

## Dispatch from Art Basel



Basel

Art fans descended upon a cold and drizzly Basel to see and acquire work by the likes of Anish Kapoor, Shirin Neshat and Tony Oursler at the bi-annual art fest that is Art Basel. This year, the fair was more festive than ever since the country was also preparing to host the European football championship at the same time. This being Switzerland, football and art fans coexisted in perfect harmony. The AB organisers even went as far as hosting a viewing party for the first game, complete with beer and sausages.

But for the rest of the week, art dominated Basel. About 300 galleries including LA's Patrick Painter, New York's Acquavella and London's White Cube displayed modern and contemporary art from around the world. The more avant-garde works were on show at the Art Unlimited and Art Statements spaces. Art Unlimited featured 70 artists from 23 countries, such as the multidisciplinary Californian artist Bruce Conner and Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, who caused quite a stir with his Hotel Democracy installation - an oversized model of a 44-room hotel with each room displaying photographs from magazines of people from around the world fighting for democracy. Art Statements provided an arena for 31 emerging artists such as Los Angeleno Kelly Nipper and Brooklyn's Eileen Quinlan.

Meanwhile, Design Miami/Basel, now in its third year, featured 28 galleries including New York and L.A.'s Moss and Galerie Patrick Seguin from Paris. Both Art Basel and Design Miami/Basel also hosted a series of accompanying lectures, book signings and special events. Iranian curator Rose Issa mused on the current state of Middle Eastern art along with Beirut-based gallerist Saleh Barakat and Canvas magazine founder Ali Khadra, while Australian artist Tracey Moffatt did a book signing for *The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt*. For breathers from all the madness, the VIP Collectors Lounge and very VIP UBS lounge provided a Vitra-designed chill space for the movers and shakers.



From Left: Acoustic concert with Patti Smith | Galerie Gmurzynska, Zürich  
And then there were the celebrities. Brad Pitt and Owen Wilson represented Hollywood, Viktor and Rolf came out for fashion as they perused the stands at Design Miami/Basel, and singer Patti Smith rocked the house - or rather, the church - when she performed at Offene Kirche Elisabethen. Hosted by the Fondation Cartier, access to the concert was limited and ended up being one of the most coveted invitations of the week. The inimitable Smith sang for about 90 minutes, throwing in a few covers, namely Nirvana's Smells like Teen Spirit (which flummoxed a few baby boomers eager to hear her own tunes) and a song by recently deceased rock icon Bo Diddley. Needless to say, the art world brought its own stars; most notably, Richard Meier who did a book signing for Taschen's new publication, *Richard Meier: Complete Works 1963-2008* and Rem Koolhaas, who attended a preview of the exhibition *Dubai Next: Face of 21st Century Culture*, which he co-curated with Jack Persekian at the Vitra Design Museum.



From Left: Galerie Hans Mayer Düsseldorf | Hotel Democracy, 2003  
(Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery, London)

So, what of the art? "I was happily surprised to see colours, different forms, materials and artists," declared Geneva-based art consultant [Anna Lipowska](#). "A few artists stuck out in my mind like the beautiful ugliness of Hungry, Hungry Hippos by Nathalie Djurberg and the subtle and emotional self-portrait by Ylva Ogland. I stopped by a painting of Rosy Keyser's three times and am now considering buying it." Collector [David Brollet](#), who picked up a work by emerging Brazilian artist Erika Verzutti, was similarly pleased by the pickings. "You have to come here if you're a serious collector," he said. "I have more than 600 pieces in my collection and what's important is to discover new artists." And, while rumours about the presence of important collectors at the fair were rampant, [Martin Kudlek](#), who owns a gallery in Cologne, said that the swarms of art advisors meant that it was difficult to gauge which collectors were at the fair. Overall, most agreed that Art Basel displayed work of exceptional quality and any initial concern about a bursting art bubble quickly subsided. "It was very buzzy," noted London-based art consultant Jeffrey Boloten. "And a big relief that the art world is not, in fact, crashing around our feet."



From Left: Art Lobby Encounter Patti Smith | Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zürich  
[--Yasmine Mohseni for ASW](#)