

Miami Beach has a reputation for being the wild child of the Art Basel fairs.

Text Payal Uttam Images Courtesy of Art Basel

Each December, the city transforms into an art mecca, fuelled by champagne brunches, pool parties and celebrity-studded events across the city. Collectors, fashionistas and design buffs hop between some 25 satellite fairs, pop-up exhibitions surrounding the beach and the graffiti-festooned streets of Wynwood Art District. 'The city lights up and becomes a frenzy of artistic activity,' says French art dealer Edouard Malingue, whose eponymous Hong Kong-based gallery showed at Art Basel in Miami Beach for the first time in 2016.

The gallery helped to stage one of the most talked-about installations, *Reconstruction of the Universe*, for which Beijing-based artist Sun Xun took over an entire city block with his massive immersive outdoor piece: a delicate bamboo structure with a billowing roof. Inside, Sun placed ink drawings, woodcuts and flickering animations screened onto spherical sculptures. 'The impact was a sense of stepping seamlessly into another realm, as if walking onto an immersive stage set,' says Malingue. 'And at night, it took a dramatic turn, lighting up the waterfront.' The work, which was commissioned by Audemars Piguet, transformed a sleepy street into a hip enclave attracting the likes of actor Katie Holmes and tennis legend Serena Williams.

Famed Swiss gallery Galerie Gmurzynska's knockout exhibition also drew a clutch of celebrities. Sean Combs and Barbra Streisand were among those spotted appreciating the presentation of Russian avant-garde art inspired by the 1917 revolution. Boldly titled *The Future is Our Only Goal*, the museum-quality exhibition was curated by the esteemed Sir Norman Rosenthal and the booth was designed by Pablo Picasso's son Claude Ruiz Picasso. The works explored one of the most optimistic periods for Russian artists and ranged from experimental architectural studies to delicate drawings. As per tradition, Gmurzynska hosted one of the hottest events of the week, an invite-only dinner party in a sprawling two-floor suite at the Faena Hotel Miami Beach. Contortionists, women wearing lampshade hats and scantily clad models with glowing wings fluttered around among art world insiders including architect Ole Scheeren.



Opposite page: One of the most talked-about installations amid the hubbub of this year's Art Basel in Miami Beach, *Reconstruction of the Universe* by Sun Xun (centre) took over an entire city block. Image courtesy of Audemars Piguet



M I A M I



S P I C E





‘It has a spontaneous laissez-faire culture: people start dancing on the street and they play loud music’



Image courtesy of EAST, Miami

The next day collectors in stilettos picked their way past a construction site to the cosy Design Miami tent near Art Basel in Miami Beach. Many headed straight for Scheeren’s work, a stylish cafe concept for gourmet market Dean & DeLuca. ‘Something really incredible happened,’ says Scheeren excitedly. ‘It was almost like an energy centre!’ He transformed what could have been a dull food counter into what he titled STAGE — a futuristic stainless steel box structure lined with tropical plants, fresh fruits, coffee and other treats. The exhibit was buzzing throughout the fair.

That evening, the art set gathered at EAST, Miami for a private exhibition and party to mark the hotly anticipated opening of the hotel’s Art Room. The sprawling space played host to Venezuelan-born artist Harif Guzman’s stunning exhibition inspired by Greek mythology. Meanwhile upstairs, Spanish-American artist Domingo Zapata, a favourite among celebrities, showed off his latest wares. Later, VIPs made their way up to 40th floor rooftop bar and garden Sugar for the after-party, where Brazilian-born DJ Elle Dee from New York hit the decks.

Over the weekend, the marathon continued with collectors travelling by private yachts or Uber’s Seaplane service to visit Art Miami. The city’s pioneering fair featured big names such as Maurizio Cattelan and Yayoi Kusama, while edgy sister fair Context showed talented emerging names. ‘Intense collectors visit an average of five fairs. Usually Art Miami is next after Art Basel but this year many came here first. I think it’s a reaction against the establishment. People are looking for something different,’ says New York-based gallerist Sundaram Tagore, who has been travelling to Miami for years.

Despite reports that the city was less busy than usual this year, Tagore affirms that it will always loom large in the imagination of the art world: ‘People can do things in Miami that they can’t do in other places. It has a spontaneous laissez-faire culture: people start dancing on the street and they play loud music. It’s a place where you aren’t judged, so in a sense you feel uplifted and free.’



Above: Harif Guzman with an artwork from his show inspired by Greek mythology at EAST, Miami’s newly unveiled Art Room. Image courtesy of EAST, Miami

Opposite page: The Ole Scheeren-designed STAGE for Dean & DeLuca at Design Miami transformed the tired canteen concept into a futuristic stainless steel box, where attendees could refuel in the midst of the adrenaline-filled Art Basel week. Image courtesy of Dean & DeLuca



THE SECRET OF THE DEMAGOGUE IS TO MAKE HIMSELF AS STUPID AS HIS AUDIENCE SO THAT THEY BELIEVE THEY ARE AS CLEVER AS HE IS.

