

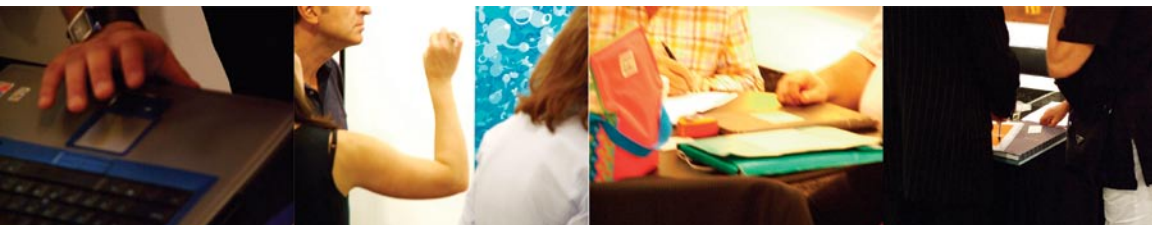
Dear Mom,

Derek Coté

Driving for fourteen hours on I-95 never sounds like a good idea, unless it is on the way to Miami in December. After loading the car with 1,200 copies of the inaugural issue of the Daily Constitutional, and provisions to last a week, we did just that. Half a day and a couple hours of sleep later we arrived in time to check-in at the hotel, around 9am, and try and get a couple more hours of rest before the madness began.

We chose to arrive a couple of days before the fairs actually opened so we could plan our course, which meant getting as many copies of the Daily Constitutional into the hands of as many fair goers as possible. And though the beach was a small hop from the hotel, we had work to do – a lot of it. There was a shit-load of art to see and countless people to talk to. I kept reminding myself that maneuvering through the fairs would be much like navigating a rough neighborhood; don't get too drunk and walk with intent, like you know what you are doing and you know where you are going.

Starting off at 10:30am with a press breakfast and preview at Art Basel entitled us to mimosas and some fancy treats, including hand-rolled cigars from the Dominican Republic. Glancing around the collector's lounge made it immediately known that this event was clearly about something other than the artists that make it all possible. How many pieces would I have to sell in order to be able to really fit in here? An Armani suit would easily set me back at least one sculpture and maybe a couple of drawings. Of course this is the fair, and art would surely be flying off the showroom floor. After we'd had our fill and our press passes in hand, it was time to reconvene at the hotel, download some images, take a much

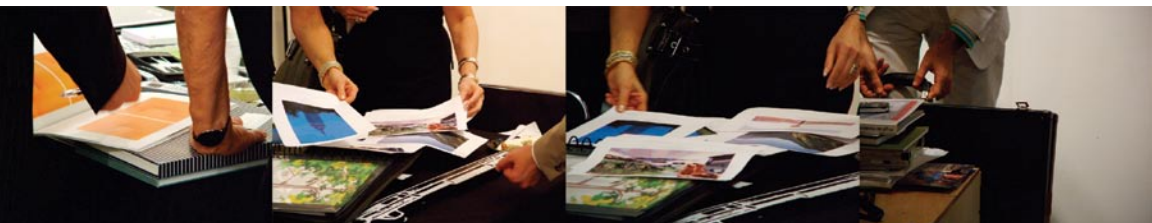


needed shower, and get a Cuban sandwich. Tomorrow will be busy. There are more press previews and the beach may have to wait yet another day.

Thursday morning takes us to the Pulse Art Fair preview brunch, on the mainland, featuring bagels, fruit, mimosas - and scotch? It's only 10:00 in the morning so we opt for mimosas. After all, there is still five days of pandemonium to go. Pulse had hired a PR company and it showed. Everything was finely orchestrated as well-dressed PR types buzzed around with communication devices, making sure that all was in order. Though we had press passes and had been put on the press list we still had to jump through a few hoops to get ourselves and our magazine into the maze - if only I had that suit. If you remember the 1972 movie Piranha, you would have an idea of what it was like here. Pulse was a feeding frenzy as collectors rushed in to claim pieces before the real action started in just a few hours. One gallery mentioned to me how they had to get more art out of storage to keep up with sales. After two hours of unloading hundreds of copies of the Daily Constitutional, visiting some of the booths, making new friends and saying hello to old ones, we had to leave in order to get to the Scope press preview in time. We hailed a cab out front only to have a sixty-something in penny loafers and a pastel polo shirt scald us for stealing his cab. His female companion was quick to scoop him up and usher him away into his waiting town car. "Oh, sorry." Mayhem...

Pulling up to Scope, at the Townhouse Hotel, was a relief. Though things were a bit hectic with some galleries still installing, and crates being loaded and unloaded on the street outside, the hotel setting seemed to have a speed-bump effect, slowing people down, allowing us to relax and meet up with the Scope organizers. Architecture really seems to affect the way people interact and behave. After a cup of espresso and dropping off some 600 copies of the magazine we agree to help Rudolph Projects, from Houston, install an oversized paper reproduction of a Harley Davidson in the front window. We finished with some time to spare before Scope officially opened and were able to have a look at some of the art and talk to some of the exhibitors. Better see it now while the rooms are less crowded and people are in the mood to chat with non-buyers. One last stop for the day at the Aqua art fair, then meet up with Keith Richards at The Deuce.

We met with the organizers of the Aqua fair, who remembered us from a phone conversation and were more than happy to let us distribute copies of the Daily Constitutional. Having lived in the Northwest, I was not surprised by their reception.



This is Aqua's first year as an art fair, and though much smaller in scale, it had a similar feel to Scope as it was also set in a hotel. However, the Aqua Hotel was less restricted; the rooms opened up to a central courtyard, fostering casual conversations with people we didn't know. Visiting every gallery at Aqua was quite easy and more relaxing than exhausting. We would definitely come back in the next few days to see it again. It was a long day, and now that our official work was done it was time to start enjoying ourselves. The beach would still have to wait, there were images to sort through and some last details we had to attend to.

After a Cuban coffee we were ready to scare up something to eat before the evening spectacle began. Though the choice of cuisine on South Beach, within our price range, is mediocre at best, we did manage to find an Argentinean steak house off the beaten path that satisfied our stomachs and our wallets. Walking down Collins Avenue during fair week was much like walking down the street in Chelsea or Williamsburg, except everyone's guard was down and everyone was happy. Running into familiar people didn't take long. First of all they weren't hard to spot, just look for the sun starved, wearing all black, looking like they had just gotten out of bed – there's one. The opportunity to see people you know, regardless of where they live, in one place at the same time, is one of the fairs' greatest attributes, in my opinion. There's also the fact that they are all in Miami during one of the coldest months of the year. Maybe that's why they are so happy. We ended up at the Miami Art Museum, one of the many parties that this week has become famous for, and met Steve Rockwell of D'art International, a magazine based in Toronto. At this point we had met so many people that Steve and I agreed to draw portraits of one another on the backs of our cards in order to remember who we were. This actually came in handy three months later when Steve visited Richmond and we found ourselves sharing a dinner table. Besides the fact that we are both Canadian, we now had something even more interesting to talk about...

The next few days included lots more art, shipping containers, fifteen-dollar drinks, a sea anemone chasing girls down the street, old money, new money, more money, and more parties, which could have used an infusion of artists. Where were all the people that made the stuff that fueled this high-octane market? Where were all the people who wore sneakers, dirty jeans, and uninhibitedly danced in the shallow pools? Isn't one of the points of this event to allow artists, collectors, and dealers to mix it up? I guess not. Because the parties were so hard to get into, many artists could not get in



unless they were on some sort of list or accompanied by a VIP. This made for some pretty repetitive nights.

We finally made it to the beach by Friday, mostly an opportunity to catch-up on sleep from the nights before, but still savored. By Saturday most of the dealers we spoke to were completely burned out, as were we, and ready to pack it up and either go home or stay a couple of extra days to relax and reflect on their experience (aka earnings). We had one last party to attend at Locust Projects, somewhere between the Design District and the newly christened Media/Production/Entertainment District. We were there to visit one of Locust Projects' founders, and Daily Constitutional issue 1 contributor, COOPER. The energy here was more than agreeable attracting a fair mix of artists and dealers from New York and Los Angeles. Now, this is what we have been looking for all along. After meeting COOPER for the first time, taking in the show and our fair share of beverages, we were off to view a couple of other shows in the area before heading back to South Beach to go dancing with some friends. I can smell the ocean from our hotel, and tomorrow is Sunday – the last day.

It was hard to get back in the car and think about leaving, I hear it's snowing at home. Maybe we could just stay and get a place on the beach and a studio somewhere. Nahh, Miami is too nice. For some reason, I feel that a little discomfort keeps the brain running, I'd never get anything done here.

What does it all mean anyway? The fair in 2005 was more determined than 2004, of course, there were more satellite fairs and much more stuff to see, maybe too much stuff. The overall sense was frantic and seemed to be less about the work of art itself than what the work of art represented. I guess that's the way the cookie crumbles, nothing is ever what it used to be, and maybe we should embrace the current climate while it lasts. The question is how long will it last, and where will we be left when it self-deflates?

