



The Sunshine Economy: Creativity and Commerce During Art Week

By TOM HUDSON
December 2, 2019

Pepe Mar is one of 34 artists chosen to participate in a new section of the actual Art Basel fair. This year will be Mar's second consecutive appearance, and last year was a big success for him. "Last year, I sold all my works that I had at the convention center to one collector," he said.

SPOTLIGHT AND RISING RENTS



Artist Pepe Mar makes his second consecutive appearance at Art Basel Miami Beach this year. After years of renting studio space, he hopes to build a home studio to save on rent.

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Pepe Mar has been part of the South Florida art scene for about 20 years. He came escaping the high cost of living in the San Francisco area during the dot-com bubble boom. Two decades later, Mar finds himself still looking for ways to ward off escalating rents.

Mar's current studio is behind a storefront on a short commercial strip in Miami's Little

River neighborhood. It's a narrow and long rectangular space. He shares it with a fashion designer and it is crowded with their work. Narrow aisles squeeze between desks and tables overflowing with all kinds of stuff that make up the raw materials of Mar's art, including the work that will be featured in a new section of Art Basel Miami Beach.

Mar works with collage, assemblage and other mixed media formats. A few smaller pieces are hung on a wall of his studio. His work for this year's Art Basel is big. It is the size of a large living room and is one of 34 works featured in the Meridians section of the art fair. Mar's contribution is called *Varla TV*. It is an homage to the drag queen Varla, who performed in early 90s South Beach. Varla was painter Craig Coleman. He died in 1994. Mar's work incorporates Coleman's paintings with his own into one massive piece.

The spotlight comes after Mar's first year at Art Basel was a success. Last year, all of his work at the show was sold to a single collector.

"That meant that I was able to pay the rent for this space for a whole year. And then I had money left over to do other things that I had to do," he said.

This time, Mar is not looking for rent money. He plans on moving. He wants to build a studio at his home, in part, to gain more control over his expenses. "You have to look for opportunities, creatively and also economically. You have to try to survive this environment."

David Castillo is the Miami Beach gallery owner showing Mar's work at Art Basel, and looking for buyers. Due to the size of the Mar's spotlight piece, Castillo expects the buyer will be a museum. The asking price is \$85,000, though Castillo said there is a standard 20 percent discount for museums.

The art gallery business model is for the gallery and artist to split the purchase price 50-50, minus any upfront production costs.

But, Castillo said, there's the intangible value for selling at Art Basel. "It is another feather in their art-world cap. It adds to the prestige of their work overall. It adds to their career advancement."