



The Alvarro-Barrington-Trucks at Notting Hill Carnival, August 2022
(Photo: Timothy Spurr)

High and Low Are Merging

No sooner have we returned from Miami than we read the most marvelous comments. Not only about who was there, but also about who felt compelled to speak out, both pro and contra. A torrent of observations, scurrilous jokes, and sheer acrimony. Kim Kardashian was photographed in front of a work by Richard Prince but apparently didn't recognize it despite being accompanied by her art advisor. Leonardo DiCaprio was spotted, not only at the fair but also, despite his wearing a dark cap and a face mask, at several parties, allegedly in conversation with highly attractive women. In the framework of *Art Basel Miami*, works by Philip Guston and Agnes Martin sold for \$7 million respectively. Paintings, sculptures, and works on paper by Georg Baselitz, George Condo, Keith Haring, Alex Katz, Robert Longo, Andy Warhol, and POC artists Kerry James Marshall, Rashid Johnson, Theaster Gates, and Glenn Ligon also changed hands for millions of dollars. **However, because things got off the ground more slowly than in previous years, talk about the end of the art boom spread and even spilled over into German-language media. This year, the fair opened a day earlier, but the slow pace was probably due to the many preceding auctions in New York.** Rarely have the booths been more thoughtfully assembled or of such high quality. Nevertheless, according to the enterprising and eloquent artist and commentator Kenny Schachter, who hadn't even attended the fair, the whole show with its nearly 300 stands was nothing but a "vulgar flesh fest ... fueled by mountains of cocaine and turbocharged by this year's drug of choice, magic mushrooms." Schachter wanted to admonish the new trade fair management under Noah Horowitz that *Art Basel*, with its sheer size and many parties, has long since come to resemble the famous and infamous "Burning Man" festival in Black Rock City, Nevada. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, we think, remembering Ad Reinhardt's wicked comments as early as the late 1950s: "The day the West Coast art renaissance came East and died." Or, also Reinhardt: "Artists who got sick before they became a success. Artists who got sick after they became a success." Conversely, the week after December 3, 2022, Kanye West, now Ye, was stripped of his honorary doctorate from the *Chicago Art Institute*. The reason was his "disturbing behaviors" and that "his anti-Black, anti-Semitic, and incendiary statements, particularly those directed at Black and Jewish communities, are disgusting and condemnable."

On the other hand, there are many art producers who behave in an exemplary manner, for instance Alvaro Barrington, the Venezuelan artist who, after successful showings in *Paris +* and previously at the *Frieze* in London, brought works from the Notting Hill carnival to the Miami fair. In an interview, he called for an art opposed to any form of corruption: “It’s about honesty and sincerity and not lying to people.” **Among the most media-effective currents of recent weeks was also the solidarity of international artists with the democracy movement in Iran, which showed itself in great performances at the Nationalgalerie Berlin, the New York Guggenheim Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.** And what has happened in Switzerland since the beginning of December 2022? The *Koller* auction house in Zurich has sold a work by František Kupka of 1913/14, estimated at CHF 350,000–500,000, for just over CHF 2 million. Albert Anker’s 1886 “Girl Peeling Potatoes” went to a bidder for a good CHF 1.75 million. Cuno Amiet’s 1913 painting “The Truth,” a nude figure kneeling hieratically against a red background, fetched just over CHF 890,000. Here, things have remained comparatively staid and quiet. The German art market, which has long been a less than outstanding trading center, is proud of the sale of an important Beckmann self-portrait from 1943. It was auctioned off in Berlin’s *Villa Grisebach* for the lower estimated price of € 20 million; anything less would have been disappointing for such a work. In Munich, just in time, *Ketterer* was able to sell early Expressionist paintings by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, as well as one of Kirchner’s rare sculptures, each at prices above € 4 million. At the age of 90, Gerhard Richter has finally dissolved his four-decade-long contract with the aged Marian Goodman in New York. In the US, he is now moving to David Zwirner. He has reportedly bought a new house in Trieste. **The world in Central Europe is notably less hysterical and less heterogeneous than the East and West coasts of the US. But gossip and headlines like those in the tabloid press are increasing here as well. “High” and “Low” are coming closer together everywhere in the world. They are almost collapsing into each other, because there is almost no elevated “high” art anymore.** Let us either happily anticipate or dread a new great art year 2023. For now, we wish all our readers happy holidays!

DR. THOMAS KELLEIN
Head of Art Consult
thomas.kellein@bergos.ch