

ARTnews

For Art Basel's 'Pioneers,' Galleries Bring a Mix of Old and New, Seeing Steady Sales

BY Maximiliano Durón, Angelica Villa March 26, 2021 3:45pm



Deborah Kass, *(Detail) Double Yentl (My Elvis)*, 1997.

KAVI GUPTA

As galleries and collectors alike continue to adjust to buying and selling art online more than a year into the pandemic, [Art Basel](#) launched the first of its 2021 Online Viewing Rooms, which opened to VIPs on March 24 and runs until March 27.

In the past year, Art Basel has expanded its OVRs beyond just replacing its three staple fairs—in Hong Kong, Basel, and Miami Beach—with adding thematic editions focused on specific art-historical periods. Previous editions were devoted to 20th-century art and art made only during 2020. This iteration takes the title of “Pioneers,” and features 100 galleries from around the world, all of which are able to show only eight works at any given time. (As in past editions, galleries are able to swap out works as the fair progresses.)

The art on view in “OVR: Pioneers” centers around artists who have “broken new aesthetic, conceptual, or socio-political ground,” as defined by the galleries, and ranges from major historical art figures to emerging artists who have become acclaimed for pushing the boundaries of art. In a press conference earlier this week, Noah Horowitz, Art Basel’s Americas director, said, “One of the great things with this viewing room is the historical nature of some of the work on view. It’s easy to assume that in a digitally native realm, everything noteworthy was created yesterday. That’s certainly not the case on our platform.”

With this online edition of Art Basel, dealers reported steady sales and spoke highly of the improved online platform, which allowed for galleries to upload videos. (A similar feature was the highlight of the online version of FIAC, which happened earlier this month.)

Eric Gleason, Kasmin gallery’s senior director, said the fair’s curatorial prompt helped it home in a presentation of sculptures by American artist George Rickey, all made between 1951–60. Among the works that sold were *Wave II (or White Wave)* and *Diptych The Seasons (Hanging)*, both in the range of \$150,000–\$250,000, while *Neighbors* (1959–60) sold in the range of \$75,000–\$100,000.

“Art Basel’s OVR: Pioneers started with a thoughtful premise,” Gleason said. “The platform allowed us to show video of these works in a way that has not been done before, which is crucial in order to understand the kinetic nature of the sculptures.”



Betye Saar, *We Was Mostly 'Bout Survival (Ironing)*, 1997. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ROBERTS PROJECTS, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA; PHOTO: ROBERT WEDEMEYER

One of the main through-lines was a focus on pioneering women artists, whose artistic contributions have often been either long overlooked or sidelined within the canon. Los Angeles’s Roberts Projects

titled its Pioneers presentation “Dark Times: Betye Saar Washboard Assemblages 1997–2015,” and it assembled the artist’s well-known mixed-media sculptures from 1997 and 1998, along with two more recent examples from 2015. During the VIP preview, the gallery sold both of the 2015 assemblages—*Banjo Boy* and *Dark Times*—for \$150,000 each.

“Art Basel OVR: Pioneers is quite unique in that it is a platform driven by a rigorous curatorial lens which informs the exhibition as a whole,” Julie Roberts, the gallery’s cofounder, said in an email.

“When developing our online exhibitions, we take a focused representation of the gallery program, rather than a more generalized overview. The critical context provided by Art Basel’s framework is important to us, and our artists, as it enhances the overall viewing experience.”

Galerie Lelong & Co. offered the work of four women artists from its roster—Ana Mendieta, Carolee Schneemann, Nancy Spero, and Mildred Thompson—for a group presentation called “Legacies.” The gallery made two works by each artist available, ranging from drawings to multi-part photographic suites to mixed-media sculptural works. The gallery sold Schneemann’s *Study for Up to and Including Her Limits* (1973), a photograph of a famed performance by the artist shot by Anthony McCall, for \$35,000.

“We’ve long been leaders in working with women artists and consequently, after their deaths, their Estates,” Mary Sabbatino, the gallery’s vice president/partner, said in an email. “Concentrating on this aspect of the gallery’s program seemed a good fit with the celebration of Women’s History Month and our solo exhibition of Mildred Thompson. In addition, three of the artists in the OVR were closely aligned. Mendieta, Schneemann, and Spero all knew each other in New York and sometimes exhibited together.”

Similarly, Chicago’s Kavi Gupta gallery sold Deborah Kass’s monumental 1997 work *Seven Ghost Yentls (My Elvis)* for \$350,000 to a private Canadian museum. “We have received an incredible response from the global arts community in celebrating this crucial body of work from Deborah Kass,” Kavi Gupta, the gallery’s founder, said in an email. “We’re pleased to see that collectors are so enthusiastically embracing 2021.”

Blum & Poe, which has locations in Tokyo, Los Angeles, and New York, sold several works by the later American painter Robert Colescott, known for his satirical figurative paintings, each for a price of \$195,000. The gallery's founder Tim Blum said that the gallery had "placed most of the works on offer to a global audience, ranging from collectors who own the artist's work in-depth to collections who are new to the artist and this period of work."

Other sales of historic work included Claes Oldenburg's *Notebook Page: Study for Sculpture in the Form of the Alphabet Good Humor Bar* (1972), which was offered in the range of \$100,000–\$150,000 by New York's Paula Cooper Gallery. The Copenhagen outfit Galleri Nicolai Wallner sold Poul Gernes's four-part panel painting *Untitled (dot painting)*, 1966, for \$110,000 to a private European collector. São Paulo's Bergamin & Gomide gallery had sold two drawings on rice paper (from the 1960s–'70s) from its solo presentation of Brazilian artist Mira Schendel to a U.S. collection, with its sales totaling in the range of \$100,000–\$150,000.

On the more recent side of things, several galleries presented work made in the past few years. L.A.'s David Kordansky Gallery presented new "Pour and Puddle" paintings by Swiss artist John Armleder, who will be the subject of a major survey at the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai opening later this year. In total, the gallery sold five works by Armleder—two "Puddle" paintings (*Pédatifide* and *Two Strictions*) and three "Pour" paintings (*Inner Planets*, *Tiroles*, and *Striction*) for \$110,000 each.

"Our strategy of curating a solo presentation of new paintings by John Armleder, paired with extensive behind-the-scenes videos of the artist making these works in his studio, generated an immediate and enthusiastic response from collectors who moved quickly to acquire these rare, medium-format examples of the artist's iconic Pour and Puddle Paintings," Michelle Pobar, a sales director at Kordansky, said in an email.



Leda Catunda, *Dourado*, 2018. Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel

RIO DE JANEIRO

São Paulo's Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel presented a mix of historic and recent work by two of its artists, Jac Leirner and Leda Catunda, and had sold the latter's *Dourado* (2018) in the range of \$25,000–\$50,000.

“Art Basel Pioneers was a great opportunity to show side by side Jac Leirner and Leda Catunda, artists from the same generation whose radical practice is on one hand an antithesis yet equally pivotal in its approach and influence,” Alex Gabriel, Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel partner director, said in an email. “It's a concise presentation which seeks to highlight the singular language both artists have developed over the years. We have had a strong response to the works, that includes both historical pieces from the 90s to recent work.”

New York's Petzel gallery sold Jorge Pardo's 2018 light sculpture made of aluminum, painted PETG plastic and stainless steel for \$125,000 along with Joyce Pensato's 2019 enamel on linen work titled *Hello* for \$120,000. San Francisco gallery Altman Siegel sold three works on paper by Trevor Paglen from 2020 by the second day of the online fair—two editions of *We...* works each sold for \$40,000, and *A Standard Face* (2020) went for \$12,000. Elsewhere, New York's 303 Gallery sold two works made in 2020 by Tala Madani for a collective \$80,000.

San Francisco's Jessica Silverman Gallery had created a presentation showcasing eight new sculptures by Matthew Angelo Harrison, who was included in the 2019 Whitney Biennial. The presentation also mimics the synergy between fair booths and museum exhibitions that is often seen during the Swiss edition of Art Basel, as Harrison's exhibition is meant to serve as a preview for his solo show in June at Kunsthalle Basel, one of the institution's most coveted exhibition slots as it coincides with the fair.

In an email, Jessica Silverman, the gallery's founder, said that they had sold three of Harrison's works—including *Relic for Disruption I* (2021), a 7.5-foot sculpture of a spear incased in tinted polyurethane resin, for \$40,000—and were still finalizing further sales. "It is harder to sell sculpture than painting or photography online, but Art Basel is one of the few fairs with the gravitas to encourage collectors to take a longer, more careful look," she said.