

Uncategorized

[Art Basel Miami: It's the Economy, Stupid](#)

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Images from Art Whino's installation

Go to an art event this week and you may notice that the artists, curators and gallery owners you encounter have a sun-kissed glow. They've just returned from Miami's Art Basel, an international art fair where collectors scoop up works by established and up-and-coming artists, curators look for fresh talent, and artists and gallery owners sell their work and celebrate at glitzy parties on South Beach. Participating galleries from D.C. included Conner Contemporary, Irvine Contemporary, Civilian Art Projects, Fraser Gallery, Hamiltonian Gallery, and Art Whino.

Art Basel is also an indicator for the state of the art market. Last year, after the economic crisis struck, the sales and celebrations were more subdued. This year, there have been glimmers of hope that prices and sales will bounce back. Arts Desk special correspondent **Trevor Young**, an artist who attended and whose work was shown with Civilian, talked to three of D.C.'s galleries in Miami about the fair, the economy, and what art is ahead of the curve. Here's what they had to say:

Jackie Ionita, of Hamiltonian Gallery, attended Art Basel for the second time this year. Because of that, all she really knows is the down days. "We opened right as the economic crisis hit," she said. "So we don't really know about the glory days of collectors coming into booths and buying everything off the walls." Despite that, she's not really sure that the economy has hurt her gallery. "It's opened up a lot of doors for us. There is more competition to come to an art fair when the economy is great."

Ninety percent of the work that Ionita brought to the fair came from D.C. artists. Among other galleries, she's noticed an increase in painting, particularly figurative painting. In a year with such an uncertain economy, Ionita thinks that galleries have no choice but to be impressive. "They have brought their heavy hitters," she said.

Lauren Gentile, of Irvine Contemporary, has traveled to Miami for her third Art Basel with the 14th Street gallery. "In the years prior to the crash we were having black AmExes thrown at us," she said. "This year, it's a little more about educating people, and less about partying." Gentile said that more than 100 collectors from the D.C. area came to the fair to see new works from the national and international artists the gallery represents, and to discover new favorites. She agreed with Ionita about the caliber of work she's seen this year. "Because of the downturn in the market, galleries have tried to bring stunners – their most outstanding work," she said.

Irvine has brought work from two local artists, **Melissa Ichiuji** and **Akemi Maegawa**, to Basel. Gentile's trendspotting revealed a return to painting, and an uptick in the amount of street art that collectors sought – a recession-friendly purchase, as it is very price-accessible. "It's very fashionable to collect video, especially for older collectors," she added. "It's kind of a young progressive thing to do, and they show it at parties in their homes."

Shane Pomajambo of Art Whino took a different approach to Art Basel: he set up his own gallery space outside of the fair. Featuring 250 artists, Art Whino eschewed Basel booths for an 8,000 square foot space that gave them the freedom to set up larger installations, and host parties to promote their artists. "What's

beautiful about the installations is that you can see a 10-foot by 10-foot in massive piece from an artist, and you can also see their canvas work,” he said. “For us, being in a traditional space wouldn’t work. We’re trying to bring you into their world.”

Pomajambo said that his gallery in D.C. works with more than 700 artists from around the world. “The art that we represent is kind of newbrow. It’s the up and coming emerging artist.” He’s also noticed the increasing influence of the street artist in 2009, and how qualities of street art are a greater part of traditional fine art. “Some of the things that we see are stencils, mixed media, wheatpasting, spray acrylic, and markers,” he said. “They’re trying to bring the ephemeral qualities of the street into their work.”