

## Art Scene Busy in Europe This Summer

Art market activity was overwhelmingly centered in Europe this summer, with Art Basel, Documenta, and Venice Biennale all opening in June. The 52<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Biennale opened in early in the month, with *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense*. The show is curated for the first time by an American director, Robert Storr, the dean of Yale School of Art, with a focus that is described as both conceptual and perceptual. The exhibit this year features 77 national participants, most of which usually exhibit the work of one contemporary artist. The United States is showing the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who died of AIDS in 1996. The show runs through November, and attendance is expected to be approximately 250,000. The show has a decidedly political theme, with many of the exhibits focused on the war and conflict, particularly in the Middle East.

Documenta, the exhibition of modern and contemporary art in Kassel, Germany also opened in June. The show was founded in 1955 and occurs only every five years. Known as the 100 Day Museum, this twelfth installation runs through September and this year broadened its scope to include 16<sup>th</sup> century Islamic calligraphy and Asian embroidery. 150 international artists are participating in the current show, most of which are not well know. There are 500 featured works including an installation by artist Ai Weiwei, which features 1,001 Chinese people flown in to walk around the streets of Kassel for a week. Attendance for the show is brisk, with 650,000 attending Documenta 11 in 2002, making it the largest contemporary art show in the world. Also opening in Germany in June was Sculpture Projects in Munster, which only runs every ten years. The 1997 installation attracted 500,000 to this small town near the western border, temporarily doubling its population.

Sales were very strong again this year at Art Basel, with most pieces under \$250,000 sold before the end of the opening night vernissage. The show was attended by a record crowd of 60,000 over the four day event. 300 international galleries exhibited, out of an applicant pool of 800. Attendance by American collectors was low, with some bypassing Art Basel to attend the other events. It was also reported that many stayed home after exhausting their budgets during the auctions in May, and that the weak dollar was also a factor. Dealers report that upwards of 75% of sales at previous shows were to Americans, but this year it was Europeans (particularly Swiss and German) who were making the majority of purchases. Collectors spend approximately \$500 million, in line with spending at Maastricht in March. Art Basel director Samuel Keller announced that he is stepping down to run the Beyeler Foundation after seven years.

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