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Painterly Ground

A new artist commission in Brazil



Robert Irwin has created an ultimate examination of perception on the greatest scale with his latest commission, *Untitled* (2019) at Inhotim. Photo by Fernanda Arruda

By  Allan Schwartzman

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Many of the greatest works I am privileged to have worked with as an advisor have not been bought but commissioned. The first of them was by [Robert Irwin](#), commissioned for the [Rachofsky Collection](#) 20 years ago, when I first began advising on the formation of private and public art collections.

Irwin had been a hero of mine since my first days in the art world, when, in 1977, I had one of my most powerful and vexing art experiences at an Irwin exhibition at [the Whitney](#), before I knew anything much about contemporary art. For his installation "[Robert Irwin: Scrim Veil, Black Rectangle, Natural Light, Whitney Museum of American Art \(New York\) \(1977\)](#)",

the artist emptied the fourth floor of the museum's former home, now [the Met Breuer](#), and installed within it a translucent stretched cloth running the entire length of the space. Suspended from the ceiling and reaching about halfway to the floor, like a giant window shade locked into position between open and closed, it doubly bisected the gallery, with a painted black stripe running around the four walls at the same height as the thick black bottom of the suspended cloth.

Made with the most minimal of means, the "sculpture" had vast presence, harnessing every essential element that defined the space, emptied of things and filled with one's experience in it—volume, architecture, light, and presence, and bringing to these elements utter clarity, strength, even a pragmatic nobility. It was an experience I would never forget, and one that could never be duplicated or found anywhere else.



A true innovator, Irwin is one of the most profound and influential artists of the last 60 years. Photo by Fernanda Arruda

A true innovator, Irwin is one of the most profound and influential artists of the last 60 years. Lawrence Weschler's 1982 book about Irwin, [Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin](#), is as giant a presence in my understanding of the contemporary artist as is the artist's own fiercely potent way of activating experience through his art and also of speaking about it. And yet most art aficionados have not had direct experience with an Irwin work, and I can say with certainty that their presence and power is impossible to reproduce or capture outside of the experience of them.

When I first met with the artist to discuss the possibility of doing the commission for the Rachofsky House, he was hesitant. “I have spent the last two decades focusing on site-specific commissions,” he said. “I got 23 of them, and 22 were cancelled.”

And so, a few weeks ago, it was my privilege to see the completion of a permanent work by Irwin at [Inhotim](#), a museum in rural Brazil that I have helped form in 5,000 acres of natural landscape and botanical gardens—a work that in many ways is an embodiment of the artist’s lifetime commitment to exploring perception and its immeasurable field.

Irwin began his career as a gestural painter before, in the early 1960s, deciding to dedicate his art to exploring perception beyond the limits of a traditional object. Beginning with dotted paintings that seemed to evaporate into vibration, he moved on to the room-sized environments that have occupied more than five decades of art-making. Irwin remains one of the most important and influential artists of the postwar period, spawning generations of artists creating art out of light and space.

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Untitled, conceived more than a decade ago and constructed as a permanent work in the landscape at Inhotim, is based on a simple architectural idiom created as a low-cost, low-tech means of onsite construction commonly referred to as “tilt-up architecture”. For Irwin, this affordable, utilitarian process—conceived with the utopian notion of making architecture accessible in places where it had previously been too costly to produce—remains half-erected, in a permanent state of possibility.

Atop each wall sits a triangular pane of mottled yellow glass—windows through which daylight passes, resulting in an ever-changing performance of the light of the sky against the floor of this octagonal structure, open to the sky, partially unfolded, like the shutter of a lens or the blooming of a flower.

This monumental work might appear to resemble the kind of traditional sculpture that Irwin’s life’s work has been created in contrast to. But first looks can be deceiving. Indeed, at Inhotim Irwin has created an ultimate examination of perception on the greatest scale—that of the Earth as the base for experience, and the Sun as the generator of light and life around which the our planet evolves. The Earth itself becomes a painterly ground, drawing light down from the Sun through the oculus of this sculptural form, creating an immeasurable field for experience and perception.

Our Miami Market Report

The art world's closeout event shows us what to expect next year



By  Charlotte Burns

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If there was anything that the conceptual prankster [Maurizio Cattelan](#) brought back to [Art Basel Miami Beach](#), it was a sense of nostalgia for the days when people complained about art that their “kids could make”. On show at [Perrotin gallery](#), Catalan’s *Comedian*, a \$120,000 banana and duct tape installation (which was later eaten by an artist hungry for his own headlines), went viral, triggering media outrage at the lunacies of the art world.

And yet this was one of the sanest editions of the Florida fair in recent memory. Yes, there were fewer people in attendance but sales were strong. It was almost like art fairs used to be, before our expectations of normal were juggernauted.



John Baldessari, *The Space Between Gun and Cigarette*. (2019) © John Baldessari Courtesy the artist, Marian Goodman Gallery and Sprüth Magers

“It’s been surprisingly good—lots of serious collectors, mainly from America,” said [Monika Sprüth](#) two hours into VIP day. Her gallery, which was close to one of the entrances, had made immediate sales (as opposed to pre-sales, she said) of work by artists including [Jenny Holzer](#), [George Condo](#), [Kara Walker](#) and [John Baldessari](#), whose new work, *The Space Between Gun and Cigarette*. (2019), sold with an asking price of \$400,000 to a private collector. Asked whether her expectations had been surpassed by reality, Sprüth chuckled: “I don’t expect anything anymore.”

There have been years in which Miami has seemed a bit like the event to which dealers brought the works they needed to shift at the end of the year (often focusing on flash and bling), but this edition felt somewhat fresher and broader. Curators from the [Tate](#) were seen paying close attention to some great work by the late Greek artist [Vlassis Caniaris](#) from the 1960s and 1980s at [Kalfayan Galleries](#), including *Space within Space* (1960), a work about resistance to the country’s wartime occupation priced at \$98,000. There was “a lot of interest from both private and institutional collections,” in the work, said gallery manager Yuli Karatsiki, adding that a large-scale installation, *Chicken-coop* (1974), they had brought to the fair two years ago is now in the collection of (and currently on show at) the [Pinakothek der Moderne](#) in Munich.

Meanwhile, various collectors were interested in the work of young Brazilian artist [Antonio Obá](#), whose prices range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 for larger-scale paintings at São Paulo’s [Mendes Wood](#) gallery.

Shifts in institutional thinking about self-taught artists meant solid sales for gallerist [Andrew Edlin](#), who also runs the [Outsider Art Fair](#). “It’s helpful to be able to tell buyers that there are five works by this artist hanging at [MoMA](#) right now,” he said, gesturing to work made in the 1940s by [Pearl Blauvelt](#). He reported a “good start” to the fair on opening morning, with sales ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 of work by artists [Duke Riley](#) and [Beverly Buchanan](#).



David Hammons—the subject of one of the best profiles of the decade, written by Calvin Tomkins for the *New Yorker* magazine this month—had a work with Hauser & Wirth, *Untitled* (Silver Tapestry) (2008), that sold for \$2.4m. Image courtesy Hauser & Wirth

By the end of the first day, the South African [Stevenson gallery](#) had been having a “fantastic” fair, with keen interest in younger artists such as [Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi](#), whose striking 2019 oil painting *Evaluation* sold for under \$30,000. “We always feel like the audience at Miami responds well to younger artists who are a bit edgy, exploring new territory,” said gallery director David Brodie. “We’re pleasantly delighted,” he said of the fair.

The fair still skews young but dealers brought a range of work—and sold it—at different price levels. There is a longstanding idea that Miami is “not the sort of fair where people sell at enormous prices,” as [Lisson Gallery](#) director Alex Logsdail put it. “Having said that, we sold a 1961 Carmen Herrera for \$2.5m. It’s been a solid fair—robust, even.”



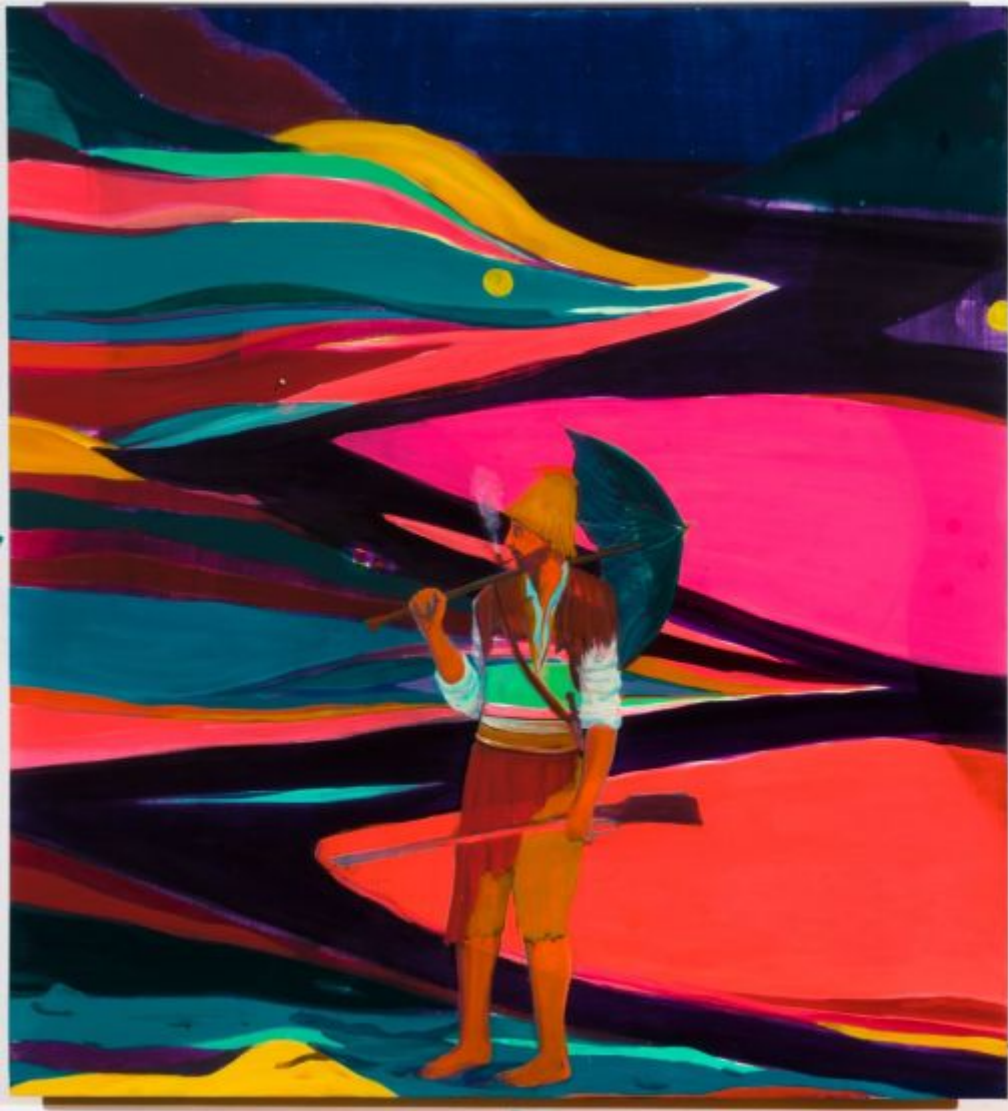
Curators from Tate were seen paying close attention to some great work by the late Greek artist Vlassis Caniaris at Kalfayan Gallery, including *Space within Space* (1960), pictured above.

David Hammons—the subject of one of the best [profiles](#) of the decade, written by Calvin Tomkins for *The New Yorker* magazine this month—had a work with [Hauser & Wirth](#), *Untitled (Silver Tapestry)* (2008), that sold for \$2.4m. The gallery also reported several sales of primary artists including new recruit [Nicole Eisenman](#), whose colorful new canvas *Sun in My Eye on the Beach* (2019) sold for \$165,000.

Pace sold works both from its estates—including two [Robert Rauschenberg](#) “Urban Bourbon” works to a private West Coast collector for close to \$1m each and a white wood assemblage by [Louise Nevelson](#) from 1977, *Floating Cloud, Cryptic VII*, for \$125,000—and its contemporary program, including two works by [Sam Gilliam](#) from 2019, each priced at \$180,000 (both to a private collection in Washington, DC) and *Composition (Cards)* (2019) by Tara Donovan for \$85,000.

Other large galleries reported strong sales across the gamut, too. At [Thaddaeus Ropac](#), sales ranged from €1m for Georg Baselitz’s oil painting *Herdoktorfreud Grüßgott Herbootsmann* (2011) to \$80,000 for [Jules de Balincourt](#)’s oil on panel *Darwin’s Nightmare* (2016). [David Zwirner](#) sold more than 20 works on opening day, including a sculpture by [Isa Genzken](#) for \$220,000 to a painting by [Bridget Riley](#) for \$1.5m and two paintings by the co-winner of this year’s [Turner Prize](#) in which all the contending artists won, Oscar Murillo.

“It’s a great fair—not cray-crazy but there are solid conversations leading to transactions,” said Matt Carey-Williams, senior director of sales at [Victoria Miro](#). The gallery was showing a gorgeous suite of [Chris Ofili](#)’s “Poolside Magic” works on paper priced between \$75,000 and \$85,000 each (several of which sold) and a new painting, *Juicings 5* (2019), which sold for \$450,000 to a private collector.



At Thaddaeus Ropac, Jules de Balincourt's oil on panel *Darwin's Nightmare* (2016) sold for \$80,000. Photo: Jason Mandella

Kurimanzutto, the Mexican gallery which has been making recent inroads into New York, had a booth focused on nature and climate change, and sold work by artists including [Abraham Cruzvillegas](#) for \$50,000 to a private Mexican collector and by [Adrián Villar Rojas](#) for \$350,000 to a private US foundation. London's [White Cube](#) reported "brisk" sales on opening day, said gallery director Leila Alexander. A somewhat unnerving floor sculpture by young artist [Kaari Upson](#), *Teeth on Pepsi Plinth (rectangle)* (2017), sold in the opening hours priced at \$90,000, while other sales included [Al Held's](#) *B/W & Orange* (1967) priced at \$950,000, and several works by [Damien Hirst](#) including a new "Mandala" painting, *Dominion* (2019) at \$750,000. Meanwhile New York's [James Fuentes](#) said on the second day that the fair was "going great": he had brought three new works by Didier William, each of which sold for \$65,000.

"We always have high expectations for this fair and it's been phenomenal this year," said Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels, a director at [Jack Shainman gallery](#), which sold work by artists including a 2002 painting by [Barkley Hendricks](#) for \$60,000 and a new painting by [Kerry James Marshall](#), *Deadheads* (2019) which had a \$2.8m asking price. "The fair had great energy and top collectors and a strong curatorial presence," she said after the event.

The pace of traffic and sales were more "low-key" than years gone by, said [Sadie Coles](#), "but it feels like we're in that moment anyway, where things are taking a little longer". The gallery had made sales of work by artists including a new work by [Wilhelm Sasnal](#), priced at \$100,000, and *Indiz II* (2019) by the gallery's youngest artist [Kati Heck](#)—which "we could have sold several times over", Coles said. She was not worried about the slower pace: "Last year felt quiet too, but it ended up being one of our best ever years because we really did have conversations that concluded throughout the weekend," she said.

This—a smaller, quieter but, in some ways stronger, fair—seems to be the new normal for Miami.

Doing It For the Exposure



“Yeah, business is a bit slow, but in the end one does these art fairs for the exposure.”

by Pablo Helguera

By Pablo Helguera

artist

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