

ARTSY

What Sold at Art Basel in Miami Beach

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Installation view of Portia Munson, *The Garden*, 1996. Courtesy of Art Basel.

Toward the end of Art Basel in Miami Beach's VIP preview on Wednesday, as the French dealer Emmanuel Perrotin was making his way back to his bustling booth, he saw a man testing the ripeness of the fair's viral sensation:

Maurizio Cattelan's *Comedian* (2019), a work consisting of a banana duct-taped to the wall. Contrary to the work's title, Perrotin was in no mood for comedy.

"Sir, you cannot touch the art unless you are planning to buy it—this piece costs \$120,000," he said sternly. When the banana-groper feigned surprise at the price, Perrotin snapped back:

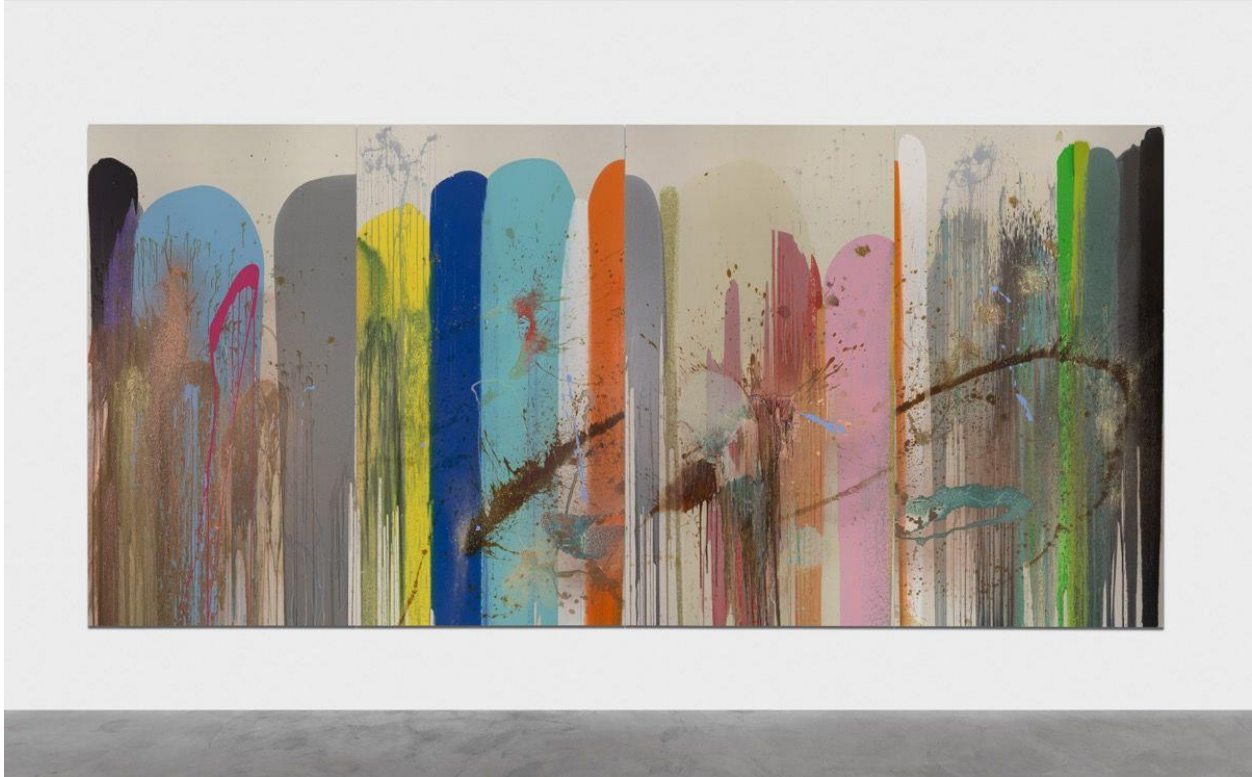
"Yes, you heard me correctly."



Installation view of Maurizio Cattelan, *Comedian*, 2019. Photo by Zeno Zotti. Courtesy of Perrotin.

Three days later, another grabby fairgoer went further still: On Saturday afternoon, performance artist David Datuna removed *Comedian* from the wall, peeled the banana, and ate it. He called the performance *Hungry Artist*. By then, the work had appeared on the cover of the *New York Post*, sparked the trending hashtag #cattelan—where people posted images of various objects taped to walls—and completely sold out. Perrotin sold the three editions of the work for prices between \$120,000 and \$150,000, and both artist’s proofs had been acquired by museums. Perrotin explained that even though his gallery

doesn’t typically disclose prices publicly, in the case of Cattelan’s banana, doing so was crucial to the work’s success. “You’re buying a story,” he explained. “From the moment you buy it, you’re part of the story.”



John M. Armleder, *Etang*, 2019. Photo by Annik Wetter. Courtesy of Art Basel.

Beyond the hunger for Cattelan's *Comedian*, dealers were doing serious business at this year's edition of Art Basel in Miami Beach. In addition to the whopping 269 galleries occupying booths on its main floor, the fair debuted a new sector on the upper level of the convention center, Meridians, featuring really big works by 34 artists.

"Launching Meridians was several years in the making," said Art Basel's director for the Americas, Noah Horowitz. "We wanted to get artists excited about the opportunity to work at that scale, and to get a deeper level of engagement with major collectors and institutions." Large-scale installations by Portia Munson and José Antonio Suárez Londoño found new homes right out of the gate. Munson's piece *The Garden* (1996)—a domestic space stuffed with plastic flowers, decorative floral motifs, and other conventional signifiers of femininity—was being presented by New York's P.P.O.W. It was snapped up during Meridians's preview on Tuesday night by the collectors Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, founders of the art museum and hotel chain 21c, for \$225,000. Subsequent sales from the new sector included an enormous painting by John Armleder, *Stetson* (2019), which Almine Rech sold for an undisclosed price, and all three editions of Woody De Othello's giant yellow sculpture of a box fan, *Cool Composition* (2019), which Jessica Silverman Gallery and Karma sold for \$175,000 apiece.

Installation view of Woody de Othello, *Cool Composition*, 2019, presented by Jessica Silverman Gallery and Karma, at Art Basel in Miami Beach, 2019. Courtesy of Art Basel.

Most dealers I spoke with agreed that even though they hadn't experienced the same sustained buying frenzy as last year's edition of the fair, business had been very good during the VIP

preview. David Castillo, whose namesake gallery is based just a couple blocks away from the Miami Beach Convention Center, sold out his booth during the preview and, by Friday, had switched out many of the works to showcase available inventory.

“Usually there’s a bit of consultation, but this year, collectors came and made decisions on the spot,” Castillo said. “Some people have already paid me, which has never happened before.”

Collectors were paying big sums early and often, with many of the fair’s biggest galleries reporting sales in the seven- and six-figure range. The fair’s biggest sales included:

- Galerie Thaddeus Ropac sold a towering Georg Baselitz bronze sculpture of two blocky figures, *Sing Sang Zero* (2011), for €3.5 million (nearly \$3.9 million) on the fair’s first day. Two days later, it sold an enormous Baselitz painting, *Herdoktorfreud Grüßgott Herbootsmann* (2011), for €1 million (\$1.1 million). The gallery also sold works by Donald Judd from 1991 and 1989 for \$900,000 and \$750,000, respectively; a 2018 charcoal work by Robert Longo for \$750,000; a 1972 Gerhard Richter painting, *Vermalung grau*, for €525,000 (about \$581,000); and a new David Salle painting, *Self-ironing Pants* (2019), for \$300,000.
- Lisson Gallery sold *Quartet*, a 1961 painting by the pioneer of hard-edged abstraction Carmen Herrera, for \$2.5 million. The gallery also sold one of Cory Arcangel’s Photoshop gradient works to a German institution for a price in the range of \$700,000; a new Anish Kapoor mirror work for £625,000 (\$821,000); a 2010 Mary Corse painting for \$300,000; and a new painting by Stanley Whitney, *Blue in the Middle* (2019), for \$250,000.
- Hauser & Wirth sold a mixed-media work by David Hammons, *Untitled (Silver Tapestry)* (2008), for \$2.4 million. It was one of several galleries showing work by Ed Clark, the recently deceased master of abstraction; the gallery sold an untitled 2011 canvas of his for \$475,000. It also found new homes for works by star artists of a younger generation, including Rashid Johnson’s *Untitled Escape Collage* (2019) for \$595,000, Nicolas Party’s *Trees* (2019) for \$385,000, and the Nicole Eisenman painting *Sun In My Eye On The Beach* (2019) for \$165,000.
- Hammer Galleries sold a Marc Chagall painting for over \$2 million.
- Mnuchin Gallery sold Helen Frankenthaler’s 1981 painting *White Joy*, which had an asking price of \$1.65 million, and David Hammons’s iconic *African American Flag* (1990) for \$1.5 million. The gallery also sold a glowing painting by Alma Thomas, *Azaleas* (1969), which had an asking price of \$1.25 million; growing demand for the Washington Color School painter’s work helped Christie’s set a new auction record for her work last month. Mnuchin had devoted a whole wall of its booth to works by the late painter Ed Clark; by the end of the fair’s second day, five pieces of his with asking prices totaling around \$1 million had been sold.
- David Zwirner sold a painting by the British Op artist Bridget Riley for \$1.5 million. Zwirner also sold paintings by Chris Ofili for \$1.1 million and \$850,000; a Donald Judd for \$900,000; and a Carol Bove sculpture for \$550,000. The gallery also sold the two enormous abstract paintings framing the entrance to its booth by Oscar Murillo, who earlier in the week became one of four co-winners of the 2019 Turner Prize.

- Marlborough’s two-artist booth pairing renowned New York figurative painters Alex Katz and Fairfield Porter was a success. The gallery sold multiple works by Katz for prices between \$1 million and \$2 million, and several Porter paintings at prices between \$250,000 and \$750,000.
- White Cube sold an Al Held painting, *B/W & Orange* (1967), for \$950,000. The gallery also sold a new Damien Hirst butterfly wing painting, *Dominion* (2019), for \$750,000; a painting by the Hungarian artist Dóra Maurer, *Overlappings 25* (2005), for €135,000 (nearly \$150,000); and a recent, untitled work by Danh Võ for €120,000 (nearly \$133,000).
- David Kordansky Gallery sold Sam Gilliam’s *Four* (1970), *Upper Red* (1971), and *Untitled* (2018) for \$900,000, \$850,000, and \$600,000, respectively. The gallery also sold the large Jonas Wood painting *Yellow Orchid with Baby Snake* (2019) for \$750,000, and Rashid Johnson’s *Two Standing Broken Men* (2019) for \$475,000.
- Blum & Poe sold a Mark Grotjahn painting for \$750,000, works by Yoshitomo Nara totaling at least \$490,000, and Henry Taylor’s new painting *Selfies* (2019) for \$200,000.
- Cheim & Read sold a Serge Poliakoff work from the 1960s for \$750,000, Milton Resnick’s *Equinox* (1960) for \$350,000, Louise Fishman’s abstract canvas *Line Drive* (2010) for \$275,000, and Lynda Benglis’s glitter, handmade paper, and chicken wire work *Sparkle Pansy* (2017) for \$125,000.
- Xavier Hufkens sold a large-scale Thomas Houseago sculpture for \$650,000, works by Sterling Ruby including a \$600,000 painting and three ceramic pieces for \$50,000 each, a Tracey Emin painting for \$460,000, and three editions of a neon work by Emin, for \$115,000 each.
- Pace Gallery sold an untitled Agnes Martin painting from 1962 for \$1.5 million. The gallery also sold two works from Robert Rauschenberg’s “Urban Bourbon” series of 1988–96, each for nearly \$1 million, to a collection on the West Coast. The gallery sold a new Lee Ufan painting for \$575,000, and Mary Corse paintings from 2000 and 2019 for \$400,000 and \$350,000, respectively. It also placed a \$250,000 painting by recent breakout star Loie Hollowell, *Standing in water* (2019), as a promised gift to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

“Miami continues to grow in importance when it comes to institutional presence,” said Marc Glimcher, the president and CEO of Pace Gallery. “The new Rubell Museum was an awesome example of how private collectors are making art accessible to everyone.”

The opening of Don and Mera Rubell’s new 100,000-square-foot museum in Miami’s Allapattah neighborhood was last week’s marquee event—taped banana notwithstanding. The complex’s inaugural installation showcases prized and imposing works from the collectors’ holdings of some 7,200 works. It underlined to what extent Miami’s community of collectors has grown in its aspirations and its numbers.

“The Rubells opening their massive new space has really inspired younger or newer collectors to be more ambitious and strategic, to collect artists in depth and early on in their careers when

they really need the support,” said dealer Jasmin Tsou, whose gallery JTT had sold out its booth by Friday afternoon.

In the decades since they left New York for South Florida, and the nearly 20 years since Art Basel arrived in Miami Beach, the Rubells—along with a handful of other mega-collectors like Jorge Pérez and Norman Braman—have helped build a local community of arts supporters. “I’ve been to several collectors’ homes this week for the first time, visiting private collections I’d never seen before that are really ambitious,” Horowitz said. “That’s been a nice counterpoint to the narrative that just a few prominent collectors have been driving the Miami scene. It’s a community that sees itself as culturally progressive, and that’s certainly not something anyone would have said about Miami 20 years ago.”

Miami collectors were making significant purchases at the fair. Pérez Art Museum Miami board president Gregory C. Ferrero bought one of the Belkis Ayón Manso collographs in David Castillo Gallery’s booth for \$50,000, and the gallery also placed a new Vaughn Spann painting, *Messiah* (2019), with a major local collector for \$45,000. Local collectors bought a composition by the German artist Gregor Hildebrandt made of cut-up vinyl for \$43,000 and Sophie von Hellermann’s large painting *Bank Holiday Monday* (2019) for \$28,000, both from Berlin gallery Wentrup.

Many more sales for under \$100,000 or in the lower six digits were reported throughout the fair:

- Paris and Brussels gallery Templon sold two new Kehinde Wiley portrait paintings for \$250,000 each. The gallery also found success with its alcove of works by Senegalese artist Omar Ba, selling four of his works for prices ranging from \$30,000 to \$120,000.
- Marianne Boesky Gallery sold two sculptures by Sanford Biggers for \$115,000 each, as well as multiple pieces by Allison Janae Hamilton priced around \$9,000.
- Galerie Nathalie Obadia sold the Shirley Jaffe painting *Criss Cross* (1969) for a price between \$100,000 and \$150,000 to St. Louis–based collectors who plan to gift it to the St. Louis Art Museum. The gallery also sold a recent Fiona Rae painting for \$100,000; a mixed-media work by Mickalene Thomas, *Jet Blue #10* (2019), for \$75,000; and a new Benoit Maire diptych for \$60,000.
- In addition to the Portia Munson installation in the Meridians sector, P.P.O.W sold a large Martin Wong storefront trompe l’oeil painting, *Untitled (Poetry Storefront)* (1986), for \$900,000, and one of his portrait paintings from 1984 for \$75,000. The gallery also sold two paintings by Hilary Harkness for \$65,000 and \$35,000, Robin F. Williams’s 2013 painting *Beachsitter* for \$50,000, an Allison Schulnik painting for \$15,000, and a smaller work by Munson for \$12,000.
- Monique Meloche Gallery sold out its two-artist booth featuring Ebony G. Patterson and Maia Cruz Palileo. The works by Patterson sold for \$65,000 each, while pieces by Cruz Palileo went for prices in the range of \$18,000 to \$25,000. One of Patterson’s pieces was acquired by the City of Miami Beach’s brand-new Legacy Purchase Program.

- Chicago's Mariane Ibrahim Gallery sold out its entire booth of works by Amoako Bofo, priced between \$15,000 and \$45,000. The Ghana-born, Austria-based artist's works got a major boost in local visibility when the Rubell Museum opened: He is its inaugural artist in residence, and an entire gallery is devoted to his recent paintings. That may have influenced the public vote in favor of acquiring one of his works for the Miami Beach Legacy Purchase Program.
- Cape Town's Blank Projects sold out its solo booth of paintings by South African artist Cinga Samson, for prices ranging from \$7,500 to \$55,000.
- Tokyo gallery Nanzuka sold out its entire booth of works by Masato Mori—riotously stylized paintings and ceramic sculptures, several of them depicting cartoonish cats—for prices ranging from \$8,000 to \$30,000.

“Dealers are showing works that play to American tastes,” gallerist Nathalie Obadia observed. While there was certainly no shortage of cheerful, bright, and shiny works, even some of the fair's most poignant and thematically challenging works took a maximalist approach.

Jenny Holzer's enormous new painting *Call me* (2019) incorporated text from House Democrats' impeachment investigation of U.S. president Donald Trump, as well as four different types of gold and gold leaf. Hauser & Wirth sold that work for \$400,000 during the VIP preview. While there were overtly political works by Holzer, Hammons, Andrea Bowers, Joyce Kozloff, Faith Ringgold, and others, it didn't seem that the current political crises in the U.S. and elsewhere had any palpable impact on business at the fair. Horowitz had a theory about why that might be.

“Despite the political turmoil here and abroad, the recent U.S. tax reforms have actually made the U.S. in general and Florida in particular very attractive to move to, especially for high-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth individuals,” he said. “Amid the trade wars and uprisings and impeachment scandals, sometimes people just want a break—and Miami is a great place to get that.”

Now Art Basel's attentions turn toward Hong Kong, the site of its next fair in March 2020, where it may be harder to convince high-net-worth individuals to go for a break, given the ongoing pro-democracy demonstrations.