

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

Juxtapoz  
Basel is Back: A Review of Art Basel 2021  
Sasha Bogojev  
28 September 2021



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Image: Caroline Walker at Stephen Friedman Gallery's booth. Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery.

And just like that, almost as if there was no global pandemic that crippled the world for the past year and a half, Art Basel returned to the Swiss city where it started over 50 years ago, bringing together 272 premier galleries from 33 countries and territories. Including the now irreplaceable Unlimited section with monumental projects that transcend the classical art fair booth, Statements sector dedicated to emerging artists, Edition section for editioned works, prints, and multiples, site-specific works presented under Parcours program, film section, as well as public artworks and performance on Messeplatz in front of the fair building, the 2021

edition was visited by some 60,000 people between the 21st and 26th of September.

So really, besides the mandatory face masks, the Covid pass wristbands that was easily obtained across the Congress Center Basel, or the occasional "virtual" visitor looking at the fair remotely using the Art Basel Live digital initiative, the fair looked and felt exactly the way we used to experience it 3x per year in Basel, Miami, and Hong Kong. And among 1000s and 1000s of works across all media, from rare and historical masterpieces to new works by today's emerging voices, we once again put the focus on the painting, and especially figurative painting as something we can relate to and appreciate the most. Lucky for us, this year's edition felt like an eldorado of that medium, with an absolute abundance of works of all scales, from all time periods, covering a wide range of themes, and employing infinite ways of utilizing the paint.

It could be a subjective perception but there seem to be a general fondness to such works, with noticeable amounts of examples by the likes of Alice Neel (presented by Xavier Hufkens, Victoria Miro, David Zwirner, and Thomas Ammann Fine Art), Peter Saul (Venus Over Manhattan had a booth dedicated solely to his work), George Condo, Glenn Brown, or Keith Haring (great selection of works was at Jeffrey Deitch booth). Even Georges Braque got somewhat of a solo exhibition in the fair and Fondation Beyeler's minimalist presentation included nothing else but a show-stopping Francis Bacon triptych. It was obviously a massive treat to see Hauser & Wirth giving us a taste of their current Philip Guston exhibition in NYC or Gagosian giving us a taste of their John Currin presentation, alongside works by other artists from their jaw-dropping roster, including a monumental piece by Jenny Saville. We also enjoyed seeing the new work by our cover artist Robin F Williams ahead of her upcoming solo show presented alongside Elizabeth Glaessner at P.P.O.W. booth, big-scale works by Josh Smith or Tomoo Gokita at Massimo De Carlo gallery, or Rauschenberg, Baselitz, Katz, but also Imi Knoebel and Daniel Richter at Thaddaeus Ropac, and a few small-scale jewels by the incredible Salman Toor at Luhning Augustine booth.

But we felt more at home on the second floor of the congress center where galleries focused on the emerging artists were located. One of the personal highlights were the works by the Leipzig-based Kristina Schuldt over at Eigen+Art booth, as well as seeing one of our favorite painters, Matt Bollinger debuting at the fair alongside another favorite, Prudence Flint, at Dublin & London-based Mother's Tankstation gallery. It's always a pleasure to see the imposing paintings by Vojtěch Kovařík at Mendes Wood DM, as well as the works by recently featured Heidi Hahn at kadel-willborn booth. Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler had a great presentation including the new sculptural embroidery paintings by Klára Hosnedlová or a painting wizardry by Ambera Wellman, and while on the subject of sculptural paintings, KOENIG had a new mind-blowing creation by Trey Abdella. On the subject of painting wizardry, Plan B had a fantastic new work by Adrian Ghenie's breathtaking work, while Stephen Friedman Gallery had great examples presenting Sarah Ball's or Caroline Walker's exceptional skills.

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Carlos/Ishikawa exhibited a new painting by Bendt Eyckermans and large works, including one on velvet, by Issy Wood. Petzel gallery had a strong presentation including a new painting by Emily Mae Smith and a huge example by Maria Lassing, alongside the likes of Sean Landers, Pieter Schoolwerth, etc. Blum & Poe put up a show with some of our all time favorites and recent favorites, most of them who we featured in the magazine over the (recent) years, including Yohitomo Nara, Tomoo Gokita, Friedrich Kunath, Eddie Martinez, Anna Weyand and Anna Park. We thoroughly enjoyed discovering Indian painter's Atul Dodiya's reflections on the past year of pandemic and loss at Chemould, Rose B. Simposon's totemic busts at Jessica Silverman, rafa esparza's portraits of family and close friends on slabs of sun-baked adobe mudbrick at Commonwealth and Council, and we instantly fell in love with the atmosphere of Eve Helene Pade's work at Galleri Nicolai Wallner.