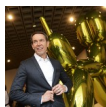


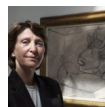
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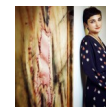
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## I Got Lost in the Art at Art Basel in Miami Beach!

Ben Davis, Thursday, December 4, 2014

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Doug Aitken, *Exit (large)* (2014) at Regen Projects  
Photo: Ben Davis

I very much enjoyed this year's edition of Art Basel's world-famous Miami Art Maze. It is a good maze this year, challenging but ultimately pleasing and well-crafted—though as usual you must keep your wits about you or you will truly lose your way.

Anyone who has been to a previous edition of the Maze will be immediately familiar with the basic setup. What makes it so ingenious is that it does not, at first, appear to present any particular difficulty. From above, it would appear as a giant gridded rectangle. Standing at any point in the immense network, aisles sweep away from you in straight plunging lines, teeming and inexhaustible.

Along these channels, you wander in search of a goal—water, an aesthetic experience, a restroom... But soon, very soon, you are lured off of the straight path. Distracted by something, you turn and you are lost. Which way were you headed? You stare, and with each new turn become more lost.

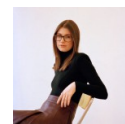
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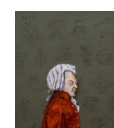
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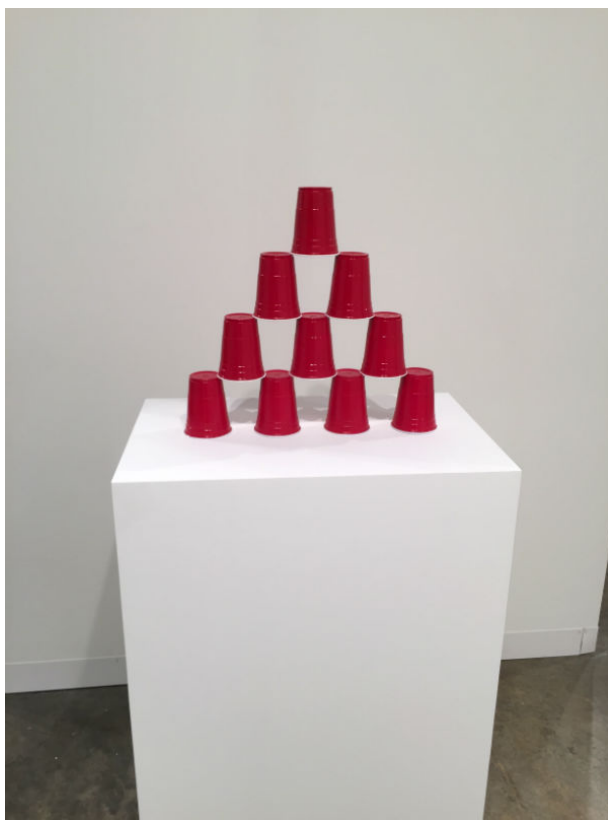
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#### EVENTS



Within the Maze there are many puzzles, brought by experts from all over the world.

Here, there is a collection of red drinking cups, stacked in a discrete pyramid.[\[i\]](#)



Matt Johnson *Party Cup Pyramid* at 303 Gallery  
Photo: Ben Davis

Here, a white dog that paws its reflection in a mirror.[\[ii\]](#)

Here, giant-sized medication bottles and immense pills.[\[iii\]](#)

Here, what appear to be some finely painted paintings.[\[iv\]](#)

What does it all mean?

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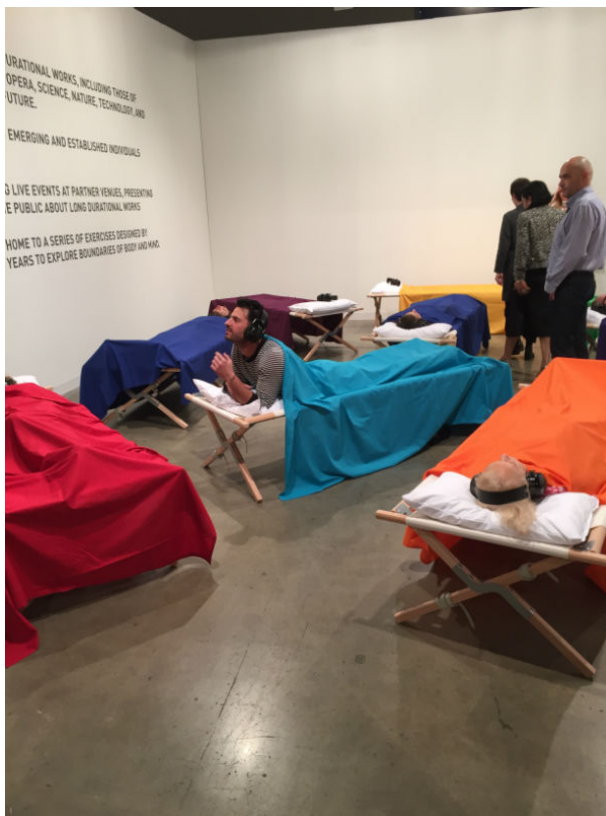


Damien Hirst, sculptures from "Schizophrenogenesis," (2014) at Paul Stolper  
Photo: Ben Davis

Fragments of text—in neon or paint—beam at you from the walls. Many seem to be passing urgent warnings, giving the Maze an ominous feeling. "TEACH US TO OUTGROW OUR MADNESS,"<sup>[v]</sup> "ONCE UPON A TIME... THE END."<sup>[vi]</sup> One asks, in deadpan neon, "ARE YOU REALLY HAPPY" (the lack of punctuation only makes the riddle more maddening!).<sup>[vii]</sup> Another, a serene, quavering animation, instructs you to "FUCK NEGATIVITY."<sup>[viii]</sup>

At one point, I saw the shining form of an exit sign in the distance. I approached in anticipation, believing I had conquered the Maze. Yet though it appeared so clear, as I drew near, I realized that this was simply another one of the Maze's pitiless tricks: It was in fact not a real exit sign but a huge and mirrored recreation of an exit sign.<sup>[ix]</sup>

Though each individual moment seems a revelation, it blurs together. Landmarks and images repeat, but with a slight difference so that you are in an eternal state of slight déjà vu. Some spaces connect one to the next, but some instead lead you into strange back rooms where further secrets are nested.



Visitors participating in [Marina Abramovic](#) performance at Art Basel in Miami Beach  
Photo: Ben Davis

Then at moments, you step around a corner, and drop through a rabbit hole into a new kind of space altogether: the gorgeously appointed living quarters of a count, decorated with priceless art;[\[x\]](#) a simulation of an ancient New York office bathroom;[\[xi\]](#) an antiseptic room where a black-clad priestess helps those wearied of their travels to sleep in hospital beds.[\[xii\]](#)



A dancer performing as part of Naomi Fisher's "Dancarchy," in the "Nova" section  
Photo: Ben Davis

Once, following the flow of the space, I turned and found myself all at once in a hidden tiki grotto. Men with machetes hacked the tops off of coconuts and passed them into the eager hands of visitors. Around this new space's periphery, there were paintings featuring spidery

figures and jigsaw puzzle pieces. But these were also not paintings, because they were fitted with dance barres, as in a ballet class. A woman in a black leotard balanced against one, stretching. From low benches, people observed the dancer, while suckling languidly upon their warm, fat coconuts.<sup>[xiii]</sup>

Once, I wandered down a small, wallpapered side corridor. When I finally had been lured into its depths I found a text that read, "IDEALLY THIS SIGN WOULD BE DEEPER." Turning the corner through a black curtain, a film played in the darkness, its elliptical images reading like a secret transmission. I stood there alone.<sup>[xiv]</sup>

Once, I drew back a white curtain, and in the unlit space behind, I found a pile of filthy coffee cups, plastic bottles, and the discarded vestments of sandwiches.

This year and every other year, watching others attempt to traverse the Art Maze is part of the Art Maze's pleasure. Who are these people? They wander in a distracted state, and appear happily lost in the space. Though the Maze experience seems to be the main draw, there is also a huge and growing market for Maze memorabilia, as these people buy up the puzzles from the Maze, to recreate part of the experience in their own homes for friends or mates.



Lost in the Miami Art Maze  
Photo: Ben Davis

Occasionally, one of these people will sight another and be seized by a frenzy of recognition: "*Hi! It's Barbara, we met at...*" But, as often as not, the other person will simply stare back blankly, not understanding. The people in the Art Maze are always asking each other what they have just seen, as if hunting for landmarks. Or they will ask each other where they are going later, as if searching for direction—as if, on some secret level, the Maze has piqued a sense of existential emptiness.

I saw several other art journalists also trying to figure out the Maze.



They looked hungry. And all of the people in the Art Maze kept mentioning someone named Miley, who I take it has some kind of strange power over what goes on here.

I wandered among these things until my feet were weary from walking and my mouth dry from asking for clues. Yet as I at last turned towards the exit, I realized it had been hours and not days, as I had thought. I left as if waking up from a dream—not a nightmare or a bad dream, more like a good dream had while hung-over.



Exiting the Art Maze  
Photo: Ben Davis

Congratulations to the organizers of the 2014 Miami Basel Art Maze for a great experience!

[ii] Matt Johnson, *Party Cup Pyramid*, 2014, at 303 Gallery

[iii] Elmgreen & Dragset, *L'Etranger*, 2014, at Galleri Nicolai Wallner

[iii] Damien Hirst, sculptures from "Schizophrenogenesis," 2014, at Paul Stolper

[iv] Ann Craven, *Pink Bend 1 (Facing Left)*, 2005, and *Pink Bend 2 (Facing Right)*, 2005, at Maccarone

[v] Alfredo Jaar, *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness*, 1995, at Galerie Thomas Schulte

[vi] Cerith Wyn Evans, *Narrative Fiction*, 2012, at White Cube

[vii] Jeppe Hein, *Are You Really Happy*, 2012, at Galerie Johann König

[viii] Cory Arcangel, *Going Negative/Lakes*, 2014 at Team

[ix] Doug Aitken, *Exit (large)*, 2014, at Regen Projects

[x] Galerie Gmurzynska's Baz Luhrmann-curated "A Kid Could Do That!" booth

[xi] Francesca Minini's "Urmutter" project, curated by Paolo Chiasera

[xiii] Marina Abramović at the Marina Abramović Institute

[xiii] Naomi Fisher's "Dancarchy," in the "Nova" section

[xiv] Laure Prouvost at Mot International

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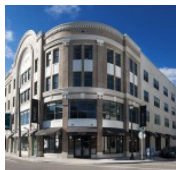
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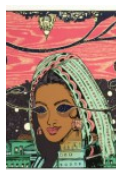


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