



*Gomide&Co's booth in partnership with Mapa Gallery and art pieces by Habuba Farah. The artist just turned 80 and was one of the Brazilian highlights.*

## The return of Art Basel

By Bianca Cutait

We have reached the end of a new cycle of openings after much closure. Subsequently to months of nervousness and uncomfortable questioning, the art market - immeasurably affected on all sides, had its first consistent advance towards the new normal that we can now live with. Alongside thousands of attendees eager for the physical and personal contact that art fairs provide, Miami Beach Art Basel has finally reasserted itself, boasting a posture of excellence and leaving all eyes, until then almost incredulous, smug with its delivery. The biggest art event in the world has gone through two hiatuses since it began its American edition. The first was right after the September 11 terrorist attacks, and the second was during the pandemic. Even with the sumptuous increase in online sales made through the so-called OVRs (Online Viewing Rooms), the art fairs and auctions managed to maintain the necessary resilience that they created over the months that we were looking for such resilience from all sides.

But what really impressed me in the 2021 edition was not only the aesthetic quality of the works on display, but the posture and ferocity in which this market resurfaced. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have been following the evolution of the market, and adapting to this evolution. In April 2020 I closed the doors of my physical gallery and learned how to make a fully virtual gallery. Like me, many others have gone through this same innovation process, and consequently fairs too. But until Art Basel in Miami proved me wrong, I confess that I had been a little afraid of how this market so new and at the same time so historically solid would behave from then on. But Art Basel exceeded all expectations, starting with strict health protocols (including 'health checks' at the door and mandatory masks), but with a hybrid format and mainly by the care of each participant, each gallery taking its best, each negotiation being made, and of each satisfied collector leaving the Convention Center happy with their choices.

The hybrid format, already seen in other editions of other fairs is, in my opinion, here to stay. This format allows viewers to know the prices of the works, to follow in real time what is being sold, and with a little more curiosity, to see the perspectives of the works in real spaces through mockups made by some galleries who quickly learned the online sales process. In October, I was able to participate (as an advisor) in the ArtBo fair, in the city of Bogotá, also in a hybrid format, where the public traveled with organized transport from gallery to gallery. In May, I had gone to NY to the Armory fair, which also featured Brazilian galleries such as Nara Roesler. I've seen Latin art grow stronger and high-end artists are being introduced and re-introduced to the most demanding audience that exists. For me, seeing Brazilian and Latin galleries specially coming strong, has been very rewarding. Luisa Strina, Gomide&Co, Luciana Brito, Simões de Assis, Almeida&Dale in partnership with Millan in the main sector of Art Basel, Portas Villaseca in the parallel fair Untitled, Piero Atchugarry in the Nova sector of Art Basel - they all have a great determining factor in common for success: consistency.

Sales support platforms such as artsy and artnet are now becoming a necessary seal to validate galleries and events (even if virtual). There is a new and exciting world for artists, while for gallery owners and advisors, there is a long path of technological innovations to follow. I will cite again the NFTs and digital art (see previous issue). Before the pandemic forced artists to learn how to make art indoors, we were already starting to see a small part of an iceberg called digital art emerge, which is nothing more than a technique, like oil painting or wood carving, photograph in silver gelatin or 'cire perdue' in bronze. But then there are NFTs and blockchains, and digital art starts to be commercialized in that way. And when my gallery went completely virtual, I realized that this whole new wave of crypto sales was my thing and that I could consequently learn how to trade digital art through such non-fungible tokens, or simply NFTs. Another important example of technological innovation are the talks, or lectures/conversations with market people around the world, but with common interests. During Art Basel week, I was able to participate in several talks about NFTs around the city of Miami, but 2 events in particular caught my attention due to their appreciation of the historical context in which they are inserted, despite both being about the hottest topic in the world and the greatest innovation of all time for art. The first was the monumental presentation of art installations by Faena Art, an organization of Argentine origin led by the brilliant work of a team that has been bringing the best in Latin art to the world for years. And the second event was the conversation (in hybrid format) with Mark Soares, one of the heads behind the Tezos platform, who presented a small NFT exhibition inside the fair. The blockchain platform featured exclusively digital art, some interactive for the public. According to them: "It is no longer human against machine, it is human + machine".

And in this new format of this new world, who are the players in the market? Artists have become more demanding with their work, as they are competing with an avalanche of information and options from other artists, many of them already with their agents. Trustees began to formally qualify. Advisors today have almost mandatory financial education. Gallerists have investment partners and dealers were forced to have more transparency in their transactions. The auctions have become more and more globalized, but they succeed in negotiations made through specialists. Markets have become universal, and this has given specialists great visibility. Not only in art, but in different segments that could be globalized continuously. The amount of information is intense, and therefore the role of advisors has become increasingly valued. The relevance of the positioning of artists within an international and globalized context makes competition fiercer, and consequently, quality increases. The art market demands the constant qualification of all these characters that are being put in check at this moment.

Art Basel and its side fairs are here to stay, showing the world the financial power not only of the Latin market, but of a tireless creative industry that generates around \$60 billion a year. Art Basel came to end the year with new hopes of everyone becoming more professional, more resilient and more together. Art Basel is now the biggest fair circuit, and it looks like it will continue to be.

And before I finish, I would like to make a small addendum for you, dear readers, who are not listening to me, but reading this text. The name of the fair is Art Basel because it started in the Swiss city of Basilea. It is pronounced Baaaaaasel, not Beisil, not Basil, much less Besel.

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