



Palm Beach Modern + Contemporary Debuts High Energy, High Class Art Fair

January 13, 2017

by Sandra Hale Schulman

In a former median parking lot on the railroad tracks smack in the middle of downtown West Palm Beach, the new [Palm Beach Modern + Contemporary Fair](#) (PBM+C) opened on Thursday, January 12, 2017 with a high class, quality fair that was big on style if not in square footage. The fair spells out its identity in its name, a slight dig at the slightly stodgy [Palm Beach Jewelry, Art & Antique Show](#) as well as the [Art Palm Beach](#) fair, now in its 20th year (January 19 to 22, 2017), with its wide range of genres.

PBM+C is produced by the Art Miami Group, which also produces [Art Southampton](#), [Context](#) and [Art Miami](#) Fairs. At the VIP preview on Wednesday, January 11, Nick Korniloff and his Art Miami Group partner (and wife) Pamela Cohen greeted guests with a flood of champagne, a VIP area festooned with orchids and John Chamberlain sculptures, and a fair dotted with art stars. At the modest tent entrance, [Sophie Ryder](#)'s clever animal sculpture, courtesy of Waterhouse & Dodd, welcomed fairgoers.



Outside the PBMCF with art by Sophie Ryder. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.



A John Chamberlain in the VIP area. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

Inside was a clean, well laid out fair with wide aisles, sound reducing beige carpet and a swarm of waiters with drinks and hot small bites to nosh on. It wasn't quite the mad fair rush scene that Art Miami always has; this was a mature, well-heeled crowd with ladies in everything from tweed Chanel suits to sequined jeans and the men dapper in patterned jackets.

Cruising into the fair I immediately ran into some boldface Palm Beach names including Tim Wride, Photo Curator for the Norton Museum, and Sybille Welter, new Art Coordinator for the City of West Palm, who has been dropping some great public art on the city the past year. Welter said she was "excited to see a new fair in town; the more the merrier!"

Speaking from her booth, glam gallerist Nicole Henry, the mastermind behind the [CANVAS project](#) that has blanketed downtown with international artists' murals, was also glad to welcome a new fair. "This brings a new contemporary art focus to the city," she said. "I think it's great and very needed."



Galleriest Nicole Henry. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

In the VIP lounge, the Korniloff's held court at the [Perry J. Cohen Foundation](#) exhibit with their friend and supporter, football hero Joe Namath. The family was in the news two years ago after the tragic loss of their 14-year-old son Perry, who disappeared at sea during a fishing trip with a friend. The couple created the foundation for education about boating safety and are using art as a vehicle to raise funds and awareness.

Earlier in the week, Korniloff wrote in an email " I'm excited to bring a world class international modern and contemporary fair back to West Palm Beach and Palm Beach County. As a resident of Palm Beach, and someone who is very plugged in culturally, there is a very new energy being built around the arts in the City of West Palm Beach. We are a big part of that energy and freshness. The county has tremendous cultural assets and international appeal for those who are into culture, philanthropy and like the finer things in life, with a growing audience to match."

My favorite exhibition in the VIP lounge was curated by Jeffrey Deitch, featuring exquisite surrealist works by [Francis Picabia](#) from the Jeff and Mei Sze Greene Collection. Greene is a Palm Beach billionaire developer who just started collecting five years ago and has been guided by Deitch in his acquisitions. I had not seen so many Picabias in one place since the 1980s in a show at Mary Boone Gallery in Soho, and was enchanted by the swirling, sure handed images of horses and women rendered in an earthy palette.



Francis Picabia exhibit curated by Jeffrey Deitch. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

Also on hand in his own booth and in a booth he curated was national art hero [Bruce Helander](#), who was awarded the first annual Professional Achievement in the Arts Award by PBM+C. An artist, writer, curator and former gallerist since the early '80s, Helander has lived in Palm Beach for the past 34 years. He is turning 70 this week, and several celebrations are planned. The madcap, dashing artist—who curated an unexpected selection of decidedly urban art from local painter Edwin Baker III—was busy doing grip and grins all night.



Bruce Helander. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

“Rocketman” lyricist [Bernie Taupin](#), who has exhibited in the Hamptons with [Mark Borghi Fine Art](#), was at his booth, filled with riffs on American flags: burning and tying stars and stripes in multi-media ways.

Also hot on the scene was artist [Carlos Betancourt](#), who created the sensational confetti spewing float during the [Faena parade](#) in December. Betancourt lives in Miami and was dazzled by the eclectic mix of old school Palm Beach fashions in a hip new setting. He introduced me to his exhibiting artist friend [Troy Abbot](#) whose sculpture “Social Media”—of videotaped exotic chickens in a multi-story wooden coop—was the most endearing work of the show.



Artist Carlos Betancourt and Alberto LaTorre. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.



Troy Abbot with “Social Media.” Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

At several points during the night freight trains that run on the line parallel to the fair site could be heard, and felt, as they roared and rumbled through downtown. The effect was to give an immediate urban edge to the fair, akin to the modern art that was blasting through town with this high energy debut fair. Art train’s a comin’: get on board.

BASIC FACTS: Palm Beach Modern + Contemporary international art fair runs from January 12 to 15, 2017 at West Palm Beach City Tent Site between Lakeview Drive and Okeechobee Blvd by South Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach, FL 33401. www.artpbfair.com/home.
