

Art Basel: Artpocalypse Now

A voyage into the art of darkness in an economy gone mad.

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As the art industrial complex storms the Magic City full force for the onslaught of Art Basel this week, some local dealers sound like characters in Francis Ford Coppola's classic Vietnam War epic while strategizing their defense against an economy gone rogue.

Basel propagandists have touted the tent-pole extravaganza as the Super Bowl and the Olympics of the art world wrapped into a single handy package, and that's not accounting for the piggyback fairs, private gallery openings, all-night cocktail soirees, and guerrilla carpet bombings across town. For the next five days, there's art everywhere — from the sweltering climes of the beach to the sprawling mainland bush.

This Thursday through Monday, you can see work by artists ranging from Pablo Picasso to Paul McCartney, from Andy Warhol to Wangechi Mutu, and from Sherrie Levine to Roy Lichtenstein.

You can find every conceivable genre of visual expression on display from inside the cavernous Miami Beach Convention Center to the 100,000-square-foot tent pavilions housing the smaller fairs in midtown. Wynwood's warehouses and every hole-in-the-wall in town, it seems, have hung exhibits or will host all-night cocktail parties, art breakfasts, or live performances.

You might encounter zombies crawling out of graffiti murals, palm tree huts bobbing in the ocean, art emblazoned on parasails, and artistic fireworks bursting in the skies as Miami is transformed into one sprawling art installation, at times resembling some hyped-up vision of the end of times.

But for some grunts new to the killing fields and on a budget, it seems more like Saigon or a no-limits debauch. In Wynwood, rickshaw drivers will rest beneath neon-lit billboards. Streets will swarm with life as art lovers buy and sell wares, while in an alley nearby, the daily denizens will sleep off a binge as the wealthy speed by in their Basel-sponsored limos, living a life of

swank hotels, juxtaposing the luxurious resorts with the ramshackle constructions typically found throughout the Caribbean. The hut, he says, was not created as an abode but rather as an "architectural skeleton to host the souls of the dead." We would gladly trade our foxhole for his ephemeral digs if he included a toilet lid in the deal.

This sho' enuf a bizarre sight in the middle of all this shit.

This year, Basel's highly trumpeted **Art Projects** — curated for the first time by Guadalajara's Patrick Charpenel — will stand near the Oceanfront command post. These works will draw friendly fire on unsuspecting civilians and veteran art aficionados by interrupting foot traffic with the force of an exploding Claymore mine.

Most of the 13 works were commissioned specifically for ABMB and will include projects by Karmelo Bermejo, Gonzalo Lebrija, Marc Swanson, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, who will present a site-specific show inside the W Hotel on Friday, December 4. You can find an Art Projects info kiosk at the Oceanfront between 21st and 22nd streets at Collins Park and book a guided tour.

If you are shellacked from too much sauce, can't remember what day of the week it is, and aren't afraid of a case of the squirts, sign up for Eduardo Abaroa's *Aereal Diary*. It's an interactive event with parasail rides offered to daring sorts.

Each parasail has the day of the week emblazoned on it. The one reading "Friday" must be used Friday, the one reading "Saturday" must be used Saturday, and so forth. It's a nifty way not to lose track of time so your CO doesn't toss you into the stockade or assign you KP duty if you're late getting back to your post.

Karmelo Bermejo would make a great candidate for the U.S. Army Bomb Disposal School. The Madrid native has concocted *The Grand Finale*, a sensory-shattering project in which he ignites fireworks displaying the word *recession* at the end of a big bang.

By constructing the R-word in fireworks, the artist juxtaposes the ostentation of the regal spectacle with the poverty prevalent during the current worldwide economic crisis. Maybe Bermejo should leave that fuse unlit if he ever decides to enlist in the bomb squad.

Charlie didn't get much USO. His idea of R&R was cold rice and a little rat meat.

During the weeklong blowout, ancillary fairs that have sprung like mushrooms from the ABMB compost will be scattered around Miami Beach and Wynwood. Several of the larger fairs have shifted spaces and expanded programs for this year's event.

NADA is back for its seventh edition and has moved from the Ice Palace in Wynwood to the Deauville Beach Resort on Collins Avenue north of the convention center. An enduring crowd magnet because it waives a cover charge, NADA features 80 galleries from 33 cities worldwide, including an intoxicating mix of contemporary talent and provocative free daily performances.

Miami dealer David Castillo, who will exhibit at NADA this year, expects lots of foot traffic at the popular free fair. "People who are coming to Miami for Basel are looking very carefully at the work and

being smart about buying," he says.

Pulse has relocated to NADA's former space at the Ice Palace and will open its fifth season with more international galleries and sterling-caliber programs. Admission costs \$15, or \$10 for students and seniors.

This year, Pulse has also launched an ambitious series featuring daily outdoor concerts and the debut of **Pulse Performance**, anchored by emerging artists such as Miami's Maria Jose Arjona, who recently collaborated with legendary performance artist Marina Abramovic. Other highlights will include music performances by Vivian Girls, the Blow, and Exene Cervenka.

During the week, Arjona will engage in a series of lengthy performances called *The/Affirmation/cycle*, in which she will test her body's endurance. It's reminiscent of the opening scene in *Apocalypse Now*, where a special forces assassin on a boozy tear trashes his Saigon hotel room and ends up a bloodied mess after he smashes a mirror into shards.

In one work, she'll use a rope dangling from the ceiling to shift her weight while she stands upon four glasses containing goldfish. In another, she'll attempt to straddle a giant ice cube containing nails and knives that she plans to remove with her toes as she balances on the melting block.

The **Scope** and **Art Asia** fairs (each \$20 general admission or \$10 for students and seniors), as well as **Red Dot** (\$10), **Design Miami/** (\$20), and **Photo Miami** (\$20 general admission, \$15 students and seniors), return with a vengeance, joined by a new addition to the Wynwood satellite fairs: **ARTery Miami** (\$10). The newbie expo is a strategic alliance between Miami's Soho Studios, Florida collectors, and international art dealers seeking to push the envelope in contemporary art.

"Our concept is to show the work of artists who are making a difference in the art world," explains Adela Holmes, ARTery's chief curator. "Because a lot of galleries have closed due to the economy, artists need representation, so we are exhibiting the work of individuals from Japan, the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, Sweden, and from here in America."

As a counterinsurgency to the stodgier fairs, ARTery will exhibit a painting by Victor Safonkin that depicts a titanic struggle between a single Teutonic warrior and an army of ghouls and goblins. It appears to presage an art-world cataclysm of Mayan-calendar proportions. A painting by Jeff McMillan portrays a yeti unleashing a blast of foul breath on unsuspecting viewers, while David Ho has rendered the image of a half-man/half-pig with a jet engine strapped to its hindquarters.

It's a reminder that anyone with a bucket of white paint and a space can open for business during Art Basel, even if his or her logic is termite-infested, local dealers complain.

"Just because you have five gallons of paint from Home Depot for a nice white space and a sign that says you're in the art business doesn't mean serious collectors will buy from you," says Gary Nader, whose eponymous Wynwood gallery is featuring a survey of the works of Roberto Matta, the late Chilean surrealist master. "People that are coming here to buy during Basel are looking for recession-proof blue-chip names and not giving a second glance to unknown commodities."

Nader is a lifer who is dug deep into his 50,000-square-foot concrete bunker, which houses \$100 million in modern and contemporary art. The hangar-size space is ringed by a phalanx of butterball Botero bronzes strong enough to stop an armored cavalry assault. His Mattas could fetch prices from the hundreds of thousands of dollars to as much as \$2.5 million.