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Save This Art! 15 Works Worth Remembering From Art Basel Miami Beach, and Why

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Photo by Ben Davis

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MIAMI BEACH — As most people are [now aware](#), the “event-driven” art economy represents the art market running to stand still. At big fairs like Art Basel Miami Beach, tremendous amounts of money and resources are spent to pique the interests of wealthy collectors and their multitudinous hangers-on, sometimes with spectacular success. However, since the experience costs a lot to participate in, and is displacing sales through storefronts — which now seem *so* 20th century as a locus for art commerce — [its merits are debatable](#). Artistically, it doesn’t add up to much; I dread art fairs like I dread going to the dentist, with the same sad knowledge that it is a necessary duty. How much, exactly, do you remember year to year from your frenzied passage through these things? Unless you sold millions of dollars of art or got laid, not much at all. Which means, in my case, definitely not much at all.

At the same time, the only thing that bores me more than art fairs is my own art fair ennui. If you wanted to accentuate the positive, you could say that the good side of Art Basel Miami Beach is that it functions as a kind of ad hoc annual global survey, with a quantity of art equal to or greater than the average biennial (someone once said that fairs were an example of “laissez-faire curating,” in fact, the “Laissez Fair” would be a dynamite name for a Miami Beach satellite!). The organizers do make an effort to bring in newer galleries, and at the Convention Center a visitor is able to get a snapshot of international art trends that you couldn’t easily find anywhere else — even if a

certain pre-packaged sameness seems to dominate and the format itself tends to make everything blend together into a kind of “contemporary art gray,” reading as an endlessly scrolling blog of bits and pieces of this and that.

I’ve always felt that art fairs repel critical thought, but this year I realized that one way to think about your role covering the big fair is that you are on a *rescue mission*. Here the window opens to the public, briefly, on the back rooms of the commercial gallery world; all the best art comes out in the open — but only for a moment. Soon it will be whisked away, vanishing into some golden penthouse or cold corporate lobby, where the average person will never get to see it (unless it flips back into the auction market in a few years’ time). So, I’ve gone ahead and picked out 15 artworks I found this ye. Here the window opens to the public, briefly, on the back rooms of the commercial gallery world; all the best art comes out in the open — but. Here the window opens to the public, briefly, on the back rooms of the commercial gallery world; all the best art comes out in the open — but only for a moment. Soon it will be whisked away, vanishing into some golden penthouse or cold corporate lobby, where the average person will never get to see it (unless it flips back into the auction market in a few years’ time). So, I’ve gone ahead and picked out 15 artworks I found this year at Art Basel Miami Beach that are worth remembering, from across the entire historical arc of the work on view at the fair. Perhaps, someday, this will help some art historian piece together where they ended up.



Photo by Ben Davis

Joaquín Torres García’s “Jouets Aladin” (Aladdin Toys) (1930) at Galeria Leandro Navarro

The great Uruguayan Cubo-Concretist is definitely having a moment, and there were many major canvasses by him on view here. These ingenious wooden figures (the heads detach and are apparently interchangeable) were crafted while Torres García was living in penury in New York, supporting himself through working for a toy company. Most of the examples of his toys were lost in a fire.



Photo by Ben Davis

Edna Reidel's "The Bull Fight" (ca. 1936) at Hirschl & Adler Modern

A vivid mid-'30s canvas by Edna Reidel — a new artist to me — seems to combine a preppy Art Deco sensibility with a subtly dream-like feeling that nods towards Surrealism. Reidel is not known to have traveled to Spain, so the work may simply reference the American fascination with the drama of the Iberian nation in the era of Hemingway and the Spanish Civil War



Photo by Ben Davis

Marcel Duchamp's "de our par MARCEL DUCHAMP du RROSE SELAVY, or the Bolte-en-valise" (1961), series "D" box, edition of 30, at Francis Naumann Fine Art

Naumann's outstanding mini-exhibition of works and ephemera by Marcel Duchamp (as well as works by his brother and sister) reaches its apex with this version of his famous valise, itself a kind of retrospective, containing miniature versions of all his greatest hits, for the Duchamp fan on the go. Surely some museum wants this.



Photo by Ben Davis

Julio le Parc's "Formes en contorsion" (1956) and "Cercles virtuels (Nr. 11)" (1964) at Galerie Hans Mayer

These stellar works by the Argentine artist (b. 1928) reinvent the canvas as an elegant and minimal machine. Le Parc's oeuvre is of importance to the history of kinetic art, and according to the dealer, these two pieces have been with the gallery for some 50 years



Photo by Ben Davis

Joan Semmel's "On the Grass" (1978) at Alexander Gray Associates

An outstanding late-'70s figurative canvas from Joan Semmel, who has a one-person show coming up at the Bronx Museum. Reversing and reinventing the tradition of the female nude, the painting presents Semmel's figure as seen from her own point of view. The result is a work of revelatory intimacy.



Photo by Ben Davis

**Shiela Hicks's "Caid Nejjai" (1977)
at Sikkema Jenkins & Co.**

A strikingly lovable, delightfully tactile gold-accented painting/construction from the American fiber artist, who is highly regarded but still under-known, in my opinion.



Photo by Ben Davis

Joseph Beuys's "Untitled (Double Object)" (1979) at Galerie Thomas

Hidden away in the back of Galerie Thomas is this duo of Beuys works, consisting of metal clips clamped to thick slabs of felt. They resemble clipboards but are, in the German artist's normal way, meant as spiritual transistors, thereby perfectly encapsulating his mystical pedagogical project.



**Allan McCollum's "Over One Thousand Individual Works" (1989)
at Friedrich Petzel Gallery**

McCollum's iconic work troubles the very idea of the iconic work, consisting of hundreds of yellow casts of like-sized but subtly different objects, all laid out on a table. Each is unique, but displayed together they come to seem as if they were all variations on one absent archetype.

Photo by Ben Davis



Photo by Ben Davis

Doris Salcedo's "Untitled" (1989-2012) at Alexander and Bonin

The somber work hails from an important series representing the Columbian artist's interest in memorializing her home country's strife, which was cresting as the work was made. The neat pile of crisp white shirts is meant to evoke men in a funeral procession; the rebar lances that penetrate them are an obvious but potent signifier of violence.



Photo by Ben Davis

Yang Fudong's "International Hotel" (2010) at ShangART

Fudong has distilled a recent video project into a series of lovely, solemn portraits of women, subtly touched with the retro glamour of 1930s Shanghai.



Photo by Ben Davis

**Pascale Marthine Tayou's
"Landscape Sierra Leone" (2010) at
Galleria Continua**

Lean in to the Cameroonian artist's canvas and you will get a whiff of his primary mediums: chocolate and coffee. "Landscape Sierra Leone" hails from a series where Tayou suggests the landscapes of various African nations by abstracting them into inscrutable panels made from the raw materials by which they are known on the international market.



Photo by Ben Davis

**Lara Favaretto's "Kicking" (2012)
at Galleria Franco Noero**

Fresh from a show at MoMA PS1, the Italian artist created this new piece just for the fair. The pockmarks at the top of the various stelae mark where she clambered across their wet cement, resulting in a work at once energetic and subtly monumental.



Photo by Ben Davis

Carrie Mae Weems's "The Broken, See Duchamp" (2012) and "Last Song" (2012) at Jack Shainman Gallery

A pair of coolly evocative works by Weems — one recreating Marcel Duchamp's creepy "Étant donnés" — have the wordless potency of recurring dreams.



Photo by Ben Davis

**Fabrice Samyn's gold-painted
postcards at Meesen De Clercq**

The Belgian artist, being shown in Art Basel Miami Beach's Nova section of emerging art, found 12 vintage postcards, one for each of the months of the year, in thrift store bins, each with a message on it from somebody's forgotten vacation. Then, he painted over everything but the words "I am" in gold leaf — the essence of a happy memory distilled to a simple assertion of existence.



Photo by Ben Davis

New works by Matt Keegan at Altman Siegel

What makes the New York-based Keegan's work interesting is his sly sense of experimentation with language and technology. His new project at Art Positions distills this sensibility into its punkish essence: He poured alphabet soup onto a scanner to see what would come out. The result is a illegible mess, and that is the point. .