

ANALYSIS

Shining a light on photography

With several specialist dealers present at this year's fair, the medium's star is rising in Miami. By Gareth Harris

Art Basel Miami Beach is not just a prime commercial platform for major Modern and contemporary art galleries from across the world; this year, a handful of specialist photography dealers are presenting work.

Significantly, the veteran New York gallery Pace/MacGill (B8) will take part in the Florida fair for the first time. "We are very excited to participate in Art Basel Miami Beach, as we have seen an increasing number of new collectors from around the world join the ranks of the museum directors, museum curators and familiar clients who enthusiastically attend the fair," a spokeswoman says. "Miami is particularly interesting as a unique intersection of the art world," says a spokeswoman for the Kicken Berlin gallery (C2), which is showing works by Otto Steinert (see box), Harry Callahan and Erwin Blumenfeld.

Crucially, there is an existing group of photography enthusiasts in Miami; the property developer Marty Margulies, who first opened his collection to the public in the Warehouse in the Wynwood Arts District in 1999, owns more than 2,000 photographs. His curator, Katherine Hinds, says: "We decided to collect photography in the 1990s. The Gurskys were stacked in Mr Margulies's hallway, and other photographs were piled up under the Rothkos and Lichtensteins, so we decided to open a space [the Warehouse]," she says. "There is no game plan with collecting photography. We buy works if they fit into the rhythm of the collection, and we collect artists in depth."

"I don't see photography as photography per se; I see it as art," says the property developer and Design Miami co-founder Craig Robins, who collects "unique" photographs by John Baldessari dating from the 1970s to the present day, and early documentary images by Paul McCarthy capturing the US artist's performance work. Meanwhile, the



Miami-based collectors Don and Mera Rubell own a key piece by Cindy Sherman: *Untitled* (#397), 2000, plus a series of works by the French artist Jean-Pierre Khazem.

Dina Mitrani, the owner of the eponymous photography gallery in Wynwood, says that apart from a few institutional buyers – notably Bonnie Clearwater, during her time as the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami – her clients are mainly private patrons. She hopes that the highly anticipated Pérez Art Museum Miami, which opened yesterday, will set up its own photography department with a curator. For now, a spokeswoman for the museum says that its "strong and expanding collection of photography" will be in evidence in the exhibition

Erwin Blumenfeld's *Untitled (Nude Study, NYC)*, around 1952

"Image Search: Photography from the Collection" (until 27 July 2014).

For both public and private organisations, there are opportunities in the market, which is burgeoning but has not yet reached boiling point. Philippe Garner, the international head of 20th-century decorative art and design at Christie's, says that the photography market "has remained solid; it has not been pumped up by speculation. The collectors are in for the long game." Recent auctions have shown that major works by important 20th-century practitioners can still be bought for relatively affordable sums. At the dedicated Phillips sale in London in November, William Eggleston's *Cadillac*, 1966-71, a portfolio of 13 chromogenic prints, sold for just £40,000 (est £35,000-£45,000).

According to the research firm ArtTactic, "the greatest proportion of value", or most money spent,

An edition of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled* fetched \$3.9m

was found in the \$10,000 to \$50,000 price range at the dedicated sales held by Christie's, Sotheby's and Phillips in Paris and London in May. "At Phillips and at Christie's, the majority of sold lots and sold value were still in lots below \$50,000," says the ArtTactic auction analysis for June.

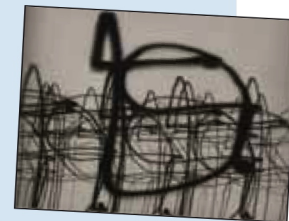
The difference between a vintage print, which is generally made within a year of the negative, and an edition, which is made afterwards, should be noted. The scale of the print – with large-format works at a premium – and the size of the edition are also factors that influence value, Garner says. A discerning collector could buy a 20th-century masterpiece for a fraction of the cost of an equivalent work in painting or sculpture,

A snapshot of photographs at the fair

Otto Steinert *Luminogramm*, 1952

Gelatin silver bromide print, Kicken Berlin (C2), price undisclosed

● The German-born photographer and doctor Otto Steinert founded the Fotoform group of photographers, who created mainly abstract imagery, in 1949, and organised the first of three exhibitions in 1951 under the title "Subjective Photography". "[The Subjective Photographers] retained many of the experimental techniques practised at the Bauhaus before the war but worked in a darker, edgier style," according to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The auction record for Steinert's work, achieved at Sotheby's Paris in 2011, stands at €41,550 (est €12,000-€15,000); this year, sale prices at auction have been as low as €2,000.



Tina Modotti *Las Piernas*, around 1925

Gelatin silver print, Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York (D5), \$42,000

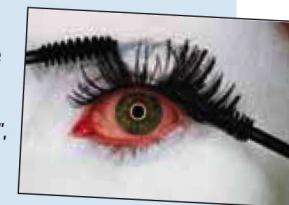
● Modotti, who was born in Italy in 1896, has been described as a model, muse, silent-film actress and Mexican revolutionary. Her romantic entanglement in the 1920s with the photographer Edward Weston sparked her own interest in the medium. She is known for her politically charged images of labourers and city slums, along with still-lives of hammers and sickles. Surprisingly, her sale prices have remained consistent at auction over the past 20 years: her third highest-selling work at auction, *Two Callas*, 1925, fetched \$189,500 (with buyer's premium) at Christie's New York in 1993. Her auction record of \$363,750 (est \$200,000-\$300,000) was achieved in April at the same auction house for *Untitled (Texture and Shadow)*, 1924-26.



Irving Penn *Mascara Wars*, New York, 2001 (edition of 15)

Fuji Crystal Archive Print, Pace/MacGill, New York (B8), price undisclosed

● The US photography titan Irving Penn (1917-2009) made portraits, fashion photographs and still-lives across six decades. His pictures of the Paris couture collections in 1950 "revised the visual aesthetics of fashion photography", says a spokeswoman for Pace/MacGill. Fashion photography is in vogue; an edition of this work sold at Christie's New York in April for \$60,000 (est \$30,000-\$50,000). A 51-lot "white glove" sale of Penn's works at Christie's Paris in November 2011 made a total of \$2.9m – still much less than the record price paid at auction for a single work by Cindy Sherman (\$3.9m). Museums still mount major shows dedicated to Penn, including "Irving Penn: Portraits" at London's National Portrait Gallery in 2010. G.H.



says the spokeswoman for Pace/MacGill. "This situation is, however, changing as the supply of great photographs diminishes," she says.

"Generally the market is strong for rare and exceptional icons from most genres; [our] November sale certainly supported that, with works being sold by Gilbert & George and also [Edward] Steichen," says Lou Proud, the head of photographs at Phillips in London. Indeed, brand names – or "classic examples by masters of photography", as ArtTactic describes them – appear to be driving the market. Steichen's *Richard Strauss*, New York, 1904, fetched £92,500 at Phillips (est £80,000-£120,000). "Collectors who started with contemporary works have started to move backwards," says a spokeswoman for Kicken Berlin.

A tranche of big names has achieved stratospheric prices at auction, however, placing them in the blue-chip "trophy" art bracket. For instance, an edition of Sherman's *Untitled*, 1981, fetched \$3.9m (with buyer's premium) at Christie's New York in May 2011. "There are the super-expensive contemporary photographic works by a tiny number of practitioners

fetching prices that can exceed \$1m. The galleries representing these artists have carved out a place in the contemporary art market [for them]," Garner says.

This disparity in prices for critically acclaimed artists across the Modern and contemporary canon has left some market specialists bemused. The art adviser Todd Levin, the director of the New York-based Levin Art Group, has organised an exhibition of works by the US photographer Stephen Shore – "Something + Nothing", at Sprüth Magers gallery in London (until 11 January 2014) – including vintage works from the series "American Surfaces" (1972-73) and "Uncommon Places" (1973-79).

"The current photography market is not a function of quality but an indication of how collectors' tastes, often in a herd mentality, are driving the market," he says, adding that the most expensive works in the show cost around \$30,000. "There is tremendous opportunity for collectors in the Modernist photography market. One could purchase all of the works by Shore in the current exhibition for around 25% of the price paid for the Sherman [at auction in 2011]."