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From auction to fair: Roman Abramovich brings Basel to life

Chelsea FC owner joins Brad Pitt and Sheikh Saud Al-Thani at vernissage

Billionaire businessman and owner of Chelsea Football Club Roman Abramovich and his partner Daria "Dasha" Zhukova caused a tremendous stir—more even than superstar actor Brad Pitt—when they arrived at Art Basel yesterday. This is believed to be the couple's first appearance at an art fair, and came less than a month after Mr Abramovich spent \$120m at the spring New York auctions on a Francis Bacon and a Lucian Freud.

Also spotted at the fair was Sheikh Saud Al-Thani, cousin of the Emir of Qatar, who is a contemporary art collector although better known for his previous collecting on behalf of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha.

Dealers were thrilled by the presence of Mr Abramovich and Ms Zhukova, until now only known to buy at auction. "I was pleased to see him, looking at things very seriously," said David Juda, (2.0/G1) of London's Annelly Juda Fine Art. "Some other collectors only go to auction."

A trio of Alberto Giacometti bronzes at Krugier's stand (2.0/B4) are believed to have caught Mr Abramovich's eye. The largest of the three, *Femme*

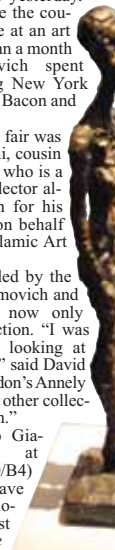


Abramovich (above) spent time yesterday admiring this Giacometti priced at \$14m

de Venise I, 1956, is priced at \$14m, while the smaller 1958 *Femme Debout* is priced at \$8m.

He is believed to be "seriously considering" a purchase, according to a source. Giacometti was one of the stars of the recent New York contemporary sales when a sculpture fetched a record \$27.5m at Christie's on 6 May. Mr Abramovich also paused to admire

works by Marc Chagall and Alexej von Jawlensky at Galerie Thomas (2.0/P2). His pres-



ence provided a welcome burst of confidence for dealers faced with fewer American collectors. "With the strong euro and weak dollar, Americans, even the rich ones, are complaining for the first time," said New York collector and banker Gilbert Harrison, chairman of Financo.

Donald Bryant, who owns works by Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly and Willem de Kooning, said finding value today requires selectivity. "The secondary market prices are out of control," says Mr Bryant. "With the primary market you are more likely to get a real price."

The divide between gallery and auction prices has accelerated in recent years, boosted by new collectors. As auction prices have soared, retail art shopping can look like a bargain. PaceWildenstein had a painting by Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang, which sold for under \$1m, according to the gallery's Susan Dunne. His record price at auction, for an older work, is \$6.1m.

"The big collectors come to Basel because they know they are going to be seeing great art," said Sam Keller,

the former Art Basel director, now head of the Fondation Beyeler. "But if you have a relationship with the dealer, you may well be able to buy that art cheaper than on the secondary auction market."

Ms Zhukova plans to open the Center for Contemporary Culture Moscow in September. She will mount international contemporary art exhibitions in an 85,000 sq. foot industrial 1927 bus garage designed by a noted constructivist architect. Mollie Dent-Brocklehurst, a former Gagosian director who has been hired to manage the centre's programmes, escorted the couple through the fair.

Mr Abramovich's interest ranged from the organic and edgy—a \$70,000 snake-like sculpture by Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto at Galerie Max Hetzler (2.0/Q2)—to a Picasso drawing at Acquavella Galleries. (2.0/R1). Having paid a record \$33.6m for Freud's *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*, 1995, at Christie's in New York last month, Mr Abramovich also priced the Freud paintings on offer at Acquavella.



Sheikh Saud Al-Thani

With the Euro 2008 football championship arriving in Basel on Saturday, some dealers who missed Mr Abramovich regretted the missed opportunity—and not only his buying power. "I wish I'd known he was here," said dealer Roland Augustine of Luhring Augustine (2.0/P4). "I would have tried to get soccer tickets."

Lindsay Pollock
Additional reporting by Bettina Krogemann

Basel art gallery forced to shut show as tournament kicks off

The Kunsthaus Baselland has been forced to close its four exhibitions early—before the Art Basel public weekend—because they clash with the kick-off of Euro 2008 in the neighbouring St Jakob-Park Stadium. This means that today is the last chance for art lovers to see solo shows by leading contemporary artists Gavin Turk, Thomas Baumann, Dan Perjovschi and Stefan Burger.

"We are in the stadium's "security zone A," explained Sabine Schaschl, the director of the Kunsthaus Baselland, "so it's impossible to get people through on the day of the game." Although the match between Switzerland and the Czech Republic is not until Saturday 7 June, Ms Schaschl is emptying the gallery of its contents tomorrow because of concerns for its safety should there be any violence. "We had a very bad experience a few years ago when there was a game. When some of the fans didn't like



Sent off: Kunsthaus Baselland will be empty during Euro 2008

the outcome, they smashed one of our windows and destroyed a work of art," she said.

"Because this match is such a special thing, no one knows what is going to happen. We don't want to take any chances," Ms Schaschl said, adding that the museum's insurance company is not prepared to offer cover in the case of "hooliganism problems".

A number of Art Basel attendees will no doubt be making their way to the Herzog & de Meuron-designed St Jakob-Park to watch the match, which kicks off at 6pm. Those without tickets can watch the match on a big screen in the city centre supplied by Art Basel.

Louisa Buck
□ Gavin Turk talks to *The Art Newspaper* about football, fairs and art on p4.

First view of Barceló's "crazy" UN ceiling

Spanish artist Miquel Barceló's extraordinary art installation for Room 20 in the United Nations Council of Human Rights in Geneva—which he has called "the Sistine Chapel of the 21st century"—was shown to a select group of Spanish government officials this morning to celebrate its completion. "It's like an enormous grotto," Tobias Mueller, director of Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, which exclusively represents Barceló, told *The Art Newspaper* at Art Basel, stressing the "crazy" dimensions of the 41-metre wide dome which he saw in progress. "He used a lot of paint." The work has been created using a special pigmented resin, pumped through a tube at a rate of 3,000 litres a minute. Meanwhile, Mr Mueller said the gallery sold several Barceló works at its stand (2.0/J1) on Tuesday, including *Avec Escargot Central*, 2006, which is valued in the €350,000-€400,000 range Roland Lloyd Parry



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Satellite fairs

Scope: Soft selling, straight out of the box

There's nothing new about soft openings of art fairs, but Scope's are elastic to breaking point. The fair's first "preview" was on Sunday afternoon, catching most of the exhibiting galleries on the hop. A special "art train" with 50 collectors on board arrived to find much of the art still in its packing cases, with gallery staff frantically hanging and nailing around collectors such as Beth DeWoody and the Horts. It seemed that fair director Alexis Hushman wasn't joking when he described the event as a "screw and view".

However, at least some of the 82 exhibitors at Scope were ready to meet and greet two days in advance of the fair's official opening yesterday. Mike Weiss Gallery (227) was among them. "It really wasn't so bad. We were selling in shorts and t-shirts," said Mr Weiss. "We can't complain," added gallery director Helene Necroto, who said that collectors were turning up unexpectedly on Monday too—after security tape was up

Photo: Katherine Healey



Stephen Wilks,
Coffee Donkey, 2008

for the night. The Israeli artist, Yigal Ozeri, sold especially well: five paintings of a virginal nude woman reclining. One, *Untitled: Priscilla in the Cloud Forest*, 2008, sold for \$50,000 to a US collector.

Ludovic Bois of Chinese Contemporary (108) was pleased to have sold Zhang Dalí's *AK-47*, 2008, for €30,000 to a collector from Greece, but seemed unconvinced that premature openings worked in practice when most stands are virtually bare. "[Collectors] think they've done Scope," he said, "but will they come back?"

It was true that sales seemed as patchy as a soft, and rather cuddly sculpture, *Coffee Donkey*, 2008, by Berlin-based British artist Stephen Wilks not yet sold for €12,000. That wasn't because its exhibitor was caught napping. Berlin dealer Kai Hilgemann (311) made sure his stand was installed early. The beast of burden made of coffee sacks was awaiting its Sancho Panza, though Mr Hilgemann said he'd had interest in two cityscapes by the artist Peter Ruehle priced at €6,000 each.

Scope 2008 has moved to a new home in a smart tent, or "pavilion" as Mr Hushman prefers to call it, in Basel's gritty industrial zone. The fairs in the area (Scope, Volta and Bâlelatina) are keen to rebrand the docks as the Rhine Arts District. Scope's new venue gave the fair a facelift, and extra space to play with, though this only emphasised the scarcity of browsers. This could, of course, have been

due to the rival attraction of Art Basel's first day vernissage.

There were a few eye-catching pieces. Peering through a hole in a chipboard partition was a strangely familiar figure. Tall, bearded and dressed in Taliban chic, the gentleman was a dead ringer for the world's most wanted: Osama Bin Ladin. *Here I Am*, 2006, an edition of three sculptural lookalikes by Chinese duo Sun Yuan and Peng Yu could be yours for €110,000, courtesy of Ethan Cohen Fine Arts of New York (127). But collectors will have to wait for "Osama's" fake Kalashnikov to arrive. It was seized in Russia, where it had been on show, on its way to Basel.

Javier Pes

Peng Yu & Sun Yuan, *Here I Am*, 2006, €110,000



Bâlelatina: Cool start for Basel's "Hot Art" fair

Despite its new branding as the "Hot Art" fair, Bâlelatina had a rather lukewarm opening yesterday afternoon, with few galleries reporting sales. One of the exceptions was the New York gallery Freight + Volume (D1), which sold Michael Scoggins's *I Heart Chewy*, 2007, at the VIP opening Monday evening to a French collector. The wall-size drawing, which looks like a page ripped from a giant child's notebook, was priced at \$9,000 (€5,800).

Once again, the organisers have invited contemporary dealers not specialising in Latin American or Spanish art, including Monique Meloche from Chicago, Galerie Vernon from Prague and Pierre-François Ouellette from Montréal. This gives the fair a fresh, emerging feel, with many of the artists showing aged under 35 and a sense



Scoggins's *I Heart Chewy*, 2007

of fun and experimentation in much of the work.

But the real strength lies in the Latin American and Hispanic art on view. Miami gallery Pan American

Art Projects (C7) has organised an impressive solo show of Argentine artist León Ferrari, including works from the late 1970s and recent pieces, such as *Conversation*, 2007, a sculptural installation consisting of three, pink, amorphous foam figures sitting in a group. The work, from the artist's collection, is priced at over €500,000, making it easily one of the most expensive works at the fair, where last week's auction records for Latin American art appear not to have driven up prices—at least not yet. With Spain chosen as the "guest country" this year, nearly half of the 30 exhibitors were Iberian, including Vigo gallery Ad Hoc (B6), which has a wonderful selection of Manuel Ocampo collages on offer, such as the weirdly comic *Primordial*, 2006, priced at €12,000.

Helen Stoilas



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