

The Art Newspaper

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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Photography
News

Undervalued photographers get exposure at Art Basel in Miami Beach

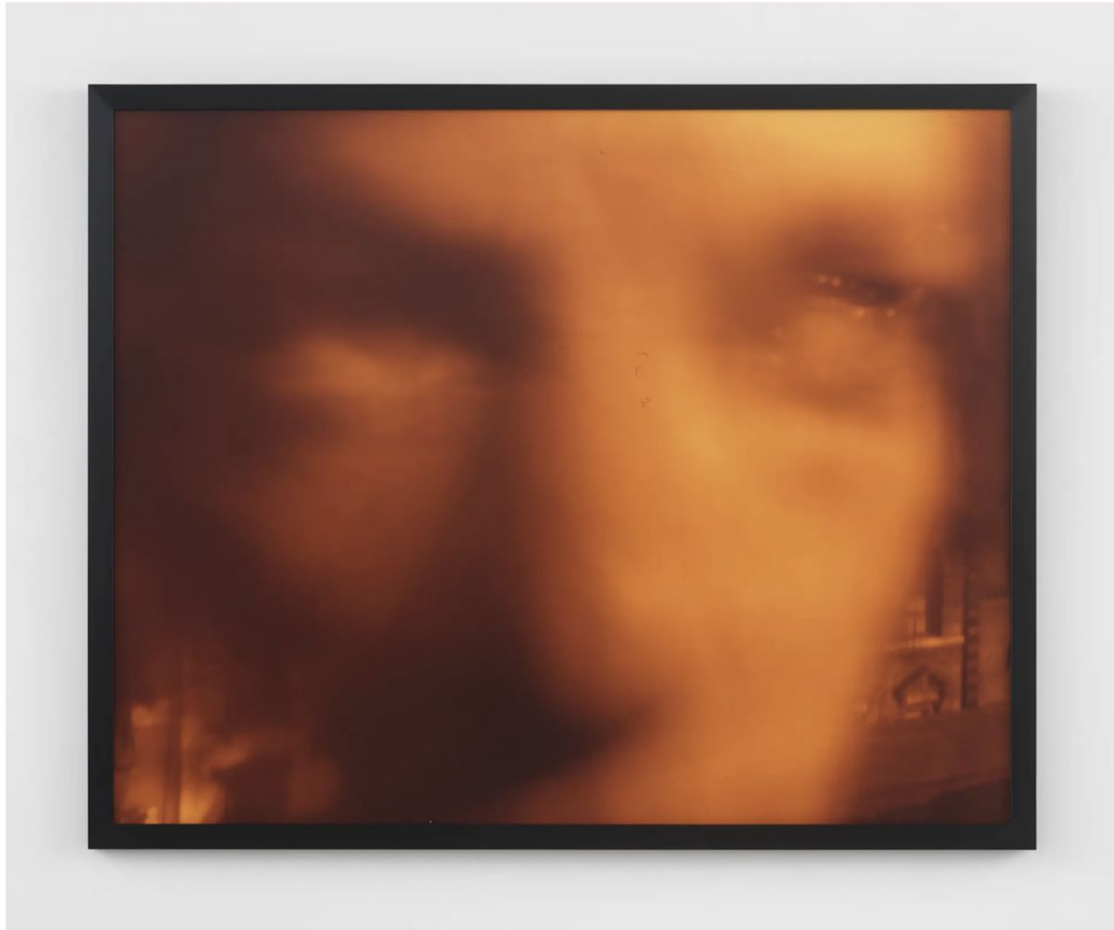
Fair will exhibit works by Jimmy DeSana and Barbara Ess, largely forgotten artists who were contemporaries of Robert Mapplethorpe

Linda Yablonsky

28 November 2022

The ultimate art experience is the one you have never had before. That is a bonus at an art fair, where collectors may find the new but not necessarily the different. Even more rare is the “experimental”, a euphemism for work of historical import that has been undervalued by the market. Two notable examples at Art Basel in Miami Beach are solo presentations of previously unexhibited photographs by Jimmy DeSana and Barbara Ess.

Now deceased, both artists were integral to the downtown New York art-fashion-music scene of the late 1970s and early 80s, but their legacies have not kept pace with those of their better-known contemporaries, such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Hujar and David Wojnarowicz. Their time may be now.



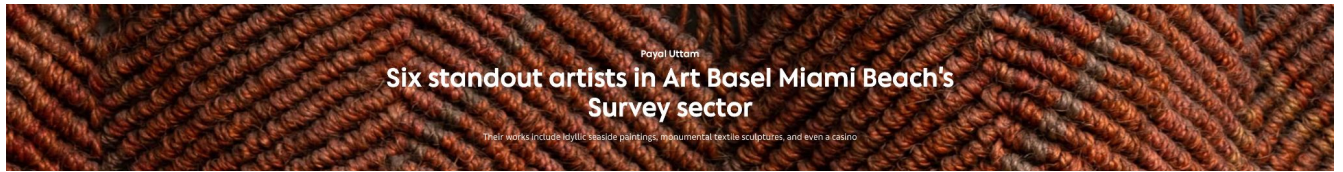
Barbara Ess, who died last year, used a pinhole camera to create ethereal images, such as her 1991 work *Head*

The Estate of Barbara Ess; courtesy of Magenta Plains, New York

Large, eerie pinhole camera works by Ess, a musician and film-maker as well as an artist associated with the New Wave scene, will appear in the Survey sector of the fair. The last pinhole camera prints remaining in the artist's personal collection, they are priced between \$30,000 and \$40,000. "Barbara was insistent on transforming the ordinary into the symbolic," notes Olivia Smith of [Magenta Plains](#), the New York gallery that has represented Ess's estate since her death last year. "The pinhole camera allowed her to abstract and distort the outer world to show how emotional subtlety and inner turmoil projected outward. Her interest was the barrier between, and her pictures are very relatable."

Art Basel
November 2022

Art | Basel



Barbara Ess (1948–2021, New York)
Presented by Magenta Plains, New York

After spending the early years of her career experimenting with film and music, the late American artist Barbara Ess chanced upon an article in the *New York Times* in 1983, about pinhole cameras – a lenseless camera often made of cardboard, pierced with a tiny aperture. She followed a diagram in the paper and built her own, quickly becoming fascinated with the possibilities it afforded to blur and distort images. For Ess, the pinhole camera almost became an extension of her inner consciousness, allowing her to conjure mysterious, fugitive images that brought to life states of liminality, ambiguity, and confusion. As she once said, 'I think of my work as an investigation and it's always concerned with the same question: Exactly what is the true nature of reality?' The booth of **Magenta Plains** will showcase a series of her haunting large-scale prints from the 1980s and 1990s depicting a variety of subjects, from a forlorn sunflower to an eerie-looking row of houses.



Barbara Ess, *Boy Watching Kiss*, 1986. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Magenta Plains.

Hyperallergic
December 1, 2022

HYPERALLERGIC

Why Is There No Spanish at Art Basel Miami?

At this year's show, I reflected on the lack of bilingual materials, the absurdity of art-fair gimmick, and the workers who make it all possible.



by Valentina Di Liscia
2 days ago



Barbara Ess's dark and haunting photographs at the booth of the New York gallery Magenta Plains provided a welcome respite from all the obvious, trying-too-hard gallery displays. I chuckled at Jonathas de Andrade's "Lost and Found [Achados e Perdidos] (2020-2022), a sculptural grouping of 25 clay butts wearing tight, multi-patterned swimming shorts inspired by the forgotten bathing suits left behind in the changing rooms of Recife's swim clubs in Brazil. And Meredith Rosen Gallery's incredible contribution to the fair is a re-staging of Guillaume Bijl's 1984 "Casino," one of the Belgian artist's so-called "transformation installations," complete with functional blackjack and roulette tables. (When it was first exhibited at the S.M.A.K. art museum, Bijl's piece reportedly invited a visit from police officers who thought it was an illegal operation.)



Installation of Barbara Ess's photographs at Magenta Plains's booth

Testudo

November 15, 2022

TESTUDO

Tips to Master Miami Art Week from Miami Beach to Your Own Home

BY ANNABEL KEENAN

Annabel Keenan is a New York-based writer specializing in contemporary art and sustainability. Her work has appeared in *The Art Newspaper*, *Cultured Magazine*, *Brooklyn Rail*, and *Hyperallergic*, among others.

With several major art fairs, dozens of museum exhibitions, and countless special events, Miami Art Week is one of the biggest times of the year in the art industry. While European collectors and dealers enjoyed the recent activities surrounding Frieze London and Art Basel's new Paris+ show, American audiences are soon flocking to Miami for Art Basel Miami Beach, with events launching the last week of November. As commercial and cultural endeavors, art fairs present perfect opportunities to see a broad cross-section of the newest and most buzz-worthy art. The sheer volume of activities can easily overwhelm, but these tips will help to navigate Art Week seamlessly.



The Lay of the Land: Miami Beach Fairs

[Art Basel Miami Beach](#) is undoubtedly the main attraction of Miami Art Week with big names like Hauser & Wirth and Gagosian who bring their most coveted, and often most expensive, works. Taking place in the sprawling Miami Beach Convention Center, the event attracts thousands of people, including dealers, collectors, and several celebrities. Visitors attend Art Basel, and any fair in general, for countless reasons from collecting art to learning about new artists to having fun at the myriad parties and events. Highlights of this year's edition include [Magenta Plains](#)'s solo booth of photographs by Barbara Ess and [Roberts Projects](#) group presentation including Amoako Boafo and Kehinde Wiley.

Understanding your goals is paramount before experiencing any fair, and this is particularly helpful for Art Basel. If you are planning on seeing a specific exhibitor or artist, make sure to look up the booth number and find it on a map. No matter how set you are on seeing something, missing exhibitors is shockingly easy, and there's nothing worse than navigating an entire fair for hours on hard concrete floors only to realize you forgot to look for something or someone.



Art Basel 2022. Barbara Ess, No Title (Sunflower), 1997-98, C print. Courtesy of Magenta Plains.

Il Giornale Dell'Arte
November 28. 2022



IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE

Alla scoperta di talenti dimenticati

Entrando nel vivo delle proposte, ad Art Basel Miami Beach si possono ammirare opere di Jimmy DeSana e Barbara Ess, artisti in gran parte dimenticati, contemporanei di Robert Mapplethorpe. Entrambi, ormai deceduti, sono stati parte integrante della scena artistica di New York tra la fine degli anni Settanta e l'inizio degli anni Ottanta, ma la loro eredità non ha tenuto il passo con quella dei loro contemporanei più noti, come Mapplethorpe, Peter Hujar e David Wojnarowicz. Forse è arrivato il loro momento.

In concomitanza con «Jimmy DeSana: Submission», una retrospettiva sulla carriera del neosurrealista inaugurata questo mese al Brooklyn Museum (fino al 16 aprile 2023), la PPOW Gallery ha dedicato il suo settore Kabinett a 21 opere uniche realizzate dall'artista tra il 1985, anno in cui gli fu diagnosticato l'Hiv, e la sua morte nel 1990 all'età di 40 anni (i prezzi variano da 15mila a 20mila dollari).

«Sono passati 32 anni, dice Laurie Simmons, ex compagna di loft di DeSana, a volte modella ed esecutrice del suo patrimonio, e la sua opera diventa ogni giorno più attuale» In effetti, Wendy Olsoff, cofondatrice di PPOW, conferma che la risposta dei collezionisti prima della fiera è stata molto positiva. L'artista si è fatto conoscere con fotografie di scene a sfondo sessuale ma, a differenza di Mapplethorpe, senza visioni di sesso o genitali. Non era nemmeno un classicista. I vividi filtri monocromatici con cui elabora le sue stampe conferiscono loro una qualità onirica da Man Ray.

«Ricordo che galleggiavo in una piscina di un sobborgo del Connecticut indossando solo tacchi alti», ricorda Simmons a proposito di un servizio per Suburban, una serie del 1980 esposta nella mostra di Brooklyn. «Voleva che le modelle avessero qualcosa che si integrasse con lo spazio».

Per Drew Sawyer, curatore di «Submission», DeSana è «il ponte tra Fluxus e l'arte della corrispondenza e il gioco di immagini della Pictures Generation, l'artista proto-queer e punk che ha aperto la strada a Mark Morrisroe e persino a Wolfgang Tillmans. Ma la sua sovversività lo ha reso più difficile da assimilare». Negli ultimi anni, quando si è ritirato dalla vita sociale attiva, DeSana si è dedicato all'astrazione. I suoi «collage», come Olsoff definisce le stampe di Miami Beach, sono il risultato di ritratti fatti a pezzi con una lama di rasoio e rifotografati come stampe singole che sembrano vetri in frantumi.

«È lì che è andato quando ha capito che la sua vita stava per finire, in un regno spirituale». L'artista Jack Pierson, che ha assistito DeSana nella camera oscura, aggiunge: «Le stampe hanno una qualità simile a un gioiello e sono molto lucide. All'epoca sembravano un po' imperscrutabili, ma ora capisco che il suo obiettivo era la bellezza. Non si trattava di persone in vasche da bagno e cappelli da festa. Non c'era nulla di grezzo in loro. Sono molto ponderati».

Imponenti e inquietanti opere con camera stenopeica di Barbara Ess, musicista e cineasta nonché artista legata alla scena New Wave, saranno esposte nel settore Survey della fiera. Le ultime stampe rimaste nella collezione personale dell'artista hanno un prezzo compreso tra i 30mila e i 40mila dollari.

«Barbara insisteva nel trasformare l'ordinario in simbolico», osserva Olivia Smith di Magenta Plains, la galleria newyorkese che rappresenta l'eredità di Ess dalla sua morte, avvenuta lo scorso anno. «La macchina fotografica a foro stenopeico le permetteva di astrarre e distorcere il mondo esterno per mostrare come la sottigliezza emotiva e il tumulto interiore si proiettassero all'esterno. Il suo interesse era la barriera tra le due cose, e le sue immagini sono molto realistiche».