

At Design Miami/ Basel, the Line Between Art and Design Is Difficult to Find

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Installation view of Louisa Guinness's booth at Design Miami/ Basel, 2016. Photo by Benjamin Westoby for Artsy.

For 10 years, Art Basel and Design Miami/ Basel have been closely entwined, showing art and design alongside one another in both Miami Beach and Basel. And the pairing is a natural fit, considering that art and design have overlapped for decades—from Isamu Noguchi's coffee tables to Salvador Dali's chairs to Meret Oppenheim's sugar ring.

"In the earlier days of the collectible design market, people were always trying to co-opt the word art-design," said Rodman Primack, the executive director of Design Miami/ Basel, which opened its 11th edition on Monday. "For a while, it was called art-design or design-art, I think because people didn't think that design, and the ethics and standards and the values of design, would stand on their own. The art market was such a powerful market, that the way to get people to pay attention was to say design-art and kind of co-opt it."

Although that's no longer the case, and artists are experimenting with design and vice versa on their own accord—think Jessi Reaves's recent, much talked about show at New York's Bridget Donahue gallery, where the artist showed furniture-sculpture hybrids—art and design still continue to crossover primarily because both are aesthetic practices. So it is fitting that this year's installment of Design Miami/ Basel features a strong showing of works that fuse art and design, from functional sculpture to artist-designed jewelry.



London-based gallery Louisa Guinness's booth resembles a small museum featuring jewelry by some of history's most illustrious artists, like Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, and Louise Bourgeois. Pieces range from €1,500 for surrealist sculptor Claude Lalanne's galvanized copper flower brooches to €200,000 for a silver necklace by Alexander Calder. Fairgoers had the rare opportunity to comb through drawers of jewelry in a section of the stand that doubled as an archive room, to boot. Gallery associate Tamara Platisa explained the appeal of designing jewelry for artists: "It was smaller, easier to work with; and because they were smaller pieces, so people could potentially afford them."

Down the aisle, another London-based gallery, Elisabetta Cipriani, displayed artist-designed works commissioned by the gallery's namesake. Ai Weiwei's 60-centimeter, 24-karat gold bracelet, priced at €130,000 is a standout. The artist designed the piece to resemble the rebar he pulled from the rubble left by the devastating 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan Province, China.



Installation view of work by Ai Weiwei at Elisabetta Cipriani's booth at Design Miami/ Basel, 2016. Photo by Benjamin Westoby for Artsy.

In Cipriani's experience, the art-design process isn't always easy. "Sometimes it takes three years for an artist to agree to a project, and then for them to sit down and create a piece," she said. "It's difficult because everything is small and wearable. They aren't used to the weight, the size, the colors. The pieces have to hold the same energy as a work of art, but they can't just create a copy of a big sculpture."

But what exactly is the line between whether something is considered art or design? "For me, design usually comes back to something that is functional and that there's an element of function in it, and artworks don't

necessarily have to have function,” explained Primack.

New York gallery R & Company showed the work of The Haas Brothers, a duo who blur the line between art and design so much that they refuse to label their work as one or the other. Pieces ranged from bronze and fur objects resembling fantastical creatures, priced between \$20,000 and \$30,000, to porcelain vessels suggestive of sea urchins or alien succulents, going for between \$15,000 and \$20,000. “They’re very inventive; whatever material they touch, they try and do something different with it that hasn’t been done before,” said gallery director Whitney Godfrey-Dardik.



Installation view of work by The Haas Brothers at R & Company’s booth at Design Miami/ Basel, 2016. Photo by Benjamin Westoby for Artsy.

Other examples of art and design hybrids at the fair include “ZigZag chair” by Dutch designer and architect Gerrit Rietveld, who, along with the likes of artist Piet Mondrian, was a member of the De Stijl movement. Paris-based Galerie Jacques Lacoste showed the work of designer and artist Alexandre Noll, whose ebony sculptures fall into the realm of fine art, while his tables and chairs assume a more functional role. At Pierre Marie Giraud, a screen by artist and designer Nancy Lorenz fused abstract painting with furniture.

“It’s an area that’s blurred, it’s an area that is always being redefined,” says Primack. At Design Miami/ Basel, that certainly was the case, with both vintage and contemporary examples of art and design straddling the grey area between the two.

—Ann Binlot

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