

MIAMI MYASTHENIA

by Walter Robinson

I love Miami's **Wynwood Art District**. The streets are wide – good for u-turns – and arranged on a grid plan, with plenty of curbside parking. So it was a little disconcerting on Thursday afternoon when my colleague, Artnet's **Liz Parks**, said that my lead-footed driving was going to make her throw up. It didn't help, of course, that I had to zoom around the block a dozen times before we found **Art Miami**, Dec. 5-9, 2007.

With about 100 galleries from 17 countries arranged in spacious booths in a giant tent with gray carpeting, Art Miami hits a note that is conservatively hip, despite the more rambunctious presence of exhibitors like **Alexander Gray Gallery**, which devoted its booth exterior to a project by bad-girl-feminist **Karen Finley**, who invited visitors to write their mother's maiden name on the wall. The installation, now covered with scribbled markers of lost female identity, originally dated from 1992 and is priced at \$30,000.

Dealers were busy if not frantic. **Jonathan Novak Contemporary Art** from Los Angeles had several works by **Jim Dine** in its booth, including a largish 2007 heart painting, titled *A Beautiful Day*, that had sold for something like \$285,000, and a wall of 18 watercolors of the celebrated Pop artist's signature bathrobe image, called *Autumn Song Cycle* (2005), priced at \$450,000.

"Review my booth," commanded New York dealer **Franklin Parrasch**. To that we critics say, watch out what you wish for! In truth, the dealer seemed to have plenty of time on his hands, having already sold California art pioneer **Craig Kauffman's** historically important, bright yellow vacuum-formed oblong wall sculpture from 1968 for \$130,000 to collector **Beth Rudin DeWoody**, and **Jason Fox's** large painting of a hippie android with a comical red ball for a nose for \$18,000.

Do all Fox portraits have red balls for their noses? "Or blue or green," Parrasch said. The fair had been open a day and a half, and he still hadn't found a buyer for a large rubber-stamp drawing of a cottontail by **Joseph Ayers**. "My favorite new artist," he said.

For the intrepid art critic, the idea this week is to visit each fair or exhibition, find one or two things to write about, and then hot-foot it to the next event, so as to avoid getting bogged down in endless detail. So I left the intrepid Liz Parks to her own devices and headed off to **Scope**, which someone had called "an unmitigated disaster." Sounded good to me.

No sooner had I made my way to the entrance of the grassy compound holding the expansive Scope tent, which is floored with polyurethaned plywood and fronted by an elaborate porch of interlocking wooden lattice, than I ran into my old friend, the artist **Peter Nadin**. Now ensconced on his farm in Greene County in upstate New York, where he engages in organic agriculture, Nadin was smoking several of his own hams in a custom-made oven, with the help of the three-and-a-half-star restaurateur **Chef Le Pape**, and offering samples of the tasty fare to visitors.

"It's an edition of 500 meals," Nadin exclaimed, serving me two slices of smoked pork on a sheet of signed, numbered and stamped paper made from cattails from his local swamp. My "Organic Pork Print," number 160/500 -- basically, a grease stain on thick handmade paper -- was ready for framing.

When it comes to the libidinal subconscious of the art world, each year has a different sexual leitmotif. As many wags have noted, last year was testicles, a few years before it was wieners. This year is asses, clearly demonstrated at Scope by the juxtaposition of a salaaming mannequin sculpture by **Iris Kettner** at the booth of **Galerie Römerapotheke** in Zürich – sold for \$6,200 to a Los Angeles museum, according to gallery director **Michèle Novak** – and the charming painting of two nudes on a couch by **Liu Zheng** on the outside wall of New York's **Krampf Gallery** booth.

With that discovery under my belt, so to speak, I headed off to the **Rubell Family Collection**. To my mild surprise, this time around I decided that the two-story, concrete-floored building is a great place to look at art, spacious, not too crowded and perfectly air-conditioned. The guards even let you take pictures.

I don't really care for "Euro-Centric" neo-expressionism or the Neo-Goth teen fantasias of Miami painter **Hernan Bas** – two of the special shows on view -- but the Berlin-based filmmaker **Natalie Djurberg** is truly shown to great advantage, a series of short vids of her eccentric and elemental puppet shows projected full size in a proper exhibition gallery rather than being restricted to a TV monitor.

Other good things included a pair of carved and painted vultures sitting on a pinnacle of polyurethane foam by **Peter Fischli and David Weiss** (the perfect thing for a divorcing collector to give to his ex-wife in the property settlement), and a dark, room-sized installation featuring a sonic organ by **Thomas Zipp** labeled "geist über materie" (spirit over matter). It was being nicely played while I was there.

Next stop was the **Ice Palace Studios** at the south end of the Wynwood Art District, where the **NADA Art Fair** is ensconced. While Scope has plenty of youthful energy, NADA has that same energy plus lots of upside market potential. In fact, for a Pollyanna like me, most of the many artworks are all equally interesting and, therefore, curiously un compelling. If good art is everywhere, what's the rush to actually go look at it?

A series of 2007 multiples by **Rochelle Feinstein** at the **Momenta Art** booth summed up my state of mind, pronouncing *Love Is Over!* written sideways, in several languages. They're \$500 each in editions of 20. But I'm just tired – that's what the hammocks hanging from the palm trees outside are for.

An hour later, I headed downtown to the **Miami Art Museum** (MAM) for its "Party on the Plaza," which boasted live music and plenty of paella. Inside was an exhibition of sound installations by **Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller**, enjoyable trifles like *Opera for a Small Room* (2005), where automated record players, surrounded by stacks of old opera LPs, play dueling bits of male and female arias. Opera for the uninitiated? Here, it works.

Also on view are drawings and models for **Herzog & de Meuron's** design for the new Miami Art Museum planned for **Bicentennial Park**. It's pretty far out – an array of boxy galleries, suspended beneath a concrete canopy on an elevated plaza and surrounded by a jungle of hanging plants, a park that "transitions into a dense, multi-dimensional garden, with a series of floating volumes – the museum itself – buried within its heart." Wide stairs connect the platform to a waterfront walkway. I'm not sure if MAM has a construction-start date yet.

Next, it was 40 blocks north for the **Design District**, where **Design Miami** was having its grand vernissage. Now, I love contemporary design as much as the next plebe, but this crowd seemed particularly slow-moving and dim-witted. The prevailing fashion esthetic was **Roberto Cavalli**, while the favored method of engaging the work on view seemed to be planting one's ass in various weird chairs.

Put it this way – a lady fainted at the opening, and in a building full of furniture the firemen laid her out on the floor. My sympathies to the dealers, who include **Albion**, which was featuring a new "moebius bench" by **Vito Acconci** (\$180,000).

During the week I had run into the Spanish curator and fair director **Paco Barragán** on several occasions, and each time he urged me to come to the opening of his exhibition, "The Expanded Painting Show," somewhere in Wynwood on Dec. 6, 2007. I had forgotten all about it when I happened to drive by the building, with its big banner announcing the show, on my way back to my hotel, and since there was a parking space right by the entrance, I stopped in.

Barragán is nothing if not enthusiastic – I had to interrupt his avid explanations, which came with flow charts and diagrams reproduced in *Wynwood* magazine, so I could actually look at the paintings. Don't worry – he's writing a book.

The opening was full of artists – **Dani Marti, Vargas Suarez-Universal, Claude Temin-Vergez, Tim White-Sobieski** – and critic **David Hunt**. They were all going to the Scope party at the **Opium Garden** in South Beach, so I went back to my hotel.

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