

BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

SFGATE

Untitled and Berggruen: homage to art and art-lovers and dealers

By Leah Garchik
Saturday, January 14, 2017



Photo: Leah Garchik, San Francisco Chronicle
A window at Pier 70

Dodging raindrops and jumping over puddles, intrepid art-lovers splashed over to Pier 70 Thursday, Jan. 12, for the opening of *Untitled*, San Francisco. As art took up weekend residence on the burial grounds of *Bethlehem Steel*, the rusty and majestic site afforded an occasional glimpse of its bones — a graffitied beam, a broken window — and history.

The mood was happy, experimental and pleasantly rough-hewn. (San Francisco-style edginess encompasses both a beautiful giveaway shopping bag imprinted with the words “Rich Bastards Beware” and a Tartine coffee bar where a cup of joe and a cookie rang up \$8. Oh, never mind.)

BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

This fair, fittingly, does not feature galleries arranged along long neat corridors; the walls are zigzag, and the displays are at angles to each other. “At Fog, you know what’s there,” said art-lover **Joachim Bechtle**. “Here, you have no clue what it’s going to be.”

That what included: Objects from David Ireland’s house and prints of his drawings; wearable “violin dresses” made at the Headlands in the “Study for Lesser Satellites” by **Brent Green**; Nieves Fernandez Galeria’s fractured video images of passersby; the Workshop Residence selling doormats **Ann Hamilton** created with a cutout quote from the book “Heidi”; the **Monique Meloche Gallery** in Chicago displaying Kenyan-born choreographer/artist **Brendan Fernandes**’ photos incorporating images from dance and African folk art; art as seen through a single window, the operating principle of the Four A.M. gallery on Grand Street in New York.

“Too many art fairs are evolving into big names and brands,” said **Rena Bransten**, whose gallery is at the Minnesota Street Project, “but this is what art’s all about.”

For most exhibitors, the feeling was loose. I asked **Noah Horowitz**, Art Basel director Americas, what he thought of this fair, and he said it was policy not to comment on other art fairs. As to whether Art Basel is thinking of expanding here, he said, “We have no intention of creating additional art fairs. ... It’s great to see an emerging cultural community come together.” (Whaddya know, later in the day, an art expert mentioned to me that he heard Art Basel was contemplating West Coast opportunities.)

And then it was on to the new **Berggruen Gallery**, where John and **Gretchen Berggruen** were celebrating their South of Market move with the exhibition “The Human Form.” The gallery, 10,000 square feet on three floors designed by Jennifer Weiss Architecture — Weiss is daughter of Gretchen Berggruen — was abuzz. Works by such artists as **Pablo Picasso**, **Kiki Smith**, **Barry McGee**, **Chuck Close**, **Richard Diebenkorn**, **David Park**, **Willem de Kooning** and (swoon) **Lucian Freud** were vivid enough to create a high, although N.Y.-style, nary a glass of white wine was served. Many works were from private collections. **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art** director **Neil Benzra** cited New York’s Gagosian Gallery — the San Francisco branch of which was having an opening next door — as a pioneer in the trend for curated shows.

BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

“What we’re looking at here is the Berggruen Gallery not just moving to a better space, but really raising the level of their programs, to do museum quality exhibitions,” Benezra said.

Drawing people to the gallery is always a plus, and despite the Smith drawing that included the words “Maybe We Have Everything,” it’s possible an eager art-lover could convince an owner to sell.

P.S.: Afterward, the Berggruens beckoned guests (“Howz about a trip to Polynesia?”) to dinner at the Tonga Room at the [Fairmont](#).

The eclectic crowd of veteran San Francisco partygoers included our dinner companion [Tom_Kelley](#), who, as the musicians’ raft floated to the center of the pool, said his mother had come up from Hillsborough in the 1930s to take synchronized swimming lessons there. [John Berggruen](#) also pointed out his brother, successful venture capitalist [Nicolas Berggruen](#), founder of the [Berggruen Institute](#) think tank and philanthropist. Being at a loss for conversational gambits about amassing a fortune, I asked whether he’d ever bought any art from his brother. “No business in the family,” he said. He also ventured that his father had worked as a reporter for [The Chronicle](#) (too long ago, however, for him to make small talk about the quality of office coffee).

At the end of dinner, Gretchen and John Berggruen boarded the raft to thank “all of our great friends, artists and colleagues” for coming along on adventures “the two crazy Berggruens have concocted.” And then the guests, giddy with food, drink and art, headed home.

Leah Garchik is open for business in San Francisco, (415) 777-8426.

Email: lgarchik@sfbchronicle.com Twitter: [@leahgarchik](https://twitter.com/leahgarchik)