into living room furniture. A couch, book racks, drawings, and a heater are all part of his ramshackle environment. "More and more, fairs are moving toward a curatorial environment," observes Nina Johnson, director of Wynwood's edgy Gallery Diet. "You are going to see more galleries at fairs focusing on one- or two-person shows rather than putting out all the stock from their spaces. People will be able to appreciate a cohesive body of work rather than the way they did it years past, when everyone seemed to be rushing through in 30 seconds and thinking, 'What can I buy to take home?'" Johnson adds.