

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Crowds, Caution at Art Basel

BY ANNA RUSSELL

STEADY RAIN FELL ON the open-air Champagne breakfast at Art Basel Tuesday, but the VIPs present had their drinks and hors d'oeuvres outside all the same. Collectors and dealers determined to make the best of it, huddled beneath umbrellas outside the exhibition halls.

That sanguine attitude persisted through the Swiss fair's opening days, as visitors navigated 286 gallery booths from across 33 countries. The annual weeklong event, a who's who of dealers, artists, curators, museum directors and big-name collectors that last year drew 98,000 visitors, opened a month after disappointing May auctions in New York, where sales totaled around \$1 billion, compared with \$2.3 billion in a similar round last year. The auction houses will test the market again in London next week.

Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, founder of Italy's foundation of the same name, called the market "delicate" and noted a high volume of relatively safe modern works on display. "Purchases are cautious," she wrote in an email.

Even so, the fair's first days saw some big sales for established names. Hauser & Wirth sold Paul McCarthy's raunchy, oversized installation "Tomato Head (Green)" for \$4.75 million. A Frank Stella went for \$1.1 million at Sprüth Magers, while Van Doren Waxter sold a suite of Richard Diebenkorn's works on paper for over \$1 million. But other pricey works, like a \$7 million sculpture by abstract expressionist David Smith at Hauser & Wirth, had failed to sell by the end of the VIP preview Wednesday, when many big sales take place.

In the curated "Unlimited" section for oversized works, the mood was cheery and circuslike. Bird calls propelled by a sound cannon echoed through the hall as part of Samson Young's piece "Cannon." James Turrell's "Cross Cut" light installation drew long lines, while Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota captivated audiences with a hanging work of dozens of vintage suitcases on red string. New York-based artist Alison Knowles prepared and served an enormous salad for visitors in her signature performance piece entitled "Make A Salad."



"Is it good?" she asked as guests munched. (It was.) Here, key players offer their take on Art Basel 2016:

The Museum Directors: Hirshhorn director Melissa Chiu saw works by British sculptor Tony Cragg and crowd-favorite Alexander Calder pop up at several booths. Pedro Gadanho, director of Lisbon's new MAAT museum, which opens in October, was on the lookout for emerging talent and edgy video art, like "The Hollow Coin" at Simone Subal's booth in the fair's "Statements" section.

The Dealers: Peter MacGill, director of Pace/MacGill Gallery, which specializes in photography, was showing at Art Basel for the first time since the 1970s. Long hesitant to join the fair circuit, he called it an inevitability now. "We've slowly been building up the number we do, and this is the best of them," said Mr. MacGill, who brought images by Richard Avedon and Richard Misrach to his stand. Swiss dealer Iwan Wirth, of Hauser & Wirth, said he wanted his booth to highlight the work of Brazilian modernist Lygia Pape. Elsewhere at the fair, Mr. Wirth had eyed an illuminated sculpture by Alina Szapocznikow, which Andrea Rosen gallery sold for €1.9 million (\$2.1 million).

The Collectors: Art Basel regulars Verena and Niklaus Müller-Senz were struck this year by sculpture, including work by William Tucker at Buchmann Galerie, but the collectors were still weighing their options Wednesday. "We don't know what to buy—and usually we did, the past few years," said Mr. Müller-Senz, who lives outside Zurich. Seoul-based collector Kyunghwa Nam, who also attended Art Basel in Hong Kong and Miami this year, had already made her decision: a whimsical time-traveler's clock by Rirkrit Tiravanija, offered for \$12,000 by STPL. "I don't want to break the bank buying art," she said.



"Everything comes and goes, you know?"

The Curators: Gianni Jetzer, who has curated the fair's separate section "Unlimited" for five years now, said he prepares by working out every day for two months ahead of the fair, "to be full of oxygen for the full week." He named Davide Balula's "Mimed Sculptures," in which mimes shape invisible sculptures by Louise Bourgeois, Alberto Giacometti and others, as among his favorites this year. Samuel Leuenberger, curator of the site-specific "Parcours" section, which is spread throughout the city, said Jim Dine's immersive "Muscle and Salt," had caught his eye.

The Artists: Fairs can be strange places for artists. "It's not like it's an exhibition," said Joseph Kosuth, an early pioneer of conceptual art, who showed a neon work, among others, at Sean Kelly's booth. "People are trying to get rid of [the art], to get money for it," he said. Mr. Kosuth said he enjoyed a project by a former student, Tim Rollins, and his group K.O.S., which was just a few paces from his own installation in "Unlimited" composed of several definitions of the word "nothing." Ms. Knowles, whose salad-making performance is in part a contemplation of solitude, said she's "not much on shows and fairs." "I'm not a hustly-bustly type," she said.

SWISS MIX Clockwise from far left, Alison Knowles' 'Make A Salad'; Chiharu Shiota's 'Accumulation: Searching for Destination' (2014-16); Joseph Kosuth's 'The Paradox of Content #5.'



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