

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Artnet News

'It Was Quite a Hassle Getting Here': Artist David Shrigley on Why He Trekked From the U.K. for His First-Ever Art Basel Miami Beach

Sarah Cascone
3 December 2021

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The irreverent artist finally made it to Miami. His impression? "It's pretty much how they described it."



Image: David Shrigley at Unconventional Bubbles with Ruinart. Photo courtesy of BFA.

Can you believe that British artist David Shrigley had never been to Miami Beach before? Still, he felt that after decades in the art world, he had a pretty good idea of what to expect from the city during the biggest art fair week in the U.S.

"After everyone is telling you about it, you develop a picture of what it's like," he told Artnet News. "And it's pretty much how they described it. I'm having fun."

Shrigley normally makes himself scarce on the art fair circuit, which he feels is more for collectors. "It's not really the place for you as an artist," he explained. But this year, he made an exception as part of a collaboration with Ruinart.

The champagne company, a longtime Art Basel sponsor, enlisted him for its Carte Blanche artist series, first with a residency in Reims, France, in 2019, and now with a delayed presentation of "Unconventional Bubbles" at the Ruinart Lounge at the fair. (It also includes an augmented reality experience featuring a burrowing pink earthworm that's specially designed to interact with the lush green lawn outside the Bass Museum.)



Image: David Shrigley for Ruinart.

Shrigley created 36 drawings and gouache paintings, three neon installations, two ceramic sculptures, and a doorway for the project, all in his quirky signature style. He also did a one-night takeover of the Miami Beach Botanical Garden just across the street from the convention center, featuring blown up versions of his drawings and massive pink, inflatable worm sculptures made from recycled nylon crawling across the grounds.

We talked with Shrigley about why champagne proved such fertile ground for artistic inspiration, why you should never turn down the chance to learn something new, and the meaning behind the delightful pink worms.



Image: David Shrigley, Worms Work Harder Than Us. Courtesy of Ruinart.

When was the first time you went to Art Basel?

I think the first time was maybe 1996 or '97, in Switzerland. I was there for Liste, the subsection for young galleries, with Nicolai Wallner, who I still show with in Copenhagen. I seem to remember doing some drawing on the plane, or maybe my flight got cancelled and I did drawings in the airport lounge. The drawings I did on the way there got shown at the fair.

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How does it feel having travelled here for a large event after the restrictions of lockdown?

I hesitate to say it, but I actually quite enjoyed lockdown. I am an introvert and my work is quite easy to make in isolation. I don't need other people to help me. I just stayed home making the work. I didn't really miss many social events. I'm married and I have a dog, so I had company.

It was cause to reassess what you like, what you don't like, what you're missing, what you're not missing. I don't miss airports or traveling that much. This is the foreign trip I've done since COVID. It's quite a nice one, even though it was quite a hassle getting here and it's going to be quite a hassle getting back. I live in the U.K. in Devon, in the southwest near the sea.



Image: David Shrigley at his artist residency in Reims, France. Photo courtesy of Ruinart.

A champagne artist residency sounds like a pretty unusual opportunity. What made you say yes?

I love champagne and it was an opportunity to learn something about champagne production. If you have an opportunity to learn something, it's a good reason to do it. And it was an exercise where I was doing something that I wouldn't normally do. It occurs to you after awhile that you have to do things like this, otherwise you have nothing to make art about. If you make something really different in response to the project, that's really valuable. I don't be associated to be with a brand—I don't need the money and I can afford to buy my own champagne! I just did it to see what happens, and I've learned a lot.

What was the most interesting thing you learned about champagne?

I love talking to the cellar master. You learn so much about wine and the nature of wine and you get an insight into somebody else's job that's so different from yours. Success and failure is so singular in this activity.

Probably the biggest realization is that champagne is quite a strange and curious luxury product in that it's made from plants and it's sustainable in a way that other luxury projects aren't. People in France are very proud of champagne. And it's not seen as a luxury product there. It's seen as a requirement for everyone.

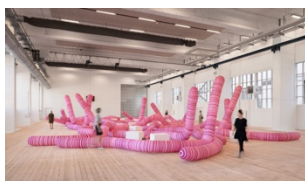


Image: David Shrigley, DO NOT TOUCH THE WORMS (2020). Installation view at Copenhagen Contemporary, 2020. Photo courtesy Copenhagen Contemporary.

I love the pink worm. Can you tell us a little about why you've made these worm pieces?

The AR worm arrived because of lockdown, trying to do things digitally. And last year I had an exhibition at Copenhagen Contemporary, which is on shit island, basically—land reclaimed from the sea that is really toxic since there used to be heavy industry there. I made a piece with giant inflatable worms that were inflating and deflating constantly. It was a response to the dead nature of the soil in that part of Copenhagen.

But originally it came from a painting I did for Ruinart, Worms Work Harder Than Us. It became a theme because the health of the soil is so important when you're making a natural product, but also to the world. We have to pay attention to our environment, and I was trying to talk a little bit about that.

See more works from the series below.

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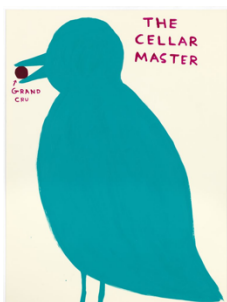


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