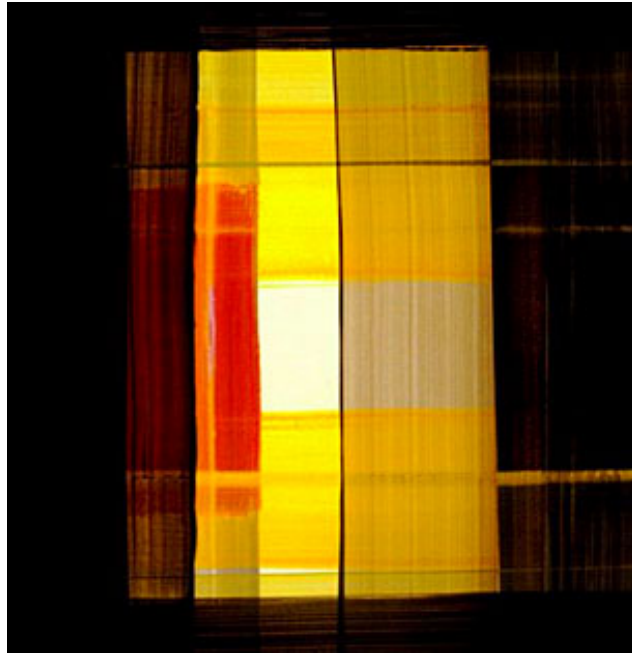


Scope Basel: Brash, but Humble

BY QUINN LATIMER | JUNE 15, 2009



If this year's **Scope** art fair — its third in Basel — didn't, in the end, pack quite the aesthetic punch one wanted, it certainly opened with a bang. With a wonderfully deep “Oomph” clapping sound and a pair of huge smoke circles, a specially commissioned installation by Brooklyn-based artist [Reed Barrow](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Reed+Barrow) (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Reed+Barrow>) announced itself in the hallway leading into the fair. *You and I Will Be Together in the End* (2009) features two smoke-ring generators embedded in large holes in facing black walls separated by a distance of 50 feet. At the clapping sound, large smoke rings emerge from the opposite ends of the hall, rushing toward each other until they evaporate just as they appear to glide through each other, much like ghost ships passing in the night.

In a straw bowler, the genial artist himself carefully kept watch over his installation, as Scope visitors quickly became entranced — and just as quickly reached for their camera phones. Asked how the fair was treating him, Barrow smiled sweetly and said, “It’s been just great, a great opportunity, though I haven’t seen much of the town. I’ve pretty much only been here.”

“Here” was Scope’s new site, a large pavilion built in the Sportplatz Landhof. Though only a two-minute walk from **Art Basel** proper, it seemed worlds away from the well-heeled and perfectly groomed environs of the Messe. As you wound your way past a gallery booth from Mexico City, the air suddenly took on the aroma of a kegger, which was a not-unwelcome change of pace from the champagne flutes fluttering around at the main fair.

But the high-low contrast extended to the art as well, much of which felt crafty and homespun, often in a cyber-punky manner. Barcelona-based photographer **Begoña Egurbides** huge lenticular prints offered distraught girls on rooftops and children frolicking in fields of poppies;

an installation of robots wrapped in blankets talked robotically about their feelings; and a group of young fashion designers from Miami created new designs on fair-goers’ bodies in a booth given a low-art baroque treatment via an inspired wall-papering of discarded lottery tickets by the American artist duo **Ghost of a Dream**.

Predictably, there was an abundance of mediocre photography and photo collage, often of sleeping, screaming, and/or naked young women found in white-linened bedrooms or the requisite flowering meadows. Nevertheless, there was some surprisingly good painting and drawing to be had — and for prices that were a far cry from the (still) giddy economic heights of the main fair. **Galerie Françoise Besson**, from Lyon, had an installation of small canvases and a wall mural by the young French painter **Emmanuelle Castellan** (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Emmanuelle+Castellan>). Her candy-colored acrylics of abstracted landscapes and domestic architectures had an easy, adept flair. Loose and liquid and lovely, they were on offer for €1,500 (\$2,100) each, and all sold to a Peruvian collector on opening day.

Another standout was a series of paintings by Texas-born artist **Sara Carter** (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Sara+Carter>) at the booth of Providence, Rhode Island, gallery **aureus contemporary**. In a kind of updated 1970s palette of avocados, burnt oranges, lemon yellows, denim blues, and sketchy blacks, her overlapping geometric grids created a sense of peering through the curtains of some desert motel with one’s eyes half closed. The transfixing, medium-sized works were going for \$8,000 each.

More minimal but no less engrossing were drawings by eminent Brazilian artist (and **Venice Biennale** (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Venice+Biennale>) alumnus) **Waltercio Caldas** at Lisbon’s **Celma Albuquerque** gallery. Shallow glass wall vitrines offered spare arrangements of India ink drawings, gold pins, and geometric lines. His works, others of which are included in nearby Zurich’s venerable **Daros Collection**, had the feeling of an elder holding court among the more boisterous upstarts.

Against the elegance of Caldas’s works, the brash sensibility of the fair at large rang out. Fluorescents, for example, were big this year, finding themselves in large-scale paintings of **Jim Morrison** (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Jim+Morrison>) and **Kurt Cobain** (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Kurt+Cobain>) by various artists, and small works by **Kim Dorland** (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Kim+Dorland>), at Canada’s **Skew Gallery**, as well as in the Day-Glo-hued shoes and scarves that many of the gallerinas were sporting.

Heading out of the fair, I stopped at the booth of Swiss gallery **Kunstwollen Association**, where there stood a sculpture of a kneeling and dappled gray horse boasting an antler that sprouted a kind of bouquet, the animal's nuzzle and hooves resting on carpet striated by modernist sunbeams. The touching work, called *My precious pale moonlight horse, come back home* (2009), by Swiss artist [Pascale Birchler](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Pascale+Birchler) (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Pascale+Birchler>) and on offer for 14,000 Swiss francs, seemed an appropriate emblem of this year's Scope itself: assuredly humble, sometimes lovely, and sometimes weird — not an altogether bad mix.

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