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Design Miami/Basel

Market finds new vigour

Dutch school of design in the ascendant as fair opens off Messeplatz



Fears that Design Miami/Basel would struggle in its fourth edition appear to have been unfounded. The move to a new location, down the street from the main Art Basel fair, has paid dividends with significantly increased footfall, up 25% from last year. And there were strong sales for some galleries.

The mood was in stark contrast to the gloom just six months ago at Design Miami, where muted sales reflected the chill winds of recession.

Design Miami founder Craig Robins hailed the move, the third in the fair's four years. "We now have a more seamless partnership with Art Basel," he said. "The audience for design is expanding, so even in a declining economy there is potential for us to grow." That said, only four US galleries made the trip to Basel this year, down from ten a year ago.

A constellation of agencies

Fossil chaise longue, one of several pieces by Atelier Van Lieshout acquired by Brad Pitt, left; Roman Abramovich watches Zhukova take part in Audience, a participatory piece by art and design collective Random International

accommodation block, bought from Carpenters Workshop Gallery of London for €95,000, is destined for his private beach in Santa Barbara.

Inside the fair Pitt bought two more Van Lieshout pieces: a *Fossil chaise longue*, 2009, for €23,000 from Vivid of Rotterdam, and a bronze female *Family Lamp*, 2008, for €17,500 from Carpenters Workshop Gallery. A year ago he bought the male version of the lamp.

Dutch designers also caught the eye of Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, who—with neither art advisor nor art-loving girlfriend beside him—made a spontaneous €9,500 purchase of *Fragile Future 3.3*, 2009. The interactive work using dandelion seeds is by the design duo Drift, Ralph Nauta and Lonke Gordijn. While the designers

dealers showing classic French modernist design, Jacques Lacombe sold a *lean Royère Ours Polaire* (polar bear) sofa and armchairs, around 1957, to a private US collector for €480,000 in the first hour.

design, but the market moved too high, too fast. Why should I buy Marc Newson furniture for hundreds of thousands when I can buy work by great modernists for €20,000-€30,000?"

Although the fair has a special

contemporary specialist in Basel for the first expressed his disapp that the majority of galleries not dedicated solely to contemporary design. "It is to be a contemporary fair."

"It's a real pity," Cologne-based dealer Ammann, who said the fair was particularly contemporary design because they have a high production and development costs, unlike their own contemporary classic design.

The overall success of the fair's edition, sponsored by HSBC Private Bank, was summed up by the Dutch designer Maas, whose *Real Time* installation wowing visitors, it has

**"Who's Abramovich?"
—designers Ralph Nauta and
Lonke Gordijn on learning
the identity of their wealthy patron**

Among the buyers of classic French work was UK collector Frank Cohen, who bought a pair

exhibition devoted to Newson, few examples of his work are on view with dealers. Ron Arad and

Design

The young designers who like to play rough

Is it time up for the glossy finishes of Newson, Arad et al? Tonight's "Designers of the Future" event has a manifesto feel

The four Designers of the Future selected for this year's Design Miami/Basel fair share more than a flying start to their careers. Varied though their approach is, there is a common thread of funkiness, an improvised or provisional quality that runs through all their work. Certainly, there is little of the smooth perfection or the high-tech, high-concept, high-gloss finish that has characterised much of the most striking design of the past decade.

This year, instead of simply commissioning new design objects, Design Miami/Basel has set the Designers of the Future the challenge of creating an original, on-site installation based around plaster and mirrors. Fair co-founder Ambra Medda is delighted with the results: "They've risen to the challenge brilliantly, and the work seems even fresher than in previous years." The installations and the designers will be presented at a talk tonight.

Raw-Edges

Yael Mer and Shay Alkalay met at art school in their native Tel Aviv and have been a couple in life for ten years or so, although they have only been working together for three years.

"You get more work done by dividing it in two: you have two brains, two pairs of hands," says Mer. "Design is more than just a profession, it's a way of life—our social life is with other designers—so in some ways it simplifies things."

Raw-Edges responded to the Design Miami/Basel brief by



Tomorrow, today: Raw-Edges's Yael Mer and Shay Alkalay, left; Nacho Carbonell, *Fertility Cave*, 2009, right

opting for plasterboard, which fits in well with their established practice of using inexpensive, "approachable" materials such as wood, MDF or paper.

"Plasterboard is such a common material, used in massive quantities in commercial, public and residential buildings for 50 years now, but I've never seen anybody doing anything interesting with it. So we decided to experiment," says Alkalay.

The east London flat that the couple moved into earlier this year has a wall covered in "cheesy" 1970s wallpaper with a large image of a snow-covered Swiss mountain towering over a lake, and they have taken this as their inspiration for their Basel installation. A plasterboard mountain rears out of the ground as if deposited by a geological movement, mirrored in a lake suggested by a stained and

heavily varnished wooden floor, like the shiny parquet floor of a bowling alley. "It's the glossiest thing we've ever made," says Mer.

Tomáš Gabzdil Libertiny

Slovakian-born and now based in Rotterdam, Tomáš Gabzdil Libertiny first attracted wider attention with his honeycomb vases made by bees in a hive, included in MoMA's "Design and the Elastic Mind" exhibition a year ago and for which he coined the term "slow prototyping".

When he received the Design Miami/Basel commission, Libertiny set out to study, examine and ultimately to celebrate plaster, choosing to achieve this in two very different ways.

In the first, he has built a

wall faced with plaster stained black, a technique he borrowed from the Venetian baroque, when it was used to save the expense of buying marble. Matt black outside edges give way to a highly polished finish in the middle; it is then carefully lit as if in a theatre, creating what Libertiny calls a "Polaroid reflection"—sharp very close to the surface, but losing focus quickly, so you can see your nose perfectly while your ears are already fuzzy. "It acts like a black hole, sucking you in, very science fiction-like, but also a very sculptural experience," he says.

The second form is a large egg, two metres tall, standing for creation or life. It is perfectly smooth, while the reverse is unfinished and raw, inspired by Michelangelo's carving of Lorenzo de Medici's tomb in



wood will dictate the dimensions of the piece."

For the Design Miami/Basel installation, Marigold has created *Palindrome*, an interior inspired by the idea of the hunting lodge, experimenting with the tricks that mirror-imagery plays on the mind, by projecting a reflection that is both identical to the original image but also reversed. As is often the case in his work, Marigold explores the territory "in between strangeness and familiarity".

Nacho Carbonell

Spanish-born Nacho Carbonell is a graduate of the Eindhoven school, and his studio is still based in the Dutch city. His work has an organic quality that matches his interest in nature—it is playful, but can also contain darker hints of a need to escape.

"Nature gives me a lot of inspiration, I always come back to the links between society and nature when I translate my concepts into projects," says Carbonell.

For his Design Miami/Basel installation, Carbonell has created what he calls a *Fertility Cave*—a dark, cavernous space, filled with large biomorphic forms that make the human viewer feel small and insignificant. His "Evolution" series, 2008, is also showing at Galleria Rossana Orlandi (see p.1).

Bruce Millar

Florence. The back of that sculpture, never seen by the congregation, is sketched but not finished.

Peter Marigold

Peter Marigold is fascinated by geometry and symmetry, but not in the way you might expect of a contemporary designer. He may use a computer, but only as a communication tool or to help with calculations, rather than using 3-D drawing software.

Instead, he has what may seem a very traditional, hands-on approach to design. "My notion of the design process is not one where you sit down to the computer. It's very much a conversation with the materials in my workshop. I don't make models, I make finished objects, working directly with materials at hand—sometimes the size of a piece of

□ Designer of the Future talk and presentation, tonight, 6pm–7pm, HSBC Private Bank Lounge, Hall 5, Messe Basel