

## Art Basel: Emersion and Beyond

December 18th, 2008 by **Brad Ford Smith**



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Art Basel 2008 has been over for two weeks, and I have now decompressed, sorted through the 50-plus pounds of cards, documents and catalogs that I picked up and, sadly, I think my eyes are starting to adjust back to seeing the world in normal work-a-day vision. This is my last blog on this subject, so I thought I would explain why I go to art fairs.

My yearly budget for buying art is very limited, and when compared with the big collectors buying at Art Basel Miami, it's minuscule. I do buy art, but my art purchases would not make or break even the smallest of our local art galleries.

So, if I'm not buying art then why is it important to go to Art Basel? For one reason, if you are someone who loves art or you are an artist, this is the only place in America where you will see works of art by just about every artist who has been written about in the last year. One example, **Richard Prince**, has received a lot of press for his new series of paintings entitled "Night Nurses." At this art fair I saw four of them in person, plus a series of lithographs that he produced based on the same theme, as well as lots of his earlier works. I now have a much deeper understanding of his direction, and I am in love with his "Night Nurses."

The second reason is: I just love to look at art. I love the feeling of being inside of someone else's thoughts, of being able to physically see how someone else perceives the world. And when it's really good, like when I was standing in front of four massive **Sigmar Polke** paints, I couldn't help but laugh with joy. Or do a little dance because I was looking at a wall full of

**Julian Schnabel** painted maps. And yes, I did (very quietly I hope) squeal like a little girl when I came across a stack of **Louise Bourgeois'** delicately composed needlepoints. My mantra for the week was "Oh My God, Oh My God, Oh My God."

This may all sound like a psychotic "The Hills Are Alive with the Sound of Music" episode, but this kind of reaction is a fairly common sight at art fairs. You see people walking around with stupid grins on their faces. Their ability to communicate is reduced to babbling art talk with lots of exclamation marks. It's very similar to that high you hear runners getting when they have gone into the zone. At Art Basel, you go beyond visual burn out and into a place where your optic nerve makes a direct connection with your pleasure zone.

Think about it: if you spend 10–12 hours a day for six days immersed in art, art is how you start to see the whole world. You develop Art-O-Scope. Everything around you, including the shadows cast by fireplugs, turn into complex compositions, contrasting balances and subtle but vibrant color schemes. It's like being visually drunk.



### **Outlined shadow of a fireplug by unknown chalk artist**

The third reason to check out Art Basel is that it is a kind of magical middle ground. It is filled with galleries, but it is not a gallery, nor is it a museum. Art fairs in general are packed with so many galleries with so much art that you are free to peruse or ignore as you please. Don't like the art in that particular booth? Just walk on to the next one. No big deal. But if you do see something that grabs your interest, and because all the art is for sale, you can get much closer to it than you would at a museum. You can, if you ask, even handle the art, have them take it off the wall so you can look at the back. Do that at the DMA or the Kimbell, and you will get a man on a walkie-talkie escorting you to security.

Art fairs are like museums in that they are curated exhibitions. They usually consist of galleries that have met some kind of curated standard set up by the art fair. And because of the expense of being involved in an art fair, the galleries tend to curate their own work, bringing with them

really good examples of art work by their best artists. When you add this all up, art fairs often display better and more contemporary artwork than most museums have in their collections.

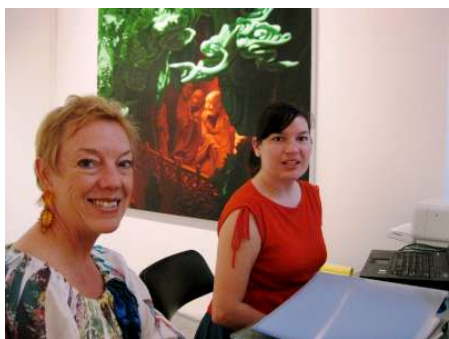
Well, that's enough about the wonderful layers of Art Basel. I hope it has not only inspired you to check out next years Art Basel, but also to attend some of the up coming art fairs, too. If so, you're in luck.

This Feb. 5-8 there will be a national art fair held right here in Dallas. It's called **The Dallas Art Fair**. OK, so the name is a bit lackluster. But it will host 30 galleries from across the country, including three galleries from North Texas. This will be the first year for the Dallas Art Fair, so it won't be anywhere as big as Art Basel. But it will give you the opportunity to experience first hand works of art by national and internationally known artists. Who knows — you may dance a little dance, and buy a little art.

I'll leave you with a few more shots of local folks in Miami:



**Cris Worley of Pan American Art Projects**



**Nancy Whitenack (left) and Danette Dufilho of Conduit Gallery**

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