

Art World

The 3 Things People Were Talking About at Art Basel, According to Social Media

From Joan Mitchell's moment to the mid-size gallery squeeze, here's what was sparking social media conversation during the fair.

Caroline Goldstein, June 15, 2018

For those of us who aren't lucky enough to be in Switzerland for Art Basel's 49th edition, we've compiled a selection of what's trending in and around the Messeplatz.

1. Joan Mitchell Mania

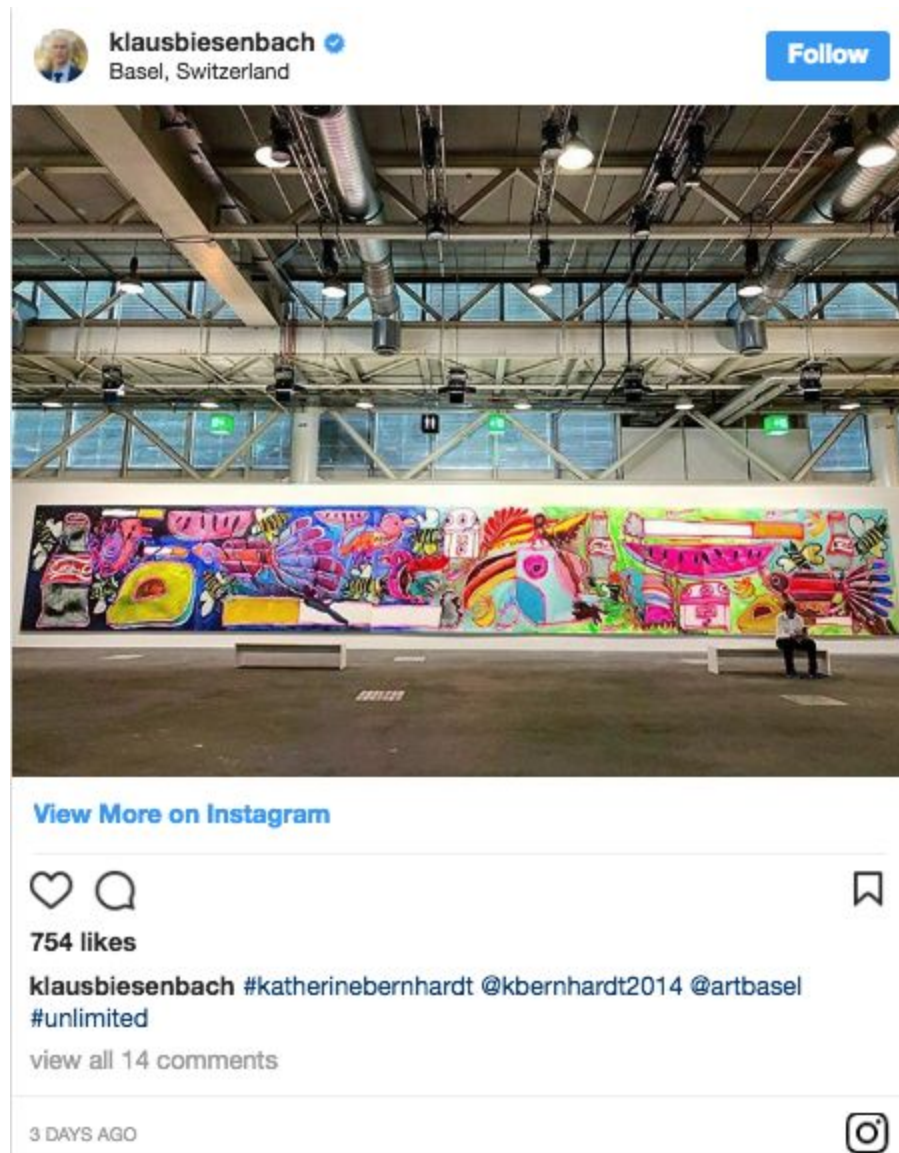
Before the fair even kicked off, Katya Kazakina of *Bloomberg* spotted a trend in exhibitors, and declared abstract expressionist Joan Mitchell “the belle of Basel.” Although it is true that there were numerous canvases by the artist, not everyone was pleased with the headline, with Magda Sawon of Postmasters gallery clapping back at the “insulting” phrasing. As sales reports flew in, two works by Mitchell—one at Hauser & Wirth and another at Levy Gorvy—were sold with asking prices of \$14 million. The always vocal raconteur Jerry Saltz had his own opinions on what to do with the money.

As Katya Kazakina of *Bloomberg* correctly pointed out, there is certainly a healthy appetite for Mitchell's expressive abstractions at the Messeplatz this year. There is no doubt that Joan Mitchell is having a moment—before public viewing days even began at the fair, the Baltimore Museum of Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art announced a major survey dedicated to the artist beginning in 2020.

2. Sometimes Size Does Matter

At the Unlimited section, where artworks too big to fit inside standard booths are displayed, there were a number of larger-than-life installations that provided endless social media fodder. In this year's Unlimited, quantity literally informs the quality. Robert Longo's *Death Star II* is an homage to the approximate number of people who died last year due to gun violence in the US. The giant orb casts a copper glow, thanks to the 40,000 copper and brass shell casings used to complete the work. Meanwhile, He Xiangyu's *Untitled* work is made of 3,500 grams of pure gold and serves as a

commentary on China's one-child policy. The storage company Uovo (Latin for 'egg') had a particular affinity for the gilded egg carton. Another fan favorite was Ai Weiwei's installation *Tiger, Tiger, Tiger*, made of more than 3,000 porcelain shards from the Ming Dynasty; and Katherine Bernhardt's neon-painted canvas *Blue Skies*, measured at more than 69 feet and made for a colorful backdrop for many photo ops.



Other Unlimited works that garnered attention on Instagram included José Yaque's *Tumba Abierta III* from Galeria Continua, an installation of glass bottles filled with water and plant residues; and Rashid Johnson's *Antoine's Organ*, which riffs on Sol Lewitt's rigid grid-format but is filled with flora and fauna, books, music, video monitors, and even features live performances by a classical pianist.

3. The Squeeze Is On—But Not at Basel

If you haven't heard, mid-size art galleries are facing tough times in 2018. Mega-collector Alain Servais sparked conversation, posting recent news articles that commented on the lackluster climate. A Turkish-based outlet spoke to the exhibitors at the nearby inaugural Frame Art Fair, where exhibitors who couldn't afford the hefty prices to show at Basel were toiling away, with nary a VIP in sight. That scene was a far cry from the seven- and eight-figure sums reported from the Basel main stage, where dealers were lamenting strong interest in artists that simply couldn't be met—which gallerist Jack Shainman rightly described as “a luxury problem.”



Caroline Goldstein Editorial Assistant

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-basel-social-media-1304186>