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CHARTA

The Art Fair Age



Are there too many art fairs? Are art fairs outdoing biennials as cultural events? How should we interpret the increasing involvement of curators with art fairs? Are we experiencing a sort of “New Fairism”? And what about the motivations that drive collectors to take on a much more active role? Analytical, well-documented and irreverent, *The Art Fair Age* is an unprecedented book that examines the ongoing evolution of the art fair phenomenon.

200 pages—68 black-and-white illustrations

limits of a conventional trade fair. ARCO thus became a trend-setter, forcing over time other fairs such as Art Basel to do the same. Have a look at this more than ten-year-old newspaper clipping from *El País* (Sunday, February 16, 1997): “They are well dressed; the gentlemen with expensive shoes and the ladies in high fashion clothes; but the shadows under their eyes give away the exhaustion caused by an overloaded program: performances, parties, museums, art fairs, conferences and after-hours, then they begin all over again.” Back then Miguel Mora wrote what appears to be a perfect description of the “event” into which art fairs have transformed, regardless of whether we are talking about Frieze, Art Basel, the Armory Show or CIRCA PR. Sam Keller affirmed, just before he left perhaps his greatest achievement, the fact that “Art Basel has developed as an event which combines commercial and cultural goals. We don’t even use the term ‘fair’ anymore to describe Art Basel; we call it an art ‘show,’ which is more appropriate.”⁸ Of course Sam Keller did a great job, but we should honor history, in this case ARCO’s history. Now we only need to change the word “show” for “experience,” and we are there.

The Grand Tour experience was disappointing, and this past edition of Art Basel wasn’t the best, including Art Statements, aside from the magnificent installation by Carlos Garaicoa and the intelligent *Art Fair Proposals* by Peter Liversidge.⁹ However, in the parallel fairs there were interesting things.

Good Shopping and Bad Shopping

On the first pages of this book I quoted the simile of “the world as a fair,” referring to Pythagoras, also quoted by Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, according to whom some men aspired “to glory,” while others were attracted by “the gain and need to buy and sell.” “There were a few,” the quote continues, “who were above all those things, they observed with desire the nature of things; those were called the wisdom zealots or philosophers; that is where the most honorable for the free man was to be a spectator without acquiring anything for himself.”¹⁰

Cicero, in the first century BC, had already anticipated with his

8. Sam Keller interviewed by Cristina Ruiz and Melanie Gerlis in *The Art Newspaper/Art Basel Miami Beach Daily Edition*, December 5, 2007, p 5.

9. Peter Liversidge suggested among other proposals to run a duty-free shop in the stand of his gallery—Ingleby Gallery—from the Art Statements booth. Also to invite the local Basel tourism office to set up a small stand inside the booth so that people become aware of the other delights Basel has to offer.

10. Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Tusculanae Quaestiones*, book V, chapters 7 through 11.



Tired collectors having a well-deserved break in the Caribbean. Artist in the background awaiting their crucial decision.

Carlos Betancourt, *Family Portrait with Mami, Papi, Alberto y Yo*, 2005, metallic lambda print, 50 x 50 cm, from the “Rincón Flamboyant Series.”

Courtesy Diana Lowenstein Fine Art, Miami/Galería Walter Otero, Puerto Rico (Image used as logo for CIRCA PR 08).