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From Fair to Festival: A Report on Art Basel/Miami Beach

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Art Basel/Miami Beach, Miami Beach Convention Center, December 3 to December 6, 2015

Frank Stella, *Il Palazzo della Scimmie*, 1984. Mixed media on canvas, etched magnesium, aluminum and fiberglass; 124 1/2 x 98 7/8 x 27 1/2 inches. ABMB Booth B13: Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

Before detailing the manifold seductions of Art Basel/Miami Beach as the site of a virtual festival of the arts, it should be noted that the anchor fair was in good form. In fact, we thought that this year's fair featured better examples and greater diversity than those of the past few years. The highly selected 267 galleries representing 32 countries brought to Miami Beach many of the popular blue-chip artists we read about in well-advertised one-person shows and contemporary art auctions. For those far from the Whitney Museum Frank Stella retrospective, many galleries displayed his paintings, providing a mini-Stella exhibition. There were also outrageous works like a 7-foot tall pair of blue and white polar bears by Paola PIVI made of foam, plastic and feathers at Galerie Perrotin and ingenious works like the wooden stools by John Preus at the Rhona Hoffman Gallery made from materials salvaged from recently closed Chicago Public Schools and selling for \$800.00. Disturbingly, this year's fair even included an actual stabbing event that was misinterpreted by some fair goers as performance art and others as an act of terrorism. We also sampled several of the close to twenty satellite fairs spread throughout Miami and Miami Beach and found the quality generally high.

There was a time just fourteen years ago when Art Basel/Miami Beach was a singular event of excellence that was accompanied by a handful of satellite fairs for those priced out of the main event or in search of emerging artists. While it is still a top-notch fair, its role has changed. Now, for art lovers internationally and for the Miami area, it gradually has taken on the role of a catalyst that sets in motion a veritable festival of the arts—in the spirit of Black Mountain College where many art forms collided and interacted. Indeed, one of the most Black Mountain-like events involved a collaboration between Silas Riener, a former Merce Cunningham dancer, and Martha Friedman, a Brooklyn-based creator of seductive soft sculptures that morphed into dance costumes at the *Pore* exhibition at Locust Projects.

Another powerful strand of this festival of the arts was the presence of two well-selected surveys of Los Angeles Light and Space Art. At the Surf Club in Miami Beach, Joachim Pissarro, in consultation with Terence Riley and John Keenan, curated *LAX – MIA: Light + Space*, which included both vintage and new sculptures as well as recent paintings by Peter Alexander, Larry Bell, Mary Corse, John McCracken, Laddie John Dill, Helen Pashgian, and DeWain Valentine. Set in an airy glass-encased building by Richard Meier right off the ocean, it provided an East Coast simulation of the Light and Space that so inspired the West Coast artists represented here. The curators of this show, who used this exhibition to launch their consulting group, Parallel LLC, exemplified another theme of this year's art week, namely, new attempts to combine art, architecture and design. This was also in evidence at the Design Miami Fair where the interdisciplinary collaborative, Revolution, introduced *Volu*, (a prefabricated dining pavilion designed by Zaha Hadid and Patrick Schumacher), which also included the participation of the designer, Marcel Wanders on a panel held inside the new structure.