

Russian collectors at Art Basel/Miami Beach

“It’s like a supermarket”

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1st January 2007 01:00 BST

Miami Beach. Russian collectors have been hitting the headlines with their art purchases in recent years, mostly buying at auction, which is traditionally seen as a lower risk entry to the art market for new collectors. But there was a sharp rise in the numbers attending the Art Basel/Miami Beach at the fair’s latest edition in December. One reason for this was an exhibition of Russian art, “Modus R”, organised by the Cultural Mission Foundation, a Moscow-based institution established in 2005 to promote Russian art abroad.

The exhibition included work from St Petersburg dealer Marina Gisich and Moscow galleries Aidan, Regina, Stella, and XL. “In Russia, people are only starting to collect,” said Semyon Mikhailovsky, co-organiser of the show. “They came to this fair to see how it works. They want to be part of the scene.”

The Russian collectors included Janna Bullock, the president of RIGroup, a privately-owned development company based in New York and Moscow. She says she started collecting five years ago. “I come here to educate myself, to see where the market is going, what is selling, what medium is important,” she said.

She says she has bought around 300 works by Warhol, Basquiat, Haring, Nevelson, Anselm Kiefer, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Demand, Kiki Smith, and Yoshitomo Nara for her foundation, as well as a 1950s Picasso. Ms Bullock

attends the Florida fair every year. “It’s phenomenal,” she says. “It’s like a supermarket.”

Another Russian present at the fair was Stella Kay, the wife of a Russian businessman, who runs two galleries in Moscow and has amassed around 100 pieces by international contemporary artists including Andy Warhol, Robert Mapplethorpe, Alex Katz, David Salle, Spencer Tunick and Marc Quinn.

However, there were no sightings of the much-publicised oligarchs at the fair. “They are too busy or too arrogant to come to fairs,” said Ms Bullock. “They have hired top international curators for their collections because they believe the Russian art market does not have anyone with the experience needed to build a sophisticated collection,” she adds. One dealer told The Art Newspaper that most galleries never sell to the Russian oligarchs. “They think everyone is trying to cheat them. They want to negotiate and start at 50%, believing that is your mark up. It is just too difficult,” he says.

Originally appeared in The Art Newspaper as *“It’s like a supermarket”*

 *Appeared in The Art Newspaper Archive, 176 January 2007*

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