



Stay Where You Are - The Art World is Coming To You

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by James Croak

In 1980 the volcano at Mount St. Helens blasted a vertical quarter mile of the mountain top into the sky. The airborne debris field was 10 miles high and 40 miles wide, leading a Washington State disk jockey to quip: "Don't bother coming to visit Washington this year because Washington is coming to visit you."

I had this thought Thursday night while viewing the immense Art Southampton fair where it was clear that entire neighborhoods of art galleries departed their zip code and landed on the grounds of the Elks Lodge in Southampton. Don't bother traveling to the art towns this summer; they have come to visit you. It would take six months of concentrated travel and a satchel of boarding passes to even glimpse the volume of eye candy that can be seen in a single afternoon. Did Art Southampton just replace Art Basel Miami Beach as the must-attend fair? Our phone lines are open.

The global art market passed 59 billion USD in annual sales last year and, according to ArtNet, the top 50 artists have a remarkable growth rate of nearly 18%, far surpassing the Standard & Poors 500 index that limps at 5%. Surprisingly, the TEFAF Maastricht art fair moaned that the art market had shrunk 7% last year due to an economy stuck in first gear. That shrinkage is perhaps apparent in Europe, but one would have a different conclusion viewing the endless crowds that mobbed the fair Thursday night, overwhelming the cops and firemen managing the traffic.

Where are they coming from? Why is the cultural life of the East End so sharply in the ascendant? No one doubts that it is; Art Southampton doubling in size in its second year is the latest example of a sea change on the East End. Another illustration is the Parrish Museum migrating from a Jobs Lane enclosure, sufficient since 1898, to a new world class building that tripled its floor space. This would not happen without viewers to fill it. Steve Martin noted in his "Object of Beauty" that as the recession took hold the "only thing missing in Chelsea were tumbleweeds." Yet the same Chelsea galleries were ready to pony up long green to show their works at Art Southampton.

The underlying reasons are multifarious and ultimately unknown; such is the mystery of an obvious trend. The Hamptons, once a summer camp for the prosperous, has an expanding year-round community of culturati. Modern telecommunications allows the information society to vacate the dark canyons of Manhattan and live in the special light, farms, and seashore of the East End. As more name artists move to the Hamptons, as it becomes common to find restaurants open in February, as new houses are built for all seasons, the people who demand a cultural infrastructure are seeing to it that it happens. And with great haste.

Art Miami, the sponsor of Art Southampton, is a seasoned group, having produced annual art fairs

for 23 straight years in the Wynwood Arts District of Miami. They followed the quiet buzz that the cultural life of the Hamptons is growing and are now very much a part of it. The year-over-year doubling in scale of Art Southampton testifies to Art Miami's confidence in the growing East End cultural scene and their desire to remain an integral part of it.

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