

EXPLORING FAIRLAND

Urbanity and architecture of art fairs

Giordano Sarno

851713

Relatore: Matilde Cassani

Scuola di Architettura Urbanistica Ingegneria delle Costruzioni - MI

Corso di studio: Architettura

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Introduction & Methodology

¹ Francesco Garutti (a cura di), *Fairland: Explorations, Insights and Outlooks on Art Fair Future*, Koenig Books, Londra 2014.

² The fairs have been chosen following the 2017 and 2018 UBS Art Market data guidelines.

Exploring Fairland takes its name from Francesco Garutti's *Fairland*, a book that has inspired this journey in the art fair world, which I've encountered multiple times during my personal experience. In the introduction the author sheds light on his purpose of investigating the art fair phenomenon and its "concentration of symbolic, social and financial capital"¹, as referring to a physical body, a territory or a high-density land. Starting from this assumption, the thesis tries to investigate a multitude of outlooks on the art fair reality, focusing on the spatial side of the issue. Through a finding and archiving process, it was possible to collect interviews, plans, maps, cost estimates, pictures and jokes about one of the most relevant manifestations of the Art System. Mapping the art fair and its boundaries has been the process necessary to let a complex image came out, a sort of collective drawing. It focuses on six major art fairs worldwide, chosen because of their success, geographical location and network influences. The physical nature of this controversial event has been analysed by overlapping the different points of view of art insiders. The core of the work is the basic feature of a physical stage that allows for a host of dynamics to happen. At first it was necessary to understand the nature of the event and then to question its architecture. Indeed, the aim of the research is to analyse a fundamental per se phenomenon of the art world with tools that belong to the built environment and architecture. This work investigates the relation between art fair and architecture at different scales. On one hand, the research tries to prove the possibility of looking at the art fair from an urban point of view, while on the other, it aims to examine if it is possible to understand each booth as an autonomous project of ephemeral architecture. These questions have been the catalysts for this research project and its outcomes.

Exploring Fairland begins with an interview section that tries to build a comprehensive image of the art fair, created thanks to the words of the people that deal with this phenomenon, on a regular basis in their professional life. In this spiral process every information was a step towards mapping the complex dynamics involved in this reality. The first idea was to invite all the players to a round table, to promote an active debate between them. Of course this is something that's almost impossible, when it comes to putting together personalities that are active in different territorial and cultural networks. This is why I decided to have personal interviews, trying to touch upon common topics to then compare their points of view by directly juxtaposing their words, trying to emulate a choral rhyme, or rather, a dissonance composition. By providing a theoretical background and framing, it has been possible for the respondents to express themselves keeping myself as a mediator figure, respectful of their own outlooks and thoughts. The following chapters of this research have been developed following the same guidelines. A further section includes analytical materials related to the spatial dimension, needed towards understanding some synthetic aspects of the art fair complexity by looking at specific documents and data of six major art fairs² (Art|Basel Basel, Art|Basel Miami Beach, Art|Basel Hong Kong, Frieze London, Frieze New York and Fiac Paris). This section compares layouts, booths details, regulations and also price invoicing and drawings of past booth design solutions. A final section includes pictures taken at the last Art|Basel edition in Basel. The images question how far the project of space goes and if it is possible to understand the booths as temporary interior projects. All the pictures of Art|Basel 2018 in this research were taken by me.

Abstract

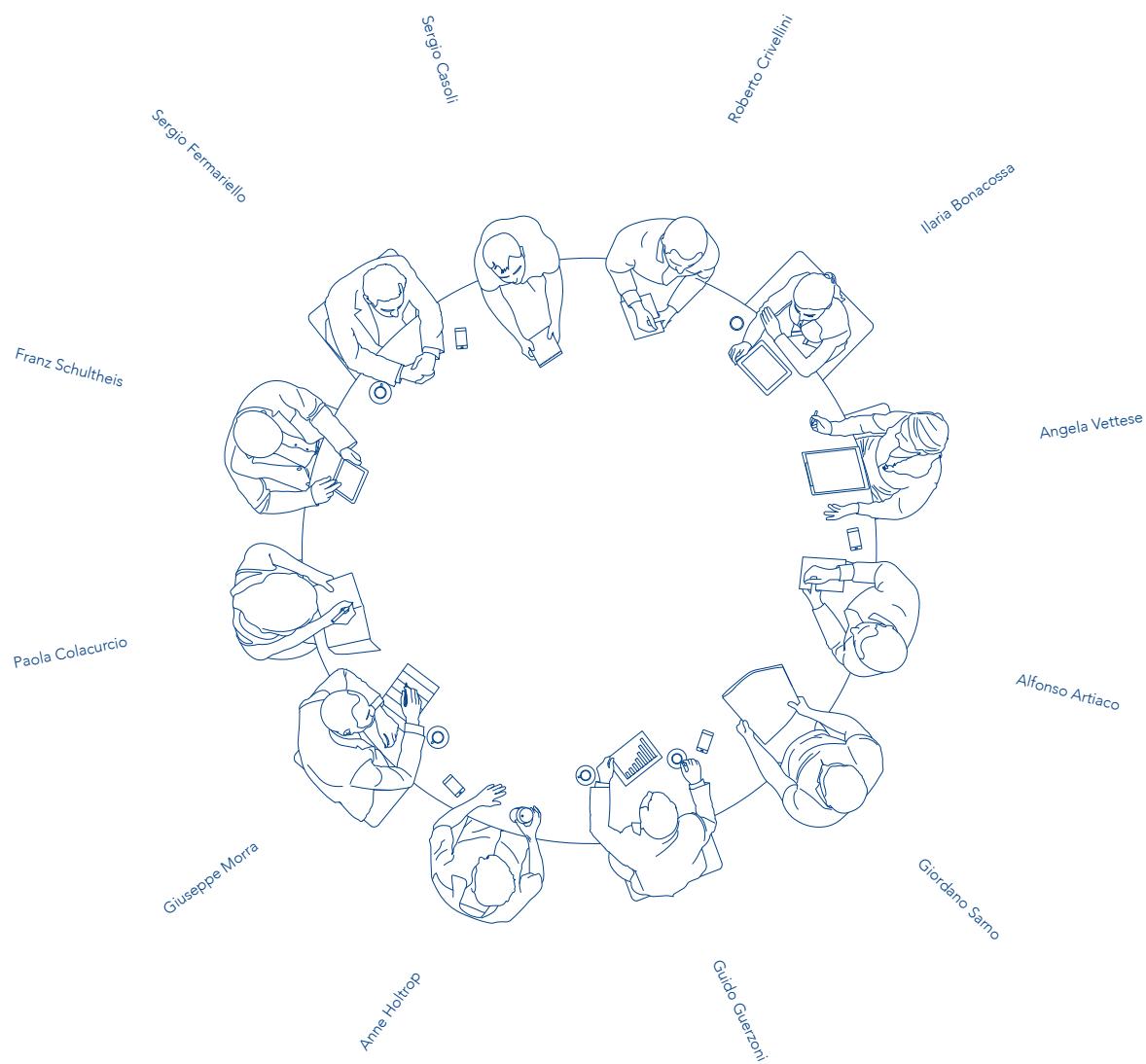
Exploring Fairland investigates the phenomenon of art fairs from a spatial point of view and with tools that belong to architecture and the built environment. The research project starts with a collection of interviews that aim to construct an inclusive image of the art fair based on the outlooks of different professional figures that deal with it on a regular base. The chapters that follow analyse both the urban nature of the fair and its layout and territory, as well as the art displays inside the booths. A horizontal attention is given to the political and social dynamics interconnected with specific spatial details addressing permeability, inclusivity, exclusivity and segregation. The aim is to understand the event as a complex built relational stage, switching focus from the impact of the fair on the city to the booths ephemeral projects. The spatial analysis is carried out by researching Art|Basel Basel, Art|Basel Miami Beach, Art|Basel Hong Kong, Frieze London, Frieze New York and Fiac Paris. Three major Italian contemporary art galleries, Alfonso Artiaco, Massimo De Carlo and Lia Rumma provided the documents to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the spaces with their material and immaterial features. Spatiality is investigated through maps, plans, perspective drawings, details, images and the direct experience of art insiders.



Finding and Archiving

Interviews

Alfonso Artiaco	3/03/2018
Angela Vettese	26/02/2018
Anne Holtrop	27/02/2018
Franz Schultheis	15/01/2018
Giuseppe Morra	26/02/2018
Guido Guerzoni	20/01/2018
Ilaria Bonacossa	12/02/2018
Paola Colacurcio	2/01/2018
Roberto Crivellini	21/01/2018
Sergio Casoli	22/01/2018
Sergio Fermariello	3/01/2018



Franz Schultheis

Professor in Sociology at St. Gallen University, Switzerland, Franz Schultheis became familiar with art fairs by accident. He had been working with Pierre Bourdieu for 20 years and started addressing sociology of art while editing his works in German. He is the global editor of Bourdieu work on art in German. He was invited to Art Basel for the very first time by Camera Austria, whose publication of Bourdieu photography he made with. That's how he understood the importance of the phenomenon and decided to study it in detail. He had the laissez-passer to Art Basel in Basel, Miami, Hong Kong and became familiar with the art fair world. In his book, *When Art meets Money. Encounters at Art Basel*, he investigates the contradictions and dynamics of the money-art relation in the Art Basel scenario, which he describes as a highly selected one. His idea of social topography and status hierarchies is deeply analysed there and emerges from our interview too. He x-rays the socio-economical foundations of the events switching from the urban impact to the symbolic capital and its physical representation, comparing the Swiss model to the Anglo-Saxon one of Frieze while also addressing the curatorial issue.

It was Miami Vice and now it's Miami Nice!

Investigating the social topography of art fairs

G: Do you think art fairs provide an instant outlook on contemporary art? What kind of relation do you have with them (from your professional point of view and personal experience)?

F: More than an instant outlook I would say a special outlook, and a special choice of contemporary art. What we find in the art fairs is a highly selected choice, from highly selected galleries, who bring highly selected artists to the place. And it is a rather commercial selection of artists that we find there. There are quite a lot of other kinds of contemporary art that can't find their way into art fairs of this kind because it's much too expensive for galleries. They just bring premiere choices of well commercial (commercial?) works in order to bring the money inside. Each gallery coming to Art Basel having 100 sqm booths has to pay 100.000 CHF and the cost of bringing the artworks from New York or South America to Basel is really high. I would say that the choice is made according to economical criteria. So, as I said, It's highly selective and not representative of the art world or of what contemporary art means.

G: Do you think this is true for all kinds of fairs worldwide, or are you talking especially for Art|Basel?

F: Especially for Art|Basel and for Frieze (a little bit less for Frieze). If you go to São Paulo, and I have been there, it's much less like that. You don't have the same clients, there are some big players, but there are quite a lot of smaller galleries, less important galleries, coming from South America's countries with different sources. So you can find another kind of art represented there. Even in very good art fairs like Art Cologne the choice is less commercial and more open for younger artists and alternative forms of art creation.

G: Can you briefly summarise your experience with art fairs and your studies about that?

F: Well, just in order to place my work in context, I've been working with Pierre Bourdieu for 20 years, and sociology of art became important for me when I was editing all his work on art in German. I'm editor of Bourdieu's global work in German language, and when I was working on his texts I became interested in the theoretical aspects of art when, by accident I was invited to come to Art Basel from Camera Austria, whom I made the publication of Bourdieu photography with. When I came to the place, I found it really astonishing and had the idea of making a sort of ethnographic work on the role of art at this place. So I came into studying Art Basel. I haven't been working for years and years on art, but I can say it was by accident, and it was a very interesting experience because Art Basel directors gave me the opportunity to meet very important players of the art world. They asked big galleries to meet us in order to make interviews, and I had the laissez-passer to Art Basel in different cities such as Miami and Hong Kong. I've been there many times and I became a little bit familiar with this world, that was unknown to me before. You see, that's the way I came to know Art Basel.

G: Do you think that art fairs such as Basel, Hong Kong or Miami have an impact to the city that hosts them? I mean, is the fair able to activate a network at an urban scale or is it just a closed enclave?

F: Well, when you look at the impact of Art Basel in Hong Kong and Miami it is enormous. I met the Rubells, very important collectors in Miami, and they said that before Art Basel arrived in Miami, it was Miami Vice and now it has become Miami Nice. The place has changed, and thanks to Art Basel, there have been a lot of private collections in Miami and very big galleries decided to settle there. The image of Miami has changed very rapidly in 10 years, we can call this a sort of city grounding by art fair, which is also taking place in Hong Kong, where the impact is also very, very relevant.



Marcos López, *Picada en la terraza de la Fundación Proa*, 2005

G: Are you talking in terms of physical and digital infrastructure and connections? I mean networks and everything that activates at an urban scale...

F: I think that it's a really global impact. When you go to Miami or Hong Kong, you'll meet the Basel government representatives and Basel Tourism and there are interconnections between the art world at different places of the world. Nowadays Art Basel is also playing in other cities giving them knowhow in order to empower their city grounding. So you have networks online, networks of people knowing each other and meeting each year at the same place. You have an impact on the space of the cities, the settlement of galleries, design shops, artists coming there and so on. It's really a global effect that you can find.

G: How would you describe the spatial model of the art fair in its parts, features and layout?

F: There are very important differences from one place to another. Each time the space where the art fair is held in Basel is very special: you have an inner court with light and around you have the hall of the exposition. So the structure is already given and the art fair adapts to it in order to give the most prominent space, the finest space, to the finest galleries. Inside the art fair you find a sort of social structure reflecting the economic and symbolic capital of the galleries and the art inside this world. So it's not an open space where everyone can go where they want, but the different places for the booths have been attributed to the galleries according to their importance.

G: So you're saying that there is a social hierarchy between the space and the people behind it?

F: Right! You have a social topography and the physical space and the social space correspond.

G: When I was trying to analyse the space the first time, I thought about airports in a way, because the space is full of lounges and different ways of experiencing the space according to the status of the visitors in a way. What do you think about that?

F: In Basel you have 2 levels: on the ground floor, around the light court, there are the world's most important galleries. Upstairs, on the upper level,

it's less and when you go to the periphery of the space, near the toilets and so on, you find the less important galleries. You find the same distribution concerning the visitors: at Art Basel you have 4 categories of visitors and 3 of them are VIPs. VIP 1st people come the first day and are super selected. After that there's a second VIP group and a third one. Only the third day the normal people can visit the fair. For these VIPs there are different spaces inside: a level that is reserved to VIPs and there you have cafes, champagne bars and other things. And inside this, there's another space concentrated on VIP selected clients of UBS, and there you find only highly selected people who have fortunes of 100 million dollars at UBS, high potential collectors.

G: I think this is extremely interesting, this compromise between the ideal participation and the actual segregation of spaces. If you think of the spatial model of the fair it should be spatially open to have a high level of permeability, but actually on the other hand you have these kind of bubble spaces.

F: Sure! When I was in NY for Frieze five years ago, there was quite another type of spacial presentation. It was like a temporary long pavilion built specifically for that event. Inside you didn't find these kind of separated booths for each gallery. You have to go in and you are in a closed space, but it is a serial presentation and that's another way of doing art presentation.

G: Would you compare it to a museum?

F: Yes, it's closer to a museum spatial model! It's the same in São Paulo, much more open, not separated by dry walls, but an open space.

G: That reflects the main issue regarding art fairs which is the market versus the cultural institution...

F: Right! The market character is highly developed at art Basel, a little bit less at Hong Kong, where there are less walls and more open spaces. In certain points you can have a look around you and see inside the other galleries' spaces in a very open way.

G: Do you think this reflects the country and its cultural values, framework and background?



Richard Long, *Ivory Granite Line*, 2016.
Lisson Gallery, Art|Basel Unlimited, Basel, 2018.

F: Well, a little bit; the Swiss mentality in collecting art is much more privatist than the American style, and the interviews we had with the American collectors showed us that when it comes to Switzerland, none of the collectors that were there invited us to come to their collections: they look at it as a private affair. In Miami everyone opened their doors and invited us to come in.

G: What do you think of the curators' involvement in art fairs?

F: There are two different kinds of presentation of art in Art|Basel: you have Art Unlimited, which is a kind of curated, very museum-like presentation, and you have the commercial side, the real *raison d'être* of Art Basel. Unlimited is a little bit like legitimisation that it is not only a commercial and economical affair, so they developed this kind of showroom. You have the curated side and the commercial side. Another important thing is that around Art Basel there is development of going public. So in the city you find each time a curated project in the streets of Basel, where young artists can show their works. In Hong Kong it's interesting because each time Art Basel is coming, the art world of the place is very excited and they arrange bus visits to ateliers. You go in the places of the old industrial complexes there are the young artist's ateliers and their places. The effects of Art Basel on the whole urban setting is much more important than the limited space they occupy at the fair exhibition.

G: I was wondering also about the building that hosts the event, because we have seen many different realities: sometimes art fair take place in an industrial building, sometimes inside fair buildings, or temporary ones such as NY, pavilions, etc. Do you think that there is a relationship between the building and the inner layout? I'm thinking also about Paris Fiac inside Grand Palais, is there a relationship or can they take place everywhere?

F: Well, as I said before, the given space is also a structuring factor and you cannot make abstraction from this, you have to arrange according to what is given. Otherwise, when you consider Frieze NY and you construct the building, your concept of art presentation is structuring the space entirely, whereas in Basel there is very small impact of creating. It's

the given space that is structuring the whole affair; and since they want to bring inside 300 galleries and the space is very limited and expensive, the economic side of structuring is very important: small spaces for everyone and the impression that you get is a little bit claustrophobic.

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All the price lists, regulations, policies, design guides, maps, plans, layouts and documents addressing the galleries and the art fairs have been kindly provided by Alfonso Artiaco, Massimo De Carlo and Lia Rumma galleries from their digital archives and from their private areas on the following websites:

www.artbasel.com
www.frieze.com
www.fiac.com

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