

Peers, Alexandra. "The Business of Art Basel." The New York Observer, 7 December 2010.



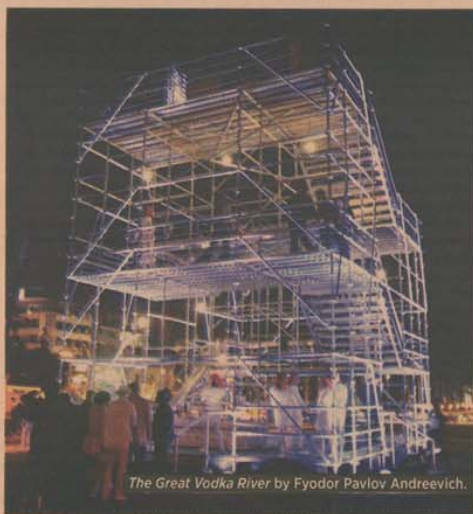
Bend, a motorcycle-gang exercise video by Liz Magic Laser and Felicia Garcia-Rivera.

## The Business of Art Basel: What sold, to who, how much

The artwork that summed up Art Basel Miami best was probably a five-story-high metal sculpture erected next door to the W Hotel and set just off the beach. At night, costumed girls singing Russian folks songs climbed up and down the steps for hours, pouring liquid into chutes that spilled downhill, then climbed down to do it all over again. It wasn't the prettiest, the best or even the biggest artwork—that prize went to the entire Collins Avenue apartment building that had *Star Wars* storm troopers stationed on its terraces. But in its mingling of performance art, sculpture, street art and luxury-brand alcohol marketing, *The Great Vodka River*, by Fyodor Pavlov Andreevich, and prominently sponsored by Beluga Vodka, touched all the major bases of the ninth annual fair extravaganza. Art Basel Miami Beach and related fairs are like the Black Friday of selling for art galleries, particularly those from New York, with a lot at stake over five days. "Fairs have become so important to us," said Jane Cohan of James Cohan Gallery, who added happily that she could have sold works by Simon Evans and Yinka Shonabare several times over. A whopping 60 or so New York contemporary art galleries—about one in six of all those in the city—

reported sales over the five days to *The Observer*, to their fair managers or to other news organizations. (These include Hauser & Wirth, Pace, Gagosian, Sikkema Jenkins, Bryce Wolkowitz, Eleven Rivington, West Street, Sundaram Tagore, etc., etc.) Our own *Collector* columnist, Adam Lindemann, bought a Franz West sculpture (another) from Zurich gallerist Eva Presenhuber. Real estate developer Aby Rosen and Beth Rudin DeWoody each bought works. SAC Advisor head Steve A. Cohen, talking about everything but an F.B.I. insider-trading investigation into hedge funds, bought Tim Hawkinson's *Bike* from 2010 for \$180,000 shortly after the fair began, according to *Artinfo* scribe Judd Tully. Lee Schrage, director of the New York Wine and Food Festival, went shopping at the Scope Art Fair with his partner, Dr. Ricardo Restrepo, and got a photograph by Jean-Francois Rauzier, which he bragged to us about before stopping to say hello to photographer Bruce Weber. Celebrities, mostly window-shopping, included George Hamilton, Calvin Klein, Jay-Z, Ben Stiller, Danny Glover, Serena Williams and Steve Martin, who was plugging his book. Buyers negotiated aggressively, stayed largely below the million-dollar level and took considerable

courting, dealers said. And some of the sales reported as "done" we suspect are still up in the air. But the mood was good. Art collector Stephen Garmon, who said he was the designer of the brightly painted exterior of the Google corporate plane, bubbled outside the Sagamore Hotel that a \$17,000 piece of his had sold at the Red Dot Art Fair. "And I talked Lamborghini into lending me a car" for the week, he added. Not everyone was happy. Major Upper East Side collectors Howard Farber, whose collection of Cuban art is 1,000 works strong, and his son-in-law, Larry Warsh, who is probably the nation's largest collector of Chinese contemporary art, found the wares European and parochial. "It doesn't speak to what's really going on in the art world globally," said Mr. Warsh. Mr. Farber noted that the Cuban art that was at the fair did well—a Wilfredo Lam that sold for \$3 million at the Cernuda Arte booth broke a record for the artist—but there wasn't much of it on view. Political art, sexual art, any art that pushed the envelope—well, this wasn't the year for it. Winners of the week were Julian and Vito Schnabel, who, between them, hosted a few of the week's top-ticket events and Sean Kelly, Benrimon Contemporary and Blum & Poe, whose busy, well-curated booths (or in Benrimon's case, hotel suite) kicked them into bigger leagues. Breakout artists included Thomas Houseago, a strong seller at L&M Arts. And Jack Pierson who was, if not "out," at least off the radar, was back "in," with strong sales at Cheim & Read. Gallerist to watch: Lower East Sider Lisa Cooley. At the NADA art fair, she sold virtually everything, including 11 striking bread sculptures, at \$5,000 to \$7,000, by Matt Sheridan-Smith. Our favorite artworks included the rediscovered succulent stripe paintings of Kenneth Noland at Mitchell Innes & Nash and a eight-figure Mark Rothko that's already under reserve. But for sheer unexpected entertainment, little beat the video being screened in the swanky Canyon Ranch lobby as part of its partnership with the next-door, cutting-edge NADA art fair. In the piece, artist Liz Magic Laser conducted an exercise class for motorcycle riders: burly macho men lifting their legs and balancing earnestly but somewhat ridiculously on their bikes in the shadow of the Williamsburg Bridge. But, in the lobby of the spa, viewers joined in. —Alexandra Peers



The Great Vodka River by Fyodor Pavlov Andreevich.