

VISUAL ARTS

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

Plenty to enjoy during frenetic week

The extraordinary week of visual art exhibitions, events, sales and parties that has generically come to be called Fog, after the art fair Fog Design + Art at the center of the storm, delivered as promised.

A new fair in town, Untitled, San Francisco, is an offshoot of a successful Miami market. It seemed to double the energy of past years, extending it across the city, from a large pier at Fort Mason to a gargantuan one in Dogpatch.

In between, there were openings of exhibitions at every turn. The city saw the debut of three entirely new commercial gallery spaces — Berggruen, Adrian Rosenfeld and one I have not yet visited, Capital. There were much-anticipated performance art projects, an arm-long list of lectures and symposia, and an international museum conclave. There was also a good amount of socializing and celebrating — see Chronicle columnist Leah Garchik's excellent reports.

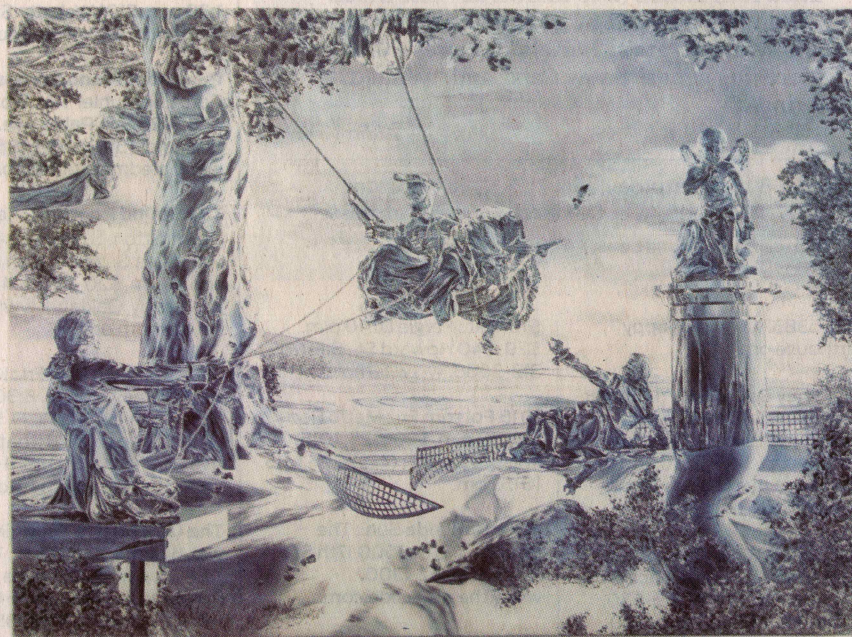
Fog Design + Art supports the San Francisco Museum of Art through the gala opening and sponsorship donations; direct proceeds and any profit from the fair itself goes to White Rain Productions, which is contracted and overseen by a volunteer committee. The gala was a sellout, with 1,600 tickets sold; 8,000 people visited the fair over its four-day run. That largely public-benefit structure is just one of the things that distinguishes Fog from other such efforts. Unlike most fairs, galleries handling objects ordinarily seen in a design context are given equal billing to high-end art dealers, which gives the event a pleasant domestic feel. And though galleries must compete for the right to rent space, organizers are sure to include some of the best of the Bay Area, so it still feels like home.

This year's show was the best in its five-year history. Among New York galleries, James Cohan brought a large and eye-catching work by Ethiopian artist Elias Sime, who has garnered much attention from museums for works made from discarded circuit boards, stitched together with reclaimed computer wire. And Yossi Milo went all-in on abstract photography with a small but intensely graphic group exhibition.

Bay Area stalwart Berggruen continued a recent tradition of testing new-to-the-gallery artists at the fair with precise and painstaking collages of ink splashes sug-



Casey Kelbaugh / Untitled, Art



Anat Ebgi

Above: New York dealer Andrew Krebs shows a work to Miami collectors Mera and Don Rubell during Untitled, San Francisco.

Left: This work by Chris Coy, nearly 9 feet wide with elements that appear computer generated, was a showstopper.

gesting colorful galaxies by Mark Fox, who last showed at the Anderson Collection at Stanford University, and works by Brad Kahlhamer completed during a recent residency at Headlands Center for the Arts. Hosfelt Gallery showed images by Stefan Kürten of high Modern architecture that could have been mistaken for old Kodachrome negatives, but were intricate drawings.

On walking into Untitled, San Francisco, the first people I saw were Miami collectors Don and Mera Rubell. It might have been a sign that the earth has shifted beneath the San Francisco art market, though it could also be that they had been invited by the fair to discuss the topic of "How Art Transforms Neighborhoods" with Minnesota Street Project co-founders Deborah and Andy Rappa-

port.

All that makes Fog feel comfortable — with its soft echoes of the staid and elegant Art Dealers Association of America show held at New York's Park Avenue Armory each March — is exactly what Untitled eschews. There was no carpeting in the walkways — indeed, there was very little heat in the building on the rainy afternoon of the VIP opening. I found the layout of booths chaotic, though many visitors called it energetic. Most galleries showed not just new work, but less well-known artists. Thematic shows were the exception rather than the rule. It all made for a heady, if demanding, experience.

Fog is intentionally limited to 45 dealers; Untitled seemed to have twice that many (organizers did not respond to requests for attendance and

participant numbers). A number of Untitled booths were given free to Bay Area non-profit art groups, who made good use of the opportunity. Dena Beard, director of the Lab, sat alone at a desk in the middle of an aisle, exposed so she could expose others to her unconventional program. The Contemporary Jewish Museum sold tchotchkes and logo wear advertising an exhibition of the comically earnest, gay and Jewish artist Cary Leibowitz.

The showstopper among the commercial gallery booths was a hyper-real painting nearly 9 feet wide brought by Los Angeles dealer Anat Ebgi. The work of 36-year-old Chris Coy, it combined fragments stolen from the 18th century French artist Jean-Honoré Fragonard with elements that appeared to be computer generated. Rendered in silvery

blue tones, it gave the feeling of a world built of mirrors and mercury glass.

Both fairs assembled frenetic schedules of conversations, panel discussions, luncheons and other official offerings. In addition, SFMOMA staged a daylong apologia related to its controversial 100-year loan agreement with the family of Doris and Don Fisher.

"Yours, Mine, and Ours: Museum Models of Public-Private Partnership" comprised four panel discussions. Each was meant to include not only museum leaders, but also major donors. At points, Latin American art collector and private museum founder Patricia Cisneros was to appear, then Sheika Hoor Al-Qasimi of Sharjah Art Foundation in the United Arab Emirates. In the end, however, only Bob Fisher, representative of the Fisher family and president of the SFMOMA board, showed up, prompting moderator Sarah Thornton to quip, "I think they all chickened out."

Fisher and SFMOMA director Neal Benezra restated the museum's unalloyed enthusiasm about their arrangement, deflecting any discussion of its limitations. Fisher said it is a loan and not a gift because "once you give something away, it's gone forever." Benezra said, "We placed a bet." And that was that.

The highlight of the day was a discussion between two museum professionals who work for privately funded museums in authoritarian countries. Kate Fowle, chief curator of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, and Lars Nittve, founding director of M+ in Hong Kong, questioned the very definition of "public." Do we take the concept to mean the state, or the mass of private individuals who share a home and culture?

Frances Morris, director of London's Tate Modern, described her museum as one that embraces unauthorized audience activism. Manuel Borja-Villel of Madrid's Reina Sofia said his ideal public is "somebody that is active; somebody who has agency."

As symposium attendees filed out at day's end, unanswered questions about SFMOMA's responsibility to an empowered public beyond its major donors still hovered in the air.

Charles Desmarais is The San Francisco Chronicle's art critic. Email: cdesmarais@sfgchronicle.com Twitter: @Artguy1