
Art or Design? Why Not Both?

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Published: June 6, 2008

BASEL— Art or design? Until recently, art would have won out handily in Basel, but the success of this year's **Design Miami/Basel**, from June 2 to 5, proved that you can have both.

New collectors, shockingly young designers, cutting-edge materials, and remarkable cultural crossovers defined the unique energy at the third edition of the fair, where the limited editions and unique design pieces exhibited underneath the spectacular concrete dome of the Markthalle — most of which sold out — were as tempting as the provocative art featured a couple of blocks away in **Art Basel**. For its second year in the Modernist landmark dome, the fair increased the number of exhibitors from 22 to 28, drawing an eclectic mix of 21 returning galleries and seven newcomers: **Carpenters Workshop Gallery**, London; **Galerie Eric Philippe** and **Perimeter Editions**, Paris; **Galerie Dewindt** and **Galerie Pierre Marie Giraud**, Brussels; **Vivid Gallery**, Rotterdam; and **Yoshii Gallery**, New York.

"The quality of the fair is very good, and people are aware of that," said **Suzanne Demisch** from New York's **Demisch Danant** gallery, whose partner **Stéphane** was doing business with a gentleman dazzled by the "rarrissime" **Pierre Guariche** 1962 lounge chair *La Vallée Blanche* (€85,000). She said that art collectors are growing increasingly interested in design. "We can feel the progress every year."

The fair has also expanded its **Designers of the Future Award** — a prize created in 2006 to promote young creatives who push the boundaries of art and architecture and change the way we understand design — to encompass four winners: London-based **Martino Gamper**, **Max Lamb**, and **Julia Lohmann**, and Munich- and Sweden-based duo **Clemens Weisshaar** and **Reed Kram**. All have developed new and unique approaches and processes within a relatively short span of time, creating design objects that are eloquently beautiful and poetic. "By including more than one winner, the Designers of the Future Award provides a more complete picture of where design practice is heading," said the Design Miami/Base organizational team, still led by the charismatic **Ambra Medda** and **Craig Robins**, in a statement.

But the biggest draw at the fair was Amsterdam's **Atelier van Lieshout**, whose "Slave City Project" was already on everyone's lips before **Joep van Lieshout's** talk on "Radical Art, Architecture and Design" with critic **Aaron Betsky** Tuesday evening. AVL's *Boardroom Table and Crockery for Slave City*, with 14 chairs and complete set of vessels, was all set up at London gallery **Albion's** booth and selling for a surprisingly reasonable \$40,000.

The radical designer, who called himself "a romantic-surrealistic artist, not a conceptual artist" at the talk, was seemingly omnipresent at the fair. Another dealer highlighting AVL was super-ashy French dandy **Loïc Le Gaillard**, who gushed about the Bad Sofa, a sensuous yet masculine dark velvet sofa available at his booth that would make any lucky sitter look sexy, and who had already sold three of an edition of 10 of the designer's Family Lamps, each priced at €36,000, the last to **Brad Pitt**.

"Ultra-contemporary design by super-young designers is something collectors are seeking today," said Le Gaillard, who emphasizes design's affordability, especially in comparison to the blue-chip works selling across town at Art Basel. "The pleasure of acquiring a rare, edgy piece at an extremely reasonable price, and knowing it's a long-term investment, is a positive equation."

Another steal, he said, is **Jeroen Verhoeven's** Cinderella table, made of soft, translucent Carrare marble and priced at £150,000 in an edition of 6; "Art would never sell this low."

While dealers mostly agreed on that point, they differed on the collectors' provenance. According to **Nicolas Chwat** from Perimeter, limited-edition works by contemporary designers predominantly drew a younger set of European collectors. "All of the buyers at Design Miami/Basel this year are surprisingly new," he said.

In order to attract and keep their attention, Chwat presented works that contradict with as much as they compliment one another, in "intense and interesting" dialogues, he said. **Pierre Paulin's** seamless Dos à Dos sofa riffed off of **Gonçalo Mabunda's** unique *African Man Throne*, an armchair composed of deactivated welded weapons, for example, while Paulin's geometrical Cathedral table spoke to a spiky surrealistic chandelier by British **James Lethbridge**. Early sales at the booth included several of **Janette Laverrière's** mirrors at prices ranging from €15,000 and €20,000 and her Nenuphar table for €20,000.

But while Chwat saw mainly European buyers, Parisian **Philippe Jousse** from **Jousse Entreprise**, who had a cache of **Perriand**, **Prouvé**, and **Pergay** objects, reported a rush of Americans. He had just sold one of his favorite pieces, a desk by Atelier Van Lieshout (in an edition of 3), for €50,000. Another standout was a dark, crude, surrealistic, and yet extremely elegant, wood chair/bench by **Rick Owens**: "Only five are left out of the edition of 20," said Jousse.

Matt Langton from London's spirited Albion gallery eagerly revealed three unique "Transcloud" luminaries from the **Campana** brothers, and said two were bought by the same collector for between \$30,000 and \$50,000. He also reported that **Ross Lovegrove's** *Long Liquid Bench* was on reserve for \$150,000.

Chinese diva **Pearl Lam** chose to highlight works by **Studio Makkink & Bey**, **Shao Fan**, and **Maarten Baas** at the booth for her gallery **Contrast**. The Shanghai space hosts a residency program that invites international artists and designers to China to investigate traditional Chinese craftsmanship, materials, or imagery. By combining these time-honored methods with contemporary ideas, the artists and designers create new works that reflect contemporary China.

Currently collaborating with Dutch designer **Jurgen Bey** and architect **Rianne Makkink's** Studio Makkink & Bey, Contrast presented in its Basel booth highly conceptual projects such as Makkink & Bey's "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." Inspired by the beauty and optimism of Chinese propaganda posters, the work re-imagines propaganda for the world of cleaning, by using Chinese porcelain, silk fabrics, woodwork, and reversed inside paintings. Cleaning cabinets filled with gloves, aprons, and other surprises are made luxurious, composed of silk boxes that can be assembled on top of a wooden base. "Cabinets are very popular," said one of Lam's assistants, who also indicated that the booth had drawn a diverse clientele of Americans, Middle Easterners, and Europeans. In addition to the M&B work, Baas's "Plastic Chair in Wood" (€5,500) had been a big hit, she said, and reserves had been placed on all five in an edition of his "Chinese objects object," a much more complex piece.

Injecting some additional youthful zing into the fair were the four honored "designers of the future." The prestigious **Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne**, led by the extravagant **Pierre Keller**, showcased a brilliant new collection of blown-glass lighting designed specifically for Design Miami/Basel by a select group of students under the guidance of honoree Max Lamb and in collaboration with **Matteo Gonet**, a young glassblower from Bern. And Weisshaar and Kram's exhibited works confirmed their undisputable talent. The two fellows passionately explained their mission to parametrically generate a family of objects with different typologies, including stools, pedestals, and tables of different heights. The breakthrough was "Breeding Tables," for which the designers intelligently intertwine product development and media design, while taking advantage of the newest technologies.

Finally, providing a welcome respite from the excitement at the fair was New York's **Yoshii Gallery**, which installed a sort of secret floating garden under the monumental Markthalle dome. The gallery surprised visitors by exhibiting **Taizo Kuroda's** delicate white porcelain in a spectacular space that celebrated architect **Tadao Ando**, who had never before appeared at the fair, created for his friend. The setting is so pure and white it absorbs almost every sound and movement around it; water, stone, and porcelain bring absolute serenity. An **Issey Miyake** quote on the wall depicts the vision of the great master of rounded forms: "The whiteness found in nature is far more powerful than anything a human hand can produce." The experience, like a moment of pure spirituality, functioned as an antidote to the surrounding rush, providing a white page where the fields of Art and Design perfectly converged.

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