



Pulse Miami Keeps the Rhythm

December 6, 2013

by Sandra Hale Schulman

Pulse at the Ice Palace Studios in Miami's Design District has always been a standout fair. One of the more serene elements has been the lawn at the entrance with hammocks and a performance stage. There have also usually been a few standalone installations.

But like everything else in Miami, growth and change is inevitable. Gone is most of the lawn and the stand alone installations and the stage - where Excene Cervenka of the band X played a memorable set a few years ago - and in its place is a new tent called Impulse, filled with some exceptional international gallery exhibits.

The large open layout and slick black polished concrete floor makes for easy navigating. The Ice Palace is a film and TV rental facility, so luxe touches abound such as antique mirrors in the lounges. A packed brunch opened the fair on Thursday, with crowds lined up as early as at 9 a.m.

Galleries from Beijing, as well as New York, are showing colorful, complicated work in photography and painting. Anja Hitzenberger's Chinese Fast Food exhibit was shot in Beijing's Olympic park in 2011, revealing a visually overloaded fast food culture that is blindingly bright with graphics and color and stimuli. It's as much about consumption as eye candy consumerism.



"Chinese Fast Food" by Anja Hitzenberger.

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New York artists were out in full force. There was powerful work from Chuck Close with a new series of portraits of film star Brad Pitt looking strong and straightforward in the particular way Close gets his subjects to appear. It's not quite clear how he gets that same intense gaze, whether it's technique or direction, one can almost always tell that Close has gotten "that shot."



Portrait of Brad Pitt by Chuck Close. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

Robert Mapplethorpe was at Galerie Stefan Ropke with two self portraits – one of Mapplethorpe in a black leather jacket and pompadour hairdo holding a knife; and one of just his outstretched arm from 1975 – that are still bizarrely riveting, elegant and dangerous in the creamy textures he coaxed from black and white emulsions.



Self Portraits by Robert Mapplethorpe. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

There was also a wondrous installation of bi-fold black doors with a snow white dove perched on a mirrored stand by Aleksandar Duravcevic. Reminiscent of Louise Nevelson, the antique doors had various ornaments and insets, the surprise addition of the dove added a melancholy narrative like a gothic tale unfolding.



Installation by Aleksandar Duravcevic. Photo by Sndra Hale Schulman.

There was a diverse selection of work at Freight & Volume Gallery's booth, particularly Richard Butler's two paintings of female heads. Strong brushwork and unusual elements in the hats and expressions really make these portraits pop. Butler may be better known as the lead singer of the 80s goth pop synth band Psychedelic Furs, but he is a serious painter, working out of his upstate New York studio and exhibiting regularly.



"Natureisboring" by Richard Butler. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

Dark work was everywhere, even in the kitschy neon signage of Robert Montgomery's "The Slow Disappearance of Meaning and Truth" rendered in bright Las Vegas like lettering.



"The Slow Disappearance of Meaning and Truth" by Robert Montgomery.
Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

The fact that dark serious work is being shown is a good sign. In Miami, a serious art world is afoot. With Art Basel Miami Beach as the main anchor and 18 satellite fairs this year-plus the opening of a new waterfront museum—it's serious business that deserves serious work and the big guns and smaller pistols are all bringing their best work. International architecture, fashion, and the high-end food culture are raising the bar for everything. Pulse Miami is reflecting all this, though a few more hammocks would be nice.

BASIC FACTS: Pulse Miami Contemporary Art Fair is presented until Dec 8, 2013 at 1400 North Miami Avenue, Miami FL 33136. www.pulse-art.com.

Pulse New York will be opening in May 2014 at The Metropolitan Pavilion, 125 West 18th Street. The fair takes place from May 8-11, 2014.

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