

Art Review

Feature

Art of Survival, Survival of Art

Art Miami Relocates, Reschedules and Reinvents Itself to Tap the December Art Fair Revelry

By Angie Hargot

It's not often that an art fair becomes a movement in itself. But, with its drastic changes this year, Art Miami has effectively done this.

The 18th Art Miami, in the words of its director, Ilana Vardy, is "a whole new fair."

Effectively, the Art Miami transformation concentrates the international art world's attention on Miami for just a few weeks every year.

First, there's the new location. Art Miami traded in its old digs at the Miami Beach Convention Center for a new home in Wynwood.

That change goes hand-in-glove with its new schedule: Dec. 5- 9, which was moved up a month earlier to coincide with the mega-fair Art Basel.

The annual art fair eliminated both its Director's Choice artist and the Caribbean Crosscurrents program for lack of space.

Art Miami upped its admission from \$12 to \$15 per day and eliminated its Free Fridays "until we can measure how the December attendees react to Art Miami," Vardy said. "We were always very familiar with our January visitors and their responses to the fair, but we anticipate the December audience to be quite different. Our hope, of course, is that we will blend the two audiences and increase visibility for our exhibitors even more. We have a very large waiting list and could have filled the show twice over."

SLICE, a small section of the fair featuring work from 10 galleries, will be sticking around, and Vardy predicts it will be "strong" with "some really dynamic and provocative cutting-edge works."

They include: Apama Mackey, from Houston; Envoy Gallery and Anna Kustera, both from New York; Plus Gallery, from Denver; and De Soto, from Los Angeles.

The organization rescheduled the fair out of general necessity: Art buyers visiting Art Miami arrived a little tapped-out after Art Basel, and the galleries pressured the group to move the fair to help their sales.

Art Miami isn't alone – several other fairs also come to Miami and Miami Beach in December to capitalize on Art Basel's popularity.

"Along with a diverse group of well-known international galleries, larger booth spaces and a substantially larger venue than the other satellite fairs, Art Miami certainly will be an important addition to the group, and one that will not be ignored by the thousands of visitors coming here in December," Vardy said.

The fair also revamped its floor plan and added an on-site restaurant, lounges and bars.

"It's important to recognize what sets Art Miami apart from the other fairs in December," Vardy said. "Like Art Basel Miami Beach, we present a broader range of artwork than the other fairs. Originally conceived to fill the niche for those galleries presenting primarily mid-career contemporary and modern art, Art Miami succeeded in attracting many top cutting-edge galleries as well."

Vardy said the new location of Art Miami's 100,000-square-foot temporary structure at N.W. Second Avenue and 22nd Street was "probably the largest piece of land available in the Art District."

Still, some members of the local art scene aren't exactly thrilled with Art Miami's reinvention.

"We're very disappointed," said Jacklyn B., co-owner of Damian B. Contemporary Art Center, located at 282 N.W. 36th St. in Wynwood. After four years of showing with Art Miami, the gallery was not selected this year because fair organizers said had too many international galleries would be showing for the event.

"This period of art in Miami is a great event for the city — it's a great moment. But as a gallery owner, we are out of place," Jacklyn B. said. "Everybody doesn't have time in one week to discover everything."

"Approximately 30 percent of the show will be New York galleries," Vardy said. "This was not intentional on our part, but there are so many important galleries in New York and our selection committee felt this group — along with a very good group of West Coast galleries — will serve to anchor the fair. There will also be great representation of galleries from Europe, especially Germany, but this first Art Miami will be noticeably more American than anything else."

Alette Simmons-Jimenez, owner of Artformz Alternative at 130 N.E. 40th St. in the Miami Design District, agrees that with "the 2,000 fairs that come to town [during Art Basel] — enough is enough," she said. But she believes if not for the move, "Art Miami would phase out completely — if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

"It's good for the area," Simmons-Jimenez added. "They showcase local galleries. The high-end collectors have a lot to do and another fair [in January] is not on their agenda." Simmons-Jimenez is planning an open-call for emerging local artists, mid-career artists and professionals working without gallery representation. Information can be found at the gallery's Web site, www.artformz.net.

"We're not a traditional gallery," Simmons-Jimenez said. "We're an artists-run open collective. The goal is to give a voice to independent artists." The open call will culminate in a juried exhibition running concurrently with both Art Basel and Art Miami. The exhibition is working in conjunction with Miami Exposed, a gallery show that runs Nov. 10 to Jan. 5.

Simmons-Jimenez said the aim of the juried exhibition is to "showcase not just the city's hotels, restaurants and beaches, but the local talent right here in our backyard."

According to Vardy, the new Art Miami in December will retain just 10 percent of the January exhibitors.

"That's why I say it is essentially a brand new fair," she said. "Hopefully our loyal supporters will appreciate this evolution even more, and the 30,000-plus visitors new to Art Miami will value the unique fair we will present.... That's my hope for the new Art Miami."

While the reinvention of Art Miami heralds a transformation in the South Florida art scene, Vardy hopes the changes will be well-received. But only time will tell how the new Art Miami will fare with its supporters.

“We are very sad this year,” Jacklyn B. said. “In Wynwood, we fight every day with very bad conditions. The Miami public comes to our space all year, but during Basel, there are too many competing events. With all of the satellite fairs and parties every night, there’s no time. But what can we do?”

Art Miami will be held on Northwest Second Avenue between 22nd and 23rd streets in Wynwood from Dec. 5- 9. Admission is \$15 for adults. For more information, visit www.art-miami.com or call 866-727-7953.