

EXPERIENCE

Latin American, Digital, and Abstract Art Are in the Spotlight at Art Basel Miami Beach



By Nadja Sayej Dec. 2, 2021 1:18 pm ET

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Art Basel returned to Miami this year after taking a necessary hiatus for 2020, boasting 253 art galleries from 36 countries.

The 19th edition of this week-long art event features a number of trends in the white-box gallery booths at the Miami Convention Center, including abstract painting, internet- or internet-inspired art, and a spotlight on Latin American artists at this sprawling fair, which runs until Sunday.

Latin Influence

Miami has a strong Latin community—over 70% of its residents are Latino—so it makes sense there's a number of Latin artists on view. Some are even getting the long-overdue attention they deserve at this year's fair, such as São Paulo gallery Casa Triângulo's booth, which features works by Brazilian artist Antonio Henrique Amaral.

Amaral's works include *Das Bocas*, from 1967, which has strong figurative elements, but also features the flat graphic shapes that made him a trailblazer in 20th century Latin American art.

"Amaral brought a singular voice to Brazilian and Latin American art; he was part of the generation that came into its own under the authoritarian rule of the military dictatorship in Brazil in 1964," says Rodrigo Editore, the gallery director. "There is still much to discover and debate about in his work, especially now," Editore says. "He was not only a key figure in the history of Brazilian and Latin American art, but also an influential artist for the young generations that defy normalcy and authority."





"COCHA" by Catalina Swinburn.
Courtesy of Aninat Galeria de Arte

Gallery Isabel Aninat, based in Vitacura, Chile, is showing three women artists. The exhibit includes works by Chilean artist Catalina Swinburn, who uses paper from old books to weave together for handcrafted tapestries.

"I work basically with books, which were brought from Europe to South America in the 1940s, I call them 'narratives of displacement,' it was a way to bring knowledge," Swinburn says.

Many of the books, she says, are about Inca mythology. One piece is called *Cocha*, which is the Incan goddess of water. "I try to give them a new life—it's a cultural catastrophe in a way, where knowledge has been abandoned and replaced by technology."

The pieces hang like cloaks on the wall, with intricate folding work. "I want to create an awareness for us to look back to the knowledge that we take from the past, to understand the future," she adds.

At Guatemalan gallery Proyectos Ultravioleta's booth, the works of Chilean artist Felipe Mujica are on view, including one red and white abstract painting called *Primeros amaneceres en la tierra (Curtain 4)*, which calls to mind the color field abstractions of Mark Rothko, but has an organic feel.





Antonio Henrique Amaral, "Bananas, 1971."
images from casa triangulo

A Digital Focus

São Paulo gallery Simões de Assis is showing the landscape paintings of Miguel Bakun, many of which were painted in the 1950s, depicting trees, rivers, and the South American countryside.

After the rise of NFTs, digital and internet-inspired art has moved to the forefront of this year's Art Basel. Visual cues to our online lives have made their way to analogue mediums, such as oil paintings and tapestries. That means that anything that looks or feels like a digital property, whether it's a popular online font, symbols, or even memes, have become a big part of contemporary art.

Artist Christine Wang's oil painting "Spreading Communism" uses the format of an internet meme for a painting about wealth. "Memes are jokes, and jokes tap into the collective unconscious to help us release tension around our anxieties," Wang says. "Not every joke is accessible, depending on whether or not you find the joke funny."

Another example is Detroit artist Qualeasha Wood, who is showing at the Kendra Jayne Patrick gallery booth, including a series of tapestries based on print-outs of digital collages in threaded form. One is called *Foreva by Cardi B*, depicting the artist in selfie mode, holding up her phone, with mouse icons, emojis, and text message bubbles. In one piece, a text reads: "I'm not a reaction meme."

In Monica Bonvicini's artwork *Hy\$teria*, on view at the Galerie Krinzinger booth, we see a millennial-friendly font for an artwork that ties into the advertising world, specifically with street culture.

The piece references Sigmund Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* from 1895, but it also reflects today's art market, Bonvicini says. "The dollar sign in the artwork occupying the center of the wall is what plays to structures of turbo-capitalism in the art world, as seen this year via the NFT," she says.



Abstract Revival

Abstract painting is also seeing a fresh resurgence at this year's fair, specifically with colorful hard-edge paintings that build on the minimalist abstraction from the 1960s but with a new graphic touch.

On view at the booth of First Floor Gallery Harare, from Harare, Zimbabwe, there are abstract wall pieces by up-and-coming Zimbabwe artist Troy Makaza, who uses silicone that is infused with pigment, which is layered into sculptural form. Using pastel hues, combined with a tropical palette, the 26-year-old artist uses the works to untangle political ideas, while nodding to African craft traditions.

"Troy Makaza's work defies the preconceptions about African contemporary art that are prevalent at the moment," says Valerie Kabov, director of First Floor Gallery Harare. "It also speaks to a movement I call narrative abstraction, which is abstraction driven by storytelling in a very conscious and thoughtful way, which speaks to modernity and tradition, and which many African artists are embracing. The narratives are about politics and power in Zimbabwe, especially around land."

Yale graduate Vaughn Spann, who is showing with two galleries— David Castillo and Almine Rech —produces large works that combine straight, colorful lines with textured sections of the surface, which is full of an unexpected graphic play with shapes.

The Milan -based art gallery Kaufmann Repetto is showing glossy wall pieces by Los Angeles artist Pae White, including one piece called *Incantation, Evening Chatter*, made from car enamel and paper clay on wood.

The artist works with string, clay, glass, and cotton to create pieces that are impressions of these objects, all layered together into abstract compositions. She then partners with an auto body shop, which sprays the piece with car paint. "So, it's a combination of Los Angeles craft culture, arts and crafts, and macho car culture," says director Amanda Schmitt.

"Abstraction is an open-ended place for the viewer to project their own reality, in that sense, I don't think we could ever get sick of it," Schmitt says. "Now that we know and understand it—it won't go out of style."

Conversation
