

ARTNEWS

‘Can You Make Me 100 More?': Stefan Simchowitz Skypes Into the Bruce High Quality Foundation's Fake Art Competition

By [Nate Freeman](#) Posted 12/07/15 5:15 pm



Stefan Simchowitz, with his fellow judges.
COURTESY BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION

On Friday evening—a few hours after a woman at Art Basel Miami Beach was stabbed multiple times in the neck with an X-Acto knife while walking by the booths, which prompted passersby to dismiss the pooling blood as performance art—the collective Bruce High Quality Foundation was hosting a competition at the Standard, Miami Beach, called “Art Chopped.” It was, as the name suggested, a version of the Food Network program *Chopped*, where contestants are given a few minutes to create a dish from a grab bag of mystery ingredients presented to them. Once time is up, judges taste the food, and if the dish isn’t up to the standards of gourmands, they get “chopped.”

“Art Chopped” is the same as that, but the contestants are making art, which made the proceedings feel a little subversive for a major fair. But then again, when the dominant conversation at the Chinati Foundation and Kickstarter dinner elsewhere in the Standard was concerning the fact that an assailant was attacking random fairgoers while screaming “I had to kill her and two more,” the sense of reality had sort of fallen away, making absurdity welcome.

Heightening that sense of the absurd was the field of judges, which included the notorious dealer Stefan Simchowitz, whose flipping tactics helped create the market for the sort of art being made, and mocked, at “Art Chopped.” He had

Skyped in from his home in Los Angeles (Simchowitz rarely attends art world to-dos) and could be seen on a gigantic screen eating Shabbat dinner with his family while the art-making occurred in Miami.

“Stefan, I know it’s probably a little bit hard for you to hear, but we’re about to start the judging,” said Sean J. Patrick Carney, the Bruce High Quality member doing his best Ted Allen impression as the “Art Chopped” host.

“Loud and clear,” Simchowitz said, stuffing food into his mouth on the feed playing on a television screen.



Seth Cameron and members of the Bruce High Quality Foundation. Courtesy BFA.

The contestants that evening included Rachel Rossin, who turned heads, literally, with her show at Zieher Smith & Horton this fall, which asked attendees to strap on an Oculus Rift headset to view the work; Jillian Mayer, a Miami-based performance artist who will have a solo show at David Castillo Gallery in Wynwood next year; Ray Smith, the token older artist among the predominantly young crowd; and some of the members of Bruce High Quality, which would be considered a conflict of interest if this was meant to be taken seriously whatsoever.

“Oh my God, is someone smoking in here?” said a woman in the back.

Indeed, the Bruce guys (there was only one woman in the large group) were smoking cigarettes as part of their submission entry for this round. Also, Bruce artist Seth Cameron was shirtless and covered in weird drawn-on rashes of some sort.

“I think that’s brilliant,” said Simchowitz.

“It’s about community and drugs and I think it’s brilliant, too,” said fellow judge Casey Jane Ellison, who hosts the web series “Touching the Art.”

“They have officially brought Ultra to Art Basel, which is mad skills,” said another judge, the writer and curator Tiffany Zabłudowicz, referring to Miami’s often debauched Ultra Music Festival.

Another item in the box of materials was a pair of flip flops, which Smith used prominently in the work of art he created.

“This work is called *Stefan: Flip, or Flop?*” he said. “Stefan, what do you think of this?”

Simchowitz, who was feeding his dog, did not respond.

"After voting it appears that Ray, you've been chopped," Carney announced to the crowd. "It was a great shot Ray, and thank you for trying to pander to Stefan."

There was a brief auction to unload Rossin's work, with proceeds going to the Bruce High Quality Foundation University, their nonprofit school in New York. Art advisor Alexander Clark, who was acting as auctioneer, got the bidding up to \$100.

After five minutes of art-making, using materials such as a tote bag and a mini boogie board, Rossin came up with an assemblage she dubbed *Baby Baudrillard*. When asked to explain the name, she said, "It's evident."

"I think she has excelled to a new level of work," Simchowitz said, betraying not a bit of sarcasm (either the guy was being completely serious this whole time, or he possesses a wonderfully dry wit that no one's given him credit for before).

Next up was Mayer, who had managed to make an installation that was actually pretty striking: an iPhone sticking out of a boogie board with a car air freshener dangling from the end.

"I'm pulled between post-Internet and salt life—I don't know if I should get an M.F.A. or go to the beach," she explained.

"I'm going to cry," Ellison said.



Stefan Simchowitz walking around his house. Courtesy Bruce High Quality Foundation.

"Jillian, can you make me 100 more?" Simchowitz said, again with a scary amount of seriousness, as that is the sort of offer he's wont to make. "Actually, what about 200?"

The Bruce guys then presented Cameron with a tote bag on his head, which promptly got them chopped.

Next up was the final round—the career retrospective round—and for materials, Rossin and Mayer were given strange tents featuring the little characters from the kids movie *Minions*, only it said “Les Buddies,” because that’s what it’s called in France. Anyway, they both chose to wear the tents as headgear, the judges proclaimed them co-winners, and at this point Simchowitz was walking around his house directing the camera at his art collection and his dogs, perhaps thinking how a stabbing at an art fair might affect his business, or how he just offered a 200-work deal to a young artist in a fake competition via Skype.