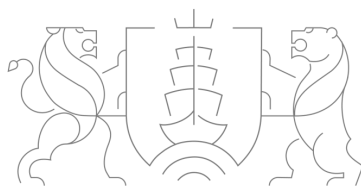


ART CONSULT

NEWSLETTER

ZÜRICH
05/2026



Walid Raad

*The loudest muttering is over,
2024*

VW Beetle, car cover, blue tarps,
collage images, various
dimensions



THE SEASON IN FULL

Within the span of a few weeks, the art world moved from Berlin to Venice before arriving in New York, where fairs, auctions, and institutions unfolded almost simultaneously, compressing the season into a single continuous moment ahead of Basel and the summer pause.

Gallery Weekend Berlin

Gallery Weekend Berlin has long since outgrown the format its name suggests; it now unfolds as an entire art week in which market activity, institutional programming, and brand spectacle collapse into one another. At Hamburger Bahnhof, Lina Lapelytė's *We Make Years Out of Hours*, commissioned by CHANEL, transformed the museum into a strangely calibrated social landscape: 400'000 wooden cubes, the scent of raw timber, children weaving through collectors, curators, and VIPs. The work operated simultaneously as a participatory environment and immaculate luxury staging. Directors Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath continued to demonstrate how deft institutional partnerships and international financing structures can reanimate even Berlin's most historically immovable museum terrain.

Across the city, Marina Abramović's *Balkan Erotic Epic* at Gropius Bau drew queues reminiscent of Berghain at its peak - fittingly so, given that Abramović herself was already en route to Venice, where her exhibition at the Gallerie dell'Accademia opened in parallel. Yet the week's most quietly assured institutional achievement belonged to the Neue Nationalgalerie, where Constantin Brâncuși's sculptures entered a precise dialogue with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's architecture - stillness meeting stillness, each sharpening the other.

Among the gallery presentations, Walid Raad at Galerie Thomas Schulte stood out with particular force. His so-called "Love Notes" - intimate inscriptions etched by soldiers into bombs and shell casings from the Second World War onward - shown alongside an overturned VW Beetle, accumulated a near-apocalyptic charge. Few artists working today fuse geopolitical violence, memory, and conceptual exactitude with such economy. At Konrad Fischer Galerie, Daniel Buren delivered one of the week's genuine surprises: monumental mirror works colliding with Memphis-style colours inside a former substation. The effect was unexpectedly sensual - less austere than one might expect, and far more alive.



While Potsdamer Strasse remained the week's gravitational axis, much of the sharper energy had drifted westward. Yuji Agematsu at Buchholz assembled fragile scraps of urban residue into works of near-archaeological intimacy. At Galerie Max Hetzler, Vivien Zhang's biomorphic paintings hovered between seduction and low-grade menace, while Wynnie Mynerva at Société pushed bodies, migration, and sexual liberation into zones of deliberate excess. Back in Mitte, Stefanie Heinze at Capitain Petzel compressed figurative fragments into dense, dreamlike constellations, and Pae White at neugerriemschneider unfolded immense Jacquard works that oscillated between ornament, architecture, and textile atmosphere.

Lurking beneath the week, however, was a quieter but increasingly persistent question: whether Berlin still holds an uncontested claim as the center of German contemporary art, or whether Munich - through the growing confidence of *Various Others* - has begun to emerge as a serious counterpart rather than a provincial satellite.

New York Art Week - Frieze, TEFAF & The Auctions

New York in mid-May is one of the densest weeks on the art world calendar: Frieze New York, TEFAF New York, Independent, NADA and the marquee evening sales at Sotheby's, Christie's, and Phillips all converged within the same window.

Frieze New York at The Shed arrived for its 15th edition and remained architecturally more functional than seductive yet offered a clear indication of where the market is currently moving. Cindy Sherman at Hauser & Wirth drew sustained attention; Maja Ruznic at Karma, Genesis Belanger at Perrotin, and Joe Bradley at David Zwirner reflected a calibrated balance between secure blue-chip presence and younger market positions. Particularly compelling was the Focus section, curated by Lumi Tan, which foregrounded galleries from Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and São Paulo. One bittersweet note: Air de Paris, which gave Eliza Douglas her platform for a decade, announced that it is shuttering.

TEFAF New York, by contrast, operated on an entirely different register: 7'000 years of art history staged within the Park Avenue Armory, quiet presentations of Robert Ryman at David Zwirner and a noticeable return of Minimalism across the fair. At the same time, Paul Thek seemed suddenly omnipresent - appearing at Buchholz, Pace Gallery, and Ortuzar Projects. The quintessential "artist's artist" emerged almost as a melancholic counter-image to the hyper-polished aesthetic currently dominating much of the market.

May's auction season, meanwhile, was defined by major single-owner collections: S.I. Newhouse, Robert Mnuchin, and Agnes Gund. Yet the more revealing signals came from works without guarantees - the lots that genuinely provoked competition in the room. It was there, more than anywhere else, that the market revealed how it presently functions.

Sotheby's opened the season in the Breuer Building: elegant, almost museological, yet perhaps too intimate for the theatre of a major evening sale. All eleven works from the collection of the late dealer Robert Mnuchin sold, with Mark Rothko's *Brown and Blacks in Reds* achieving USD 85.8 million including fees. The room itself became a strangely precise portrait of the market's current generational transition: teenagers bidding from the front row, dealers in their nineties securing trophies, champagne-drinking spectators slipping into empty seats. New faces, old money, and observers not yet entirely certain where they belong.

And yet the atmosphere often felt surprisingly thin. Many top lots had effectively been placed in advance through guarantees and irrevocable bids. Increasingly, the auction houses appear capable of orchestrating highly targeted bidding ecosystems through data profiles, watch lists, and strategic pre-sale outreach. Much of the drama now unfolds well before the auction itself ever begins.

Christie's nevertheless delivered the defining moment of the season. The collection of S.I. Newhouse realized USD 630.8 million, while Jackson Pollock's *Number 7A* reached USD 181.2 million including fees - among the highest auction prices ever achieved. Mark Rothko's work from Agnes Gund's collection likewise established a new benchmark at USD 98.4 million. The fact that Christie's commissioned a special Nicole Kidman campaign for the Newhouse Brancusi - conceived by Tobias Meyer and inspired by Lee Miller's archival photography - was, depending on one's perspective, either a brilliant marketing move for a USD 100 million object or a symptom of the times. The real momentum, however, unfolded in the day sales. Genuine bidding was erupted over works by Alexander Calder, Alma Thomas, and Lee Bontecou. Dealers now joke, only half ironically, that USD 750'000 is the new USD 500'000.

The real dynamism, however, emerged in the day sales. There, genuine bidding battles unfolded over works by Alexander Calder, Alma Thomas, and Lee Bontecou. Dealers now joke, only half ironically, that USD 750'000 has become the new USD 500'000.

The dominant aesthetic of the secondary market - postwar abstraction and abstract expressionism - likely reflects less the actual demand of younger collectors than the structural logic of guaranteed estates and secured trophy lots. The market has not entirely recovered its former euphoria. And yet, unmistakably, it has begun moving again.

Looking Ahead - Art Basel

In June, the center of gravity shifts to Switzerland. The season opens with Zurich Art Weekend before attention consolidates around Art Basel - particularly Unlimited and the VIP First Choice Preview.

One of the more intriguing developments this year is "Basel Exclusive": leading galleries will reportedly withhold key works from advance previews and unveil them for the first time during the fair itself. On one level, the strategy aims to restore genuine suspense - an actual rush toward trophy works once Basel opens. On another, pre-sales and guarantees remain essential for many galleries seeking to offset the enormous financial burden of participating in the fair. It is precisely between these two poles - surprise and security - that this year's Art Basel is likely to unfold.

Unlimited, curated for the first time by Ruba Katrib, places strong emphasis on political, social, and ecological concerns. Stefanie Hessler's *Parcours* project *Conviviality* once again extends into the urban fabric of the city, while Nairy Baghramian and Ibrahim Mahama realize major site-specific installations in public space.

Perhaps even more symptomatic of the week's broader atmosphere, however, is the Basel Social Club. Under the title *Office*, a vacant office building will be transformed into a temporary social stage somewhere between exhibition, party, networking apparatus, and alternative public sphere.

Institutionally, Basel is unusually strong this year: Pierre Huyghe at the Fondation Beyeler, Cao Fei and Helen Frankenthaler at the Kunstmuseum Basel, and Angelica Mesiti at the Museum Tinguely.

More broadly, Basel this year seems poised to enter into unusually close dialogue with the Venice Biennale. Many of the artists most discussed in Venice will simultaneously be represented through gallery presentations in Basel. Rarely can the immediate feedback loop between institutional discourse, curatorial attention, and market dynamics be observed with such clarity as during these June days along the Rhine.

Marie-Kathrin Krimphoff and Carolyn Stocker-Seiler

This publication is for information and marketing purposes only. The provided information is not legally binding and neither constitutes a financial analysis, nor a sales prospectus, an offer for investment transactions, an asset management mandate or an investment idea and does not substitute any legal, tax or financial advice.

© Copyright Bergos AG.
All rights reserved.

