



## An art-blog maven on the three-ring Miami circus

By Randy Gladman  
December 7, 2010

I've resisted attending the annual art carnival that is Art Basel Miami Beach since my last excursion in 2003. From that trip, during the convention's second iteration, all I remember is a blur of expensive cars, beautiful women at exclusive parties in boutique South Beach hotels, and an ocean of vodka. (Some figments also remain of a moment when I posed as film director Wes Anderson in order to successfully Jedi mind-trick my way past security into the Visionaire party at the Raleigh Hotel; but that's a story for another blog posting). What I don't remember from that first trip was what I went there for in the first place: the art.

By the end of the second day of this year's Art Basel Miami, I realized there actually is a lot more to this event than just an art superstore writ large. Pop-up shows by OHWOW Gallery and Jonathan Levine Gallery, both appearing in Wynwood for the run of the festival, are excellently raucous examples of the kind of energetic satellites that make this whole event fizz. These exhibitions included exciting next-generation starts such as KAWS, DALEK, Rob Lazzarini, Jose Parla, Rey Parla, Barry McGee, Phil Frost, Invader, and Shepard Fairey, all artists with crossover appeal into contemporary culture. Ryan McGinness's *Women: The Blacklight Paintings* exhibition and party at the seedy Club Madonna strip club also offered a kind of dynamic interaction with Miami itself -- an aspect that the fairs largely neglect.

The main Art Basel fair in the Miami Beach Convention Center is fantastic and important for sure, but it is only interesting if artists already have a blue-chip stamp of approval for you to notice or care about them. The artists showing with the top galleries involved with this main fair are already 'made', in the mafia sense of the world; they are untouchable, their contribution to the contemporary culture beyond reproach and debate. As a result, there is a stuffiness to this main event. What I value now is the way this centerpiece functions as the sun in a solar system of smaller planetary events that cut spinning routes throughout Miami; though it is too hot (and expensive) to be cool and exciting, the central fair is the bright star that gives gravity to all the week's ancillary events.