



The Appeal of SEVEN

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Back in 2006, in an article titled "A storm of art as Baselmania engulfs Miami," *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith predicted that

Art fairs will continue to flourish until the bottom falls out of the art market, or until dealers, who invented them, decide that there is a better way to do things.

The global recession never quite saw the bottom fall out of the art market, but it has arguably spawned a number of dealer-invented alternatives to the more traditional art fair model, such as Independent in New York, Sunday in London, and ABC in Berlin. But back in 2006, Smith highlighted one pioneering effort as an indication of what she thought the future held:

Two dealers already on this quest are Ronald Feldman, a longtime SoHo gallerist, and Joe Amrhein of Pierogi, a Williamsburg fixture. They have rented a raw one-story building in the Wynwood district here and filled its 12,000 square feet with works by artists they represent.

Fast forward to 2010, and the model Pierogi and Feldman built has evolved into a venture that now includes seven contemporary art galleries, including London's Hales Gallery, who began participating in 2007, and New York's BravinLee programs, Postmasters, P•P•O•W, and (my own gallery) Winkleman, who all join for the first time this year. The focus of this expanded effort, called simply SEVEN, is in creating an exhibition experience within the context of Miami's art fair week defined by the needs of each artist's work. The press release on the event's website explains this idea in more depth. What the press release doesn't explain is how each decision about SEVEN (whether on marketing, installation placements, shipping costs, etc.) is agreed to by us, the participating dealers, and that the costs are so significantly less than participating in one of the larger fairs that the 24,000 square foot space we'll be sharing this year offers an opportunity to present work in Miami that would be cost-prohibitive, if possible at all, at the big box fairs. Because each of the participating galleries' programs include presenting large-scale installations, for the first time we new participants have the chance to bring such work to Miami and better reflect what we're about to that audience.

Another appeal of SEVEN's model is something that requires a bit of clarification about the art dealer's point of view to explain fully. Anyone who has the independence, ambition, and ego it requires to open a commercial art gallery (or the stamina to have kept it afloat over the past two years) will undoubtedly not love all the rules and restrictions that larger fairs require of participants. Of course, from a fair organizer's point of view, it is understandable with an operation as complex as they have, with products as expensive as fine art, and with visitor expectations as high as they are among the world's top collectors, that they cannot cater to each dealer's whims or risk protracted, time-consuming debates by explaining each decision to egomaniacal dealers who refuse to take "No" for an answer. Guidelines and restrictions are necessary to keep the whole thing smoothly moving along. But from my point of view, coming as I do from my little kingdom in which it's the vision of the artist first and foremost that dictates how we present the artwork, and not a 10-page contract, SEVEN is a vastly superior option in this regard.

What SEVEN doesn't have, of course, is the collective audience draw of hundreds of the world's best-known galleries, or their advertising budgets, or their VIP lounge sponsors. But we're OK with that. None of those things truly make the viewing experience better. In fact, they can greatly hinder it. Which isn't to say I don't enjoy the bigger fairs. I find them oddly comforting (so much attention being paid to what begins as humble materials and efforts in some studio). But it is exhilarating to be able to dream big with your artists within the Miami context and not have to sell a body part to pay for it.

It's also truly refreshing to strategize and discuss the plans and logistics of the event with other dealers who completely understand and empathize with my concerns, and aspirations, for the week. An art fair experience designed by dealers with their artists' visions dictating the choices...I suspect the idea will quickly catch on.