

Art Basel in the 1970s: the Role of the Female Gallerists Rewriting a History

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Introduction

In this essay, I attempt to shed light on the role of women gallerists in the 1970s at *Art Basel*, arguing that their influence has gone unrecognized. These early pioneers not only made pivotal contributions to *Art*, the original name of what is currently known as *Art Basel*, but were also responsible for its schedule, development and some important exhibitions.

In this case, the female presence is not considered here through the lens of Feminism in its canonical form, as these gallerists did not always prefer rosters of female artists or artists who dealt with these topics. Rather, it is seen as a direct emanation arising from their participation in a predominantly male system, where even the world of art dealing and collecting had often been based on belonging to the other gender, because of economic possibilities and independence. Here, they are new players who are beginning to interface in the art system, often starting as collectors and then becoming entrepreneurs. They are hybrid figures in the art market: patrons, intellectuals, gallery owners who need now, more than ever, an updated narrative so that their innovative contributions can be recognized. There is the necessity to impose an alternative research on these figures, one that goes beyond the narration and biographical studies that have been carried out to date.

The 1970s were pivotal years in the development of the art system and art fair world, when the major international and Italian fairs were established: *Art Basel* in 1970, *FIAC* in 1974, *TEFAF* in 1975, *Arte Fiera Bologna* in 1974, all preceded by *Art Cologne* in 1967. However, *Art Basel* turns out to be the most important from the beginning, because of the international vocation it has always had, although in the early years there appears to have been an impressive participation of Swiss and German galleries.

It has been widely assumed that *Art Basel* since its inception was founded on the initiative of the gallerist Ernst Beyeler, and that the fair has been historically renowned for the presence of an almost all-male tradition.

We must appreciate Marc Spiegler's efforts about this. In recent years, he has conducted a series of online interviews and issued a comprehensive catalog marking *Art Basel's* 50th anniversary, in which he openly acknowledged that the idea originated with a woman: Trudl Bruckner¹.

Researching art fairs and their history can become quite challenging, as one must navigate topics as diverse as art market research and history of exhibitions, provenance and museum studies. Studying the role of women within the history of art markets and art fairs such *Art Basel* is doubly challenging because it means that one must delve deep into historical catalogs to identify unknown materials and list of names that shed light upon the hidden story of this lynchpin of the art world.

Even though *Art Basel* is regarded as the most significant fair in the art world (Baia Curioni, 2012, p. 124; Baia Curioni, Forti, Leone, 2015, p. 59), its origins and early years are still not well-known. *Art Basel* is widely considered to be a preeminent venue for influential collectors and the "place to be" for gallerists who aim to sell art at top prices, covering an important percentage of their yearly revenue (Baia Curioni, Equi Pierazzini, Forti, 2020, p.7). In addition, this fair is an intriguing model that has grown over time, thanks to the institutionalization of this cultural event, and its emergence as a business brand. This aspect is suggested by the existence of a selection committee, its relationship with key institutions in the Swiss city, the presence of international exhibitors, and the definition of an important curatorial direction. Without a doubt, this process was also facilitated by the preparation of an official catalog since the first edition of the art fair, which furthered its growth worldwide.

For this essay, all catalogs from 1970 to 1979 were analyzed, with the aim of discovering the most important female names that determined an evolution for the fair. Here, three gallerists stand out.

These are the three who took part in all the editions of the 1970s, and who not only participated exhibiting their artists but also took leadership roles. These women include: Trudl Bruckner (Riehentor Gallery) from

¹ Marc Spiegler has been appointed as a Global Director of *Art Basel* from 2012 until 2023, and was Co-Director since 2008. See: Dirié, Gavillet, Spiegler, 2020; Bicker, Fulton, Meier, 2018.

Switzerland, Annely Juda from Great Britain, originally from Germany, and Denise René from France. These names not only come across as foundational, but also can be considered as a litmus test of the fair's predominantly Eurocentric beginning. In addition to them, other gallerists will also be included in this narration.

Therefore, this paper is organized into four main sections: the first one provides an analysis of contemporary research about women in art history in the 1970s and in the art market studies, through a literature review in order to frame the context of this narration; the second and the third present the role of female gallerists in the fair with an analysis of some case studies. The fourth one is composed by two appendixes with some data analyzed and an interview created for this occasion.

A Glimpse into the Research on Women in the Art Market

According to the art historian Amelia Jones:

Feminism, in most of its forms, proposes or demands a political and/or ethical stance towards cultural experience; academic versions of feminism theorize the ways in which all forms of culture condition, and are conditioned by, gender or "sexual difference". In its most recent forms, feminism insists on broadening models of analyzing the role of gender in cultural experience to accommodate the coextensivity of gender and other modes of subjectivity [...] (Jones, 2010, p. 1).

Numerous publications have attempted to rewrite art history from a female perspective, aiming to fill the gaps left with women artists in its development².

This type of analysis of women in art history is not something new. But, certainly, what is missing is a history of the art market from a woman's perspective, where art-historical research is intertwined with analyses of the market, i.e., relationships with artists and the role that certain gallerists played in these artists' promotion and evolution, as well as in placing them in certain types of collections, institutions, and museums. To date, the majority of literature that has dealt the most with art market research and gender, although mainly considering the role or price of the

² We can consider recent publications, such as: *Guerrilla Girls*, (2006), *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*, Penguin Books, New York; or Heartney, Posner, Princenthal, Scott, 2007.

artists³, are due to cultural economists or sociologists, not visual art researchers. Nevertheless, a new analysis that intertwines the different disciplines and methodologies is crucial.

We can trace back to the 1970s the most important academics and publications dedicated to women in the arts, thanks to scholars like Linda Nochlin⁴, whose role is very well established internationally, given her famous article *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* published in 1971; and, later, the Italian art critic Lea Vergine⁵. When she published her famous book *Il Corpo come linguaggio. (La "Body-art" e storie simili)* in 1974, she created a worldwide survey of this artistic movement where she highlighted several important female artists such as Gina Pane, Ketty La Rocca, Rebecca Horn, Joan Jonas. This can be considered a preliminary approach to her later survey, given that in the final biographies within a total of 60 artists, only 8 are women, meaning they only make up 13%⁶ (TAB.A - Appendix A).

Thereafter, with the exhibition and catalog *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia, 1910-1940: Pittrici e scultrici nei movimenti delle avanguardie storiche* in 1980, she brought back to life a poorly narrated and non-inclusive history of art consisting of a male focus. It proved a watershed for gender issues, marking a tremendous turning point.

Griselda Pollock and Patricia Mainardi are two other art historians that ought to be mentioned in this literature review. The second one is probably less well-known in Italy than the previous ones, despite the fact that her name is essential for the history of exhibitions. Specifically, she spent much time researching the Salons, that could be considered as closely related to the history of art fairs, and not just to the history of exhibitions as we know it today⁷. Patricia Mainardi's groundbreaking and still fundamental Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Universal Expositions of the Second*

³ See, for example, the following recent study: Bocart, Gertsberg, Pownall, 2022, pp. 543-565. This is based on the difference of prices in auctions realized by male and female artists based on 1800 auction houses results in the time frame of 2000-2017.

⁴ See also a recent publication, such as: Nochlin, Reilly, 2015.

⁵ We shall mention some re-readings of her work that that have been done lately, such as Maderna, 2020.

⁶ For this quantitative analysis, all the artists in the biographies have been analyzed, considering from pp. 287-317 of the book: Vergine, 1974. See Appendix A at the end of this essay for a complete analysis.

⁷ The role of the Salons as part of the beginning of the art fair movement is currently part of my Ph.D. research. Instead, they are usually intended as part of the exhibition history, if we consider books like Altshuler, *et al.*, 2008.

Empire: A Study in Art and Politics (Volumes I and II) was discussed on April 29th 1984 at the City University in New York, and was supervised by distinguished Professor Linda Nochlin. Mainardi's dissertation was the beginning of two other books on these topics, considering the Salons and the Great Exhibitions⁸. It is worth pointing out the relationship between the two, in terms of being part of a new wave of scholars who are familiar with these new themes. For our discourse related to Feminism, it is important to mention her essay *Quilts: The Great American Art* included in the journal *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* in 1982. Here, she discussed the importance that quilts – a combination of art and crafts - played in women's emancipation. These were artifacts that were usually exhibited at local fairs (Mainardi, 1982, p. 331).

It is worthwhile bringing back to light the remarkable volume by Griselda Pollock *Differencing the Canon*, published in 1999 and anticipated by the book *Framing Feminism: Art & the Women 's Movement 1970–85*, co-authored with Rozsika Parker in 1981. When referencing this article, Pollock claims that:

Rozsika Parker and I first advanced in 1981 in opposition to an initial feminist attempt to put women into the canon of art history. We used the apparent exclusion of women as artists to reveal how, structurally, the discourse of phallogentric art history relied upon the category of negated femininity in order to secure the supremacy of masculinity within the sphere of creativity (Pollock, 1999, p. 5).

According to Pollock, a canon is what can be considered the best, in literature, art history, or music, and it is not always produced by the academy, but created by artists as well (Pollock, 1999, p. 4). Therefore, rewriting the history of *Art Basel* by enhancing women's names is an attempt to challenge this type of canon in the context of art market research.

In the 1970s, the Italian international magazine "Flash Art" had dedicated several spaces to women in the artworld, even publishing a page entitled *Women in Art*⁹, in 1974 (fig.1). It consisted of thirty-one portraits of the best artists, curators, gallerists of that time, such as Nanda Vigo, Ivonne Rainer, Ileana Sonnabend, Lea Vergine.

⁸ See for instance, Mainardi, 1987; Mainardi, 1994.

⁹ I have found this material during my research in the Archive of Flash Art.



Fig. 1– *Women in Art*, “Flash Art”, n. 50-51, p. 26, 1974. Courtesy Flash Art Archive

In 1975, “Flash Art” also openly sided with the pro-abortion campaign initiated by the Italian Radical Party, inviting «all Italian and foreign artists to contribute one or more works in support of this initiative»¹⁰ (Flash Art Editors, 1975, p. 8).

The relationship between the art market and Feminism was firstly discussed in a landmark interview titled *We Are Feminists*¹¹, conducted in

¹⁰ This text it is in Italian. It has been translated by me.

¹¹ I was able to discover this material during some research for my dissertation at Flash Art’s Archive in Milan, in December 2022. I am thankful to Tommaso Pagani, Gea Politi, and

1976 by Gerhild Grolitsch with Gislind Nabakowski, an important photographer from the historical point of view. We should all remember her photograph of the performance by Gino De Dominicis at the Venice Biennale in 1972, when the artist 'exhibited' a young man named Paolo Rosa with down syndrome in the work entitled *Seconda Soluzione di immortalità*. This is today the only image that can be defined as official and belongs to the archive of Lia Rumma's gallery (Pellicari, 2017, pp.63-65). At that time, Nabakowski, was also an editor for the German edition of *Flash Art*, a magazine named *heute Kunst*.

We are Feminists, which can be considered as a "Manifesto", was accompanied by a series of striking images, such as Carolee Schneemann's performance *Meat Joy*, in 1964, Joan Jonas' *Mirror Check*, and Ulrike Rosenbach's action *Don't believe I am an Amazone*, No. 1.

During this interview, a significant testimonial in the history of women's roles in the art market field, she openly denounces men dominance in the art market and the fact that women are not recognized as economic agents in the art world: they are suppressed and not endowed with credibility. Indeed, most research usually focus on female artists' role, while we rarely find publications related to women gallerists.

This conversation, originally translated into English by Janice Guy, states as follows:

[GG]¹² You are editor in chief of 'heute Kunst' and you managed to bring a special issue about "Feminism and Art" on to the male controlled art market. How did that come about?

[GN] I believe we should no longer stop to ask how it came about. The situation of women cultural organizers, artists and critics is comparable to that of other feminists: in the economic division system of the art market, women are suppressed. My own case is typical. In January 1975 I edited the special issue 'Feminismus und Kunst' in 'heute Kunst'. In art circles they were so offended by my art initiative that I lost some advertisements. Suddenly it was: "Gislind Nabakowski is unusually intelligent, attractive, congenial, etc., but she should not have done that about feminism. How foolish intelligent women can be, they are ruining their careers". However, this copy n. 9 of 'heute Kunst' was sold out after only a

Cristiano Seganfredo for giving me the time and opportunity to research and study comfortably at their archive.

¹² I added the square brackets and the initials of the names in order to make it easier for the reader to understand who is speaking, given the fact that the original interview uses the italic for the interviewer.

few weeks, there are still a few second hand copies (Grolitsch, Nabakowski, 1976, p. 17).

And also:

[GG] The art market is a vicious circle for female artists. They are chosen only within limits for gallery programs. According to my investigations, art buyers consist of 65% by men (15% academics). These male buyers/collectors bring in about 75% of the turnover (male academics 30%, female academics only 5%. This spell must be broken.

[GN] Collectors generally come from the money investing class of society in which the women are not particularly autonomous and independent. The men are as a rule the money earning buyers and the women stand alongside, well-groomed next to the well-fed men and perhaps join a little in the conversation...The women often see to the correspondence, which is necessary for the cultivation of the collection, a form of charity to the bourgeois possession of culture. In the sense that collectors are small sponsors, who procure culture, it seems to me that they are also always bigger patriarchs (Grolitsch, Nabakowski, 1976, pp. 17-18).

It is also one of the first occasions where we are confronted with numbers and percentages about collectors, with only 5% of them being women academics. Otherwise, according to Nabakowski, art collectors are frequently businessmen's spouses who are interested in charity. This loud statement is not entirely true, but we can certainly understand its circumscription during those difficult times. Historically, we have prominent female collectors that have even shaped the museum's contemporary history as well, if we think of how the beginning of MOMA was autonomously founded in the 1920s by Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, even though they were clearly coming from important families. Before them, we may also mention Isabella Stewart Gardner.

In this article, Nabakowski discusses the relationship between female artists and gallery programs, arguing that they are not so present within the roster of a gallery, something that is also observable in the first ten years of *Art*.

More recent studies published mostly by cultural economists and sociologists have discussed the role of women in the history of the art market, through the use of statistics and quantitative methodologies. The following three are particularly interesting because they are focused either on the role of female artists or of the gallerists, starting from the Salons

while finishing with the contemporary years of *Art Basel*. Of a sample of three recent studies¹³ on these topics, only one attempted to analyze the presence of female gallerists, whereas most of the other analyses are focused on artists. In synthesis, most studies focus on women artists rather than female gallerists or curators, and most of the time female academics are typically the ones carrying them out.

The first two are focused on the gender-bias of artists in terms of prizes, presence, and sales. In 2023, an international research team led by scholars Claire Dupin de Beyssat, Diana Seave Greenwald¹⁴ and Kim Oosterlinck¹⁵ was about sexism in the nineteenth century at the Parisian Salons, though a numbered analysis of the medals awarded between 1850-1880, which were introduced under Napoleon. In this case, the sales have not been mentioned, but we should consider the fact that receiving a medal meant to win a prestigious award and becoming part of an official art system, with the possibility of receiving commissions (de Beyssat, Greenwald, Oosterlinck, 2023, p. 408). Here, they were testing for the presence of a gender bias (de Beyssat, Greenwald, Oosterlinck, 2023, p. 416) and they discovered that in a total of 74,338 paintings exhibited during those years, the works by female artists were 10,992, which means 14.79% of the sample «a rate that already reflects the difficulties women face to have their work accepted at the Salon» (de Beyssat, Greenwald, Oosterlinck, 2023, pp. 417-418); whereas works by male artists were 63,346, which means 85.21% (de Beyssat, Greenwald, Oosterlinck, 2023, pp. 418). There have also never been any women in the jury from 1850 to 1880 (de Beyssat, Greenwald, Oosterlinck, 2023, p. 423).

¹³ There are two more studies that should at least be mentioned within this essay: Bocart, Gertsberg, Pownall, 2022, pp. 543-565; and Cameron, Goetzmann, Nozari, 2019, pp. 279-307. Here, they investigated auction prize outcomes for artists who graduated from Yale School of Art, finding that female students have fewer pieces on auction but more positive results.

¹⁴ Diane Seave Greenwald is a curator at Isabelle Stewart Gardner Museum. She recently published an interesting book entitled *Painting by Numbers*, which contains a chapter devoted to the female condition. Inspired by Linda Nochlin's essay, the title is *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? Artistic Labor and Time-Constraint in Nineteenth-Century America*. Here, she quantifies women's representation at the National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the USA, in the XIX century. See: Greenwald, 2021, pp. 94-100.

¹⁵ I am very thankful to Prof. Kim Oosterlinck for sharing this research, for our discussion and his advice.

On the other hand, Taylor Whitten Brown¹⁶ worked on a research on the value of the prices for women artists published entirely on the *UBS & Art Basel Art Market Report* by Claire McAndrew in 2019, and in a synthetic version on *Artsy*, the website from which she gathered the data (Whitten Brown, 2019, online). In this study, Whitten Brown discovered that gallerists working in the primary market only represented 36% of female artists in their roster in 2018 (McAndrew, 2019, p. 117). The sales of female artists by galleries are ranked at 32% for their annual turnover (McAndrew, 2019, p. 97), and among them, primary-market galleries tended to have a higher share of emerging female artists (43%). This number declined if artists became more established (McAndrew, 2019, p. 118).

A research that specifically focused on female gallerists was Marta Equi Pierazzini's *Women in Art* as part of her Masters' thesis written in 2015¹⁷. *Women in Art* was a research built on a database consisting of artists, galleries and directors, collected between 2005 and 2012 from *Art Basel*. In a group of 6,896 artists, 480 galleries and 1205 gallery directors, female artists constitute only 26% of the database, and their number has always been lower than those of men over the course of the eight years (Equi Pierazzini, 2013, p. 10)¹⁸.

As it can be observed, these results are not too dissimilar from those of Taylor Whitten Brown's study. Additionally, by integrating the directors, Equi Pierazzini was able to develop a study on the genre of the gallerists as well. In a group of 1,205 gallery directors, 557 were males, and 632 were females. Overall, she found that female directors represent 52% of the sample, which is significantly higher than the percentage of female artists (Equi Pierazzini, 2013, p. 48).

Trudl Bruckner and other Female Gallerists at the Beginning of Art

Acquiring new information concerning the origins of *Art*¹⁹ in the 1970s has proven to be quite challenging.

¹⁶ I would like to thank Chris Bail and Taylor Whitten Brown for our discussions about this.

¹⁷ This MA Thesis was supervised by Prof. Stefano Baia Curioni and Prof. Angela Vettese, at Bocconi University. This datasource is part of a database constructed by ASK Research Center of Bocconi University that at that time registered the artists, galleries and directors present at the Art Basel fair between 2005 and 2012.

¹⁸ This type of research was also further developed into the essay by Baia Curioni, Equi Pierazzini, Forti, 2020.

¹⁹ I will recall here that *Art* is the former name of *Art Basel*.

Rare material is not available because most protagonists passed away, and the first catalogs did not include an extensive section dedicated to critical texts. On the other hand, the list of the galleries was frequently preceded by an official note from the Art Fair President, usually a member of the Swiss Industries.

For this research, all the catalogs from 1970 to 1979 have been collected and analyzed. These catalogs are valuable for examining the history of art markets and exhibitions, an area of research with gaps in scholarship that need to be addressed²⁰.

The first edition was accompanied by a slender catalog with a cover designed by Herbert Leupin²¹, a Swiss graphic designer specializing in poster art. The catalogs' structure shows that there was the aim to internationalize the event since the beginning, as three languages were used (German, French, and English)²², attracting international collectors. Following that one, massive books going from 500 to more than 700 pages were issued each year until 2020, with the grandiose ambition of one expressly devoted to the fair's 50th anniversary²³. Since the 1970s, most of the catalogs have been organized into four sections: the list of the galleries, the list of the artists in alphabetical order with the galleries that represented them, two pages for the galleries, a supplement, and plenty of commercial announcements, preceded by a short, institutional introduction. The fair map was usually published at the end so that the catalog served as a physical guide to the exhibition. A new type of structure was established in the 2000s.

Art fairs are like bamboo trees and chameleons. They spread around the world, invading cities, and they change shape, form and perfume. Like myths, their origins are difficult to trace. They bring a joyful atmosphere and culture, and they also generate revenues for the economies of the art world and the city itself. An art fair is a social event, where artworks are sold by galleries that are renting booths for a short period of time, in

²⁰ I was able to collect all of these catalogs through a one-year long, international, research. I am very thankful for my time at Duke University, Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies, which was of great support.

²¹ It is possible to see a picture here: Art Basel (2020), *Meet the photographer who has shot Art Basel every year since 1970*. Available at <https://www.artbasel.com/stories/50-years-kurt-wyss-interview> (Accessed 17 March 2023).

²² See Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1970.

²³ Dirié, Gavillet, Spiegel, 2020. This was the last catalog published by *Art Basel* for that venue.

a cultural environment. Therefore, art fairs are complex systems, where reputation and quality are key aspects.

The history of *Art Basel* did not begin so differently from its "neighbor" *Art Cologne*, that is, it was born out of the initiative of a group of gallery owners, in order to create a flourishing system within their own city. As much as *Art Basel* wished to distinguish itself from *Art Cologne* with a more international, rather than national, vocation, it is nevertheless true that the first group of gallerists was actually made up of mostly Swiss and Germans, with an enlightened Rudolf Zwirner serving as a bridge between the two, and whom we find already in the first international committee²⁴. Yet behind the birth of *Art*, was a woman: Trudl Bruckner. Her daughter recalls in this way the memory of her mother's idea.

At that stage, I was at the Sorbonne in Paris for a semester for my law studies. It was supposed to be a semester, but in May 1968, it became extremely uncomfortable in the Latin Quarter in Paris, and so I came home early. At home, my mother surprised me with her initial thoughts of doing something for Basel, as too little was happening there. [...] Too little was happening for her in the city. She wanted to do something for Basel...and for artists and art. It should be something grand: an art fair that would shine far beyond Basel, but also something exquisite (Bauman, 2018, p. 64).

These are complex years, where student movements take ground, and when Feminism flares up. But for the art world these are also peculiar times, which not only see the birth of major fairs, but also of major exhibitions that un hinge the system, such as those by Harald Szeemann, Germano Celant's theories, and the Biennale, which that year underwent a major protest and which in the 1970s opened up to artistic "Behaviors". After all, we are twenty-five years following World War II²⁵, and despite this lapse of time there still seems to be the necessity of attempting to forget what happened and to recreate a new, more progressive kind of art world under the same name that the group of galleries that had founded *Art Cologne* had given themselves: Association of Progressive Art Dealers, founded in 1966 (Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels, 2016, p. 8).

²⁴ See Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1970, p. 3.

²⁵ I am thankful to Prof. Hans J. Van Miegroet for our discussion about my research.

Indeed, the committee is also the first to mention *Art Cologne* as a reference, within the introduction to *Art's* first catalog:

For example, the continued success of the Cologne Art Fair, which is organized by a group of progressive West German art dealers, has shown how important such a fair is today for contemporary art, since it provides the art dealers with contacts with new buyers, and the public, apart from contact with the art trade, also with an insight into the supply available, with the opportunity to compare prices and therefore to gain a clearer idea of the market.

The idea to organize such a fair in Switzerland was obvious. Especially since Switzerland has recently become more and more a center for the international art trade-among other things because of its favourable geographical situation and its liberal foreign exchange and finance policies (Internationale Kunstmesse, 1970, p. 10).

Trudl Bruckner was pivotal in all of this, hers was the decision to start the fair, and hers was also the choice of the date, so as to assist the auction period (Kornfeld, 2018, p. 62) and thus have a greater chance of reaching a large group of international collectors.

Trudl Bruckner was the perfect person to initiate such a huge project, because she was originally from Basel, where she had owned a gallery since the 1950s, while also being respected by her colleagues. She founded Gallerie Riehentor inspired by the name of the street in Riehentorstrasse, where she was living with her husband Cristoph – Steffi- Bruckner, a cloth merchant married in 1946. Remembered as the grand dame in Basel, she was considered a kind leader, and her gallery was a meeting place for artists, families, and art enthusiasts (Fetz, 2018, p. 25).

Most of the publications and articles about *Art Basel's* history only briefly mention the fact that the fair was born from the idea of a group of three gallerists named Ernst Beyeler, Trudl Bruckner and Baltz Hilt, not addressing the importance of Trudl Bruckner in all of this, except for Marc Spiegler (Spiegler, 2020, p. 4).

A document about the first meeting for the idea of the fair dated June 10th, 1968 at 8 pm, held at the cafeteria Buffet SBB MatterhonstÜbl (Dirié, Gavillet, Spiegler, 2020, p. 48), provides more information on the beginning, and we can see that at the *Galleristenzusammenkunft*²⁶, there

²⁶ Translation: gallerists meeting.

were *anwesend*²⁷ ten people. It is worth noting that the gallerists absent were Frl. Bettie Thommen and Galerie Beyeler.

Among them Trudl Bruckner appears as the first one on the following list:

- Frau Bruckner, Galerie Riehentor;
- Frl. Galerie d'Art Moderne;
- Frl. Selhofer, Galerie Musarion;
- Herr. Dr. Cahn, Münzen und Medaillen AG;
- Herr Fehse, Galerie Münsterberg;
- Herr Dr. Gerhard
- Herr Gürtler, Katakombe;
- Herr Handschin;
- Herr Hilt;
- Frau Just, Galerie Hilt (Protokoll).

In this document, it is written:

This idea is universally welcomed. Disagreement prevails only because of the locations. Dr. Cahn suggests Kunsthalle, while Herr Hilt and Herr Gurtler think of the Muba. Mr. Fehse and Mr. Handschin prefer Safransaal because it is central and popular. A completely different, new audience would certainly appear. A provisional date is given, namely the 5th-9th. November 1968 as a fair with sales and as a conclusion Saturday, November 10th with an auction and subsequent pleasant entertainment. Messrs. Fehse and Hanschin are commissioned to organize this fair²⁸ (Dirié, Gavillet, Spiegler, 2020, p. 48).

As a result, everyone was in favor of the idea of the art fair and of the dates which were originally set for November 5-9 1968, whereas the place was still undecided. Initially, even a museum was considered as a potential venue to host the fair.

Art curator Paco Barragan intended to point out the role of Trudl Bruckner, while reconsidering the importance of Ernst Beyeler for the initial

²⁷ Translation: present.

²⁸ The original language of this document is German: «Diese idee wird allgemeiner begrusst. uneinigkeit herrscht bloss wegen den Lokalitäten. Herr Dr. Cahn schlägt Kunsthalle vor, während Herr Hilt und Herr Gurtler an die Muba denken. Herr Fehse und Herr Handschin finden Safransaal besser, weil zentral und auch populär. Es wurde sich sicher ein ganz anderes, neues Publikum einfinden. es wird ein provisorisches Datum genannt und zwar der 5.-9. November 1968 als Messe mit Verkauf und als Abschluss Samstag, 10. November mit Auktion und nachheriger gemutlicher Unterhaltung. Die Herren Fehse und Hanschin werden beauftragt, diese Messe zu organisieren».

idea. He claims that there is a sort of myth about the intertwined relationship between Ernst Beyeler and *Art Basel*, whereas he actually participated because he received social pressure from Trudl Bruckner and Hermann Hauswirth, the director of Schweizer Mustermesse, known as Muba (Barragan, 2020, p. 83).

Nevertheless, Beyeler's role in the fair's early international steps must not be neglected; thanks to him gallerists such as Denise René and Annelly Juda, whom we will focus on due to their institutional roles, got involved. In the years following its debut, other participants include Leo Castelli, Sidney Janis (Art Basel, 2020a), Lucio Amelio's Modern Art Agency, and Ileana Sonnabend.

Amelio, for example, exhibited from 1971, Janis from 1972, Leo Castelli from 1973, and Sonnabend from 1974, although her participation in Castelli's booth was probably set earlier²⁹.

As a result, internationalization was not truly dominant from the beginning, but rather spread like wildfire over the course of the fair's expansion. Given the constant growth of the participants, the fair switched the halls of the location and covered two floors. As an example, in 1970 there were 113 galleries, 285 in 1979, and a peak in 1975 with 316 exhibitors³⁰.

From the first edition, the fair was organized within two committees: the organizing one included Swiss dealers, and the International Committee included dealers mostly from Europe³¹. This is a prominent list that contributes favorably to their reputation-based work, giving prestige to the fair, while networking with their own contacts.

Thus, the structure is endowed with two poles that serve to make decisions, select galleries, bring in contacts, and assist in the success of a project that showed itself from the start to be a combination of art market strategies and structured exhibition choices. Similarly, interlocutors were thus interfacing with primary and secondary markets, with young artists and Modern Masters.

²⁹ Analysis conducted by the author by analyzing the gallery list in all the catalogs from 1970 to 1979.

³⁰ See TAB 2, Appendix A. Analysis conducted by the author based on the Exhibitor lists in the catalogs. On this occasion, magazines and auction houses have not been counted.

³¹ This is the full list of the international committee: André Emmerich, New York; Graziano Ghiringhelli (Il Naviglio), Milano; Charles und Peter Gimpel, London; Enberhard Kornfeld, Bern; Aimé Maeght, Paris; Rudolf Zwirner, Köln; DuMont Schauberg, Köln; Thames+Hudson, London (Internationale Kunstmesse, 1970, p. 3).

The first edition of *Art Basel* featured several female gallerists, including Trudl Bruckner, Denise René, and Annely Juda. This is a group of galleries participated in the fair for the first ten years and became part of the international committee in 1974³². For this reason, they are the most interesting triad at the beginning of the fair and are a powerful force in terms of Feminism, in the sense of women taking leadership positions in the art market. Along the years, these were accompanied by a series of other female gallerists worth noting: Gmurzynska Gallery; Ileana Sonnabend; Juana de Mordò; Ursula Krizinger; Verena Muller; Renee Ziegler; Isy Brachot; Marie-Suzanne Feigel; Galerie Suzanne Bollag; Galerie Margarete Lauter; Galerie Dorothea Loehr; and the Italians: Lia Rumma; Marilena Bonomo; Il Capricorno; Studio La Città, Lucrezia De Domizio. This last one, participated in two editions: in 1973 and 1975, and she dedicated her booth to contemporary Italian artists and to the performance, showing names like Beuys, Chiari, De Dominicis, Enrico Job. In 1973, she presented an entire booth dedicated to the artist Enrico Job and his "bread man", the title of which was *Metamorphosis*. This was an exhibition-performance realized during the Venice Biennale the previous year, which had taken place both in the public space of St. Mark's Square and the Grand Canal, and at the Il Canale gallery³³.

In 1975, in the pages devoted to her gallery, there are three images. One concerning the 1974 work *Incontro con Beuys* by the artist of the same name, a master for her and with whom she established a friendship and working relationship that we might call "anemic," the other two pertaining to the work *Quando non si parla più di immortalità del corpo. (Entrance reserved for animals)* by Gino De Dominicis, an intervention realized at her gallery in Pescara on January 13th, 1975³⁴, along with a confessional. Here we can see four animals, a cow, a donkey, a chicken, and a goose, which have become very important in contemporary art history if we consider artists like Maurizio Cattelan.

Even though Ileana Sonnabend is considered one of the most important gallerists worldwide³⁵ in that period, she only participated in four edi-

³² Analysis conducted by the author on the catalogs. This information was desumed by confronting Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1974, with the previous four. Trudl Bruckner was part of the Organising Committee since the beginning.

³³ See Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1973, pp. 518-519.

³⁴ See Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1975, p. 144.

³⁵ See Temkin, Lehmann, 2013.

tions of the fair from 1973 to 1976³⁶, and presented a predominantly American program with the exception of artists like Jannis Kounellis and Anne and Patrick Poirier. Paradoxically, female artists and those of a more feminist nature began to be seen in booths arranged by male gallerists, who were nevertheless interested in these practices. A striking example is Morra Studio, which started presenting the work of Marina Abramovic quite early on, or Harlekin, from Wiesbaden, which in 1979 dedicated a booth solely to Marina Abramovic and Ulay showing in the catalog their *Performance 3* with a snake, in dialog with Joan Jonas³⁷.

The following map of *Art Basel* 1970 (fig. 2) shows us that these galleries are entrusted with medium-sized booths at the central level, while Denise René's booth, who was exhibiting together with Hans Mayer³⁸, reaches the levels of Bruno Bischofberger, Ernst Beyeler, and Maeght, that is to say grand galleries that for that period could be considered as today's top players.

Bruckner's Riehentor Galerie exhibited all works created in that same year, confirming that the gallery was specifically devoted to contemporary art. The artists were: Wolf Barth, Konrad Hofer, Rolf Iseli, and English female artist Jacqueline Stieger with a giant sculpture in aluminum entitled *We at Welton*³⁹. Trudl Bruckner's interest was grafted onto predominantly Swiss and German artists, with a willingness to read and promote the contemporary, along with the cooperation of her husband and the whole family. Her originality also lay in the choices to promote herself. In the first catalog of the fair, unlike all the other galleries, she decided to include a sort of poster designed with a sharp outline, which, somehow, represented the works in a schematic way of the artists presented at the booth⁴⁰. Over the years, she seemed to open up to the secondary market, proposing artists such as Paul Klee.

³⁶ Analysis conducted by the author by analyzing the gallery list in all the catalogs from 1970 to 1979.

For instance, Ileana Sonnabend is not listed among the participating galleries in 1978. Nevertheless, upon scrutinizing the fair's map, one finds that she is actually an integral part of Leo Castelli's booth. Together, they presented one show by Robert Rauschenberg that year. In 1977 and 1979, neither Leo Castelli or Ileana Sonnabend participated at the fair, even though Castelli was still part of the International Committee.

³⁷ See *Internationale Kunstmesse, 1979*, pp. 202-203.

³⁸ Besides her original gallery in Paris, she opened two more venues in Düsseldorf and New York with him.

³⁹ See the list of the works in: *Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1970, Art, Internationale Kunstmesse, Schweizer Mustermesse, Basel*, p. 142.

⁴⁰ See the pictures: *Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1970*, pp. 142-143.

According to Gilli Stampa, their gallery was directly approached by Trudi Bruckner because she wanted a young gallery from Basel to participate in the fair. Furthermore, this was a gallery that displayed video works and installations from the beginning. In the sculpture park, they have displayed large installations by artists like Franco Marsili, Christian Rotacher and Albert Siegenthaler (fig. 3-4).

In response to a question about their display in the courtyard, Gilli explains:

At the first Art Basel, we were only placed in the adjacent sculpture park, since the booths inside were already taken after our admission. But we still got a lot of attention and were even able to sell works. The stands of the other galleries still had a very classic layout. Painting, sculpture and graphics, but for the most part at a high level (Stampa, 2023, e-mail Interview, Appendix B).

Therefore, they installed outside because the total number of available booths had already been exceeded. In the archival photos below, it can be seen that the set-up was arranged as a pathway and not designed as if it were a booth. However, one can glimpse in the first photo a series of seats, which perhaps presumed the presence of refreshments or places for art conversations⁴².

Over the years, this gallery developed a niche for showcasing pioneering female artists who dealt with the role of women in art and society, exhibiting pioneers like Valie Export, Ulrike Rosenbach and later Miriam Cahn, Marlene Dumas, Rosemarie Trockel, Pipilotti Rist and others⁴³.

⁴² I am very thankful to Gilli Stampa for our interview and this archival material.

⁴³ The full interview with Gilli Stampa is available at APPENDIX B.



Fig. 3 – Galerie Stampa, Installation View, *ART*, 1970. Courtesy Galerie Stampa



Fig. 4 – Galerie Stampa, Installation View, ART, 1970. Courtesy Galerie Stampa

The following picture taken for a “Flash Art” reportage at the Basel fair serves to give us a sense of what was going on in those years and who were some of the main characters. Here, among the various female gallerists we find Ursula and René Block, Annemarie Verna, Ursula Krizinger, as well as Hans Mayer who was exhibiting with Denise René at that time, Leo Castelli, Bruno Bishofbergher, and Diego Stampa, one of the founders of the Galleria Stampa. Galleria del Naviglio’s booth deserves a special mention as, although it was busy at the fair, it was particularly interested in the World Cup football match about Italy-Poland (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 – Flashback on the Art Fair of Basel, “Flash Art” no. 48-49, pp. 8-9, 1974. Courtesy Flash Art Archive

The National Exhibitions: Annely Juda and Denise René

Since 1973, national-themed exhibitions, almost Biennale-style pavilions, were also included in the fair where predominantly European countries interfaced. In 1973, the United States was represented, although not as an exhibition but as a group of different galleries that put together artists on the second floor; in 1974 Italy⁴⁴, a retrospective from 1950-1970, where Mariza Merz was the only woman among thirty-nine artists exhibited; in 1975 Great Britain, in 1976 Spain, in 1977 Germany, in 1978 France⁴⁵.

Furthermore, a cleaner way of showing the works in the booths was reached by the committee, bringing the idea of solo booths to life, established initially in 1974⁴⁶, following a new trend initiated thanks to the international beginning of curatorship. For instance, in 1975, Frédéric P. Walthard, Director of the Swiss Industries, states the preference for either solo shows or two to three artists' exhibitions. Also, he introduces the British Exhibition:

A special accent is given for the second time by the «New Trends» sector with avantgarde works. I could be enlarged this year: far more than fifty exhibitors are participating in it.

In 1975, too, several galleries are again concentrating on one man shows or on the works of only two or three artists. This concept has proved this worth as a complement and contrast to the prevalent exhibition style with a wide range of exhibits; it permits an intense and lasting presentation of the work of one artist for the art connoisseurs from all over the world who come together at the ART in Basle.

The tradition started two years ago with a special show of American art and repeated last with a display of Italian artists will be continued; this time with paintings, sculptures and objects from Great Britain.

An Exhibitor's Advisory Board with 25 leading gallery owners from 12 countries, together with 315 exhibitors from 22 countries guarantee that ART 6'75 will remain true to form and conscious of its own special task: as the largest and most lively international art fair for art of this century to impart comprehensive information, to the advantage and for the pleasure of artists and art lovers. It is the aim of this catalogue to help achieve this objective (Internationale Kunstmesse Basle, 1975, p. 5).

⁴⁴ See Internationale Kunstmesse Basle, 1974, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁵ The chronology of these art fair's national pavilions was described by analyzing all the catalogs in progressive order as well as their floorplans.

⁴⁶ See Internationale Kunstmesse Basle, 1974, p. 5.

Annely Juda was a German-Jewish woman who moved to England, to the famous *Finchleystrasse in London in 1937*, coming from Kassel (Dickson, MacDougall, 2020, p. 231). After working for Erik Estorick, an art collector interested in Italian Futurism, she launched the Molton Gallery in 1960, designed by Arnold Bode, then the Hamilton Galleries in 1963. In 1968, she established Annely Juda Fine Art in Tottenham Mews, London, focusing on the non-objective universe.

From the beginning of the fair, she was accompanied by her son David, who became another important figure alongside his mother. They were a familiar type of organization, as actually most of the galleries are, working together on the artists, logistics and installation of the booth.

Their roster was comprised of an outstanding selection of international Modern Masters like Giacomo Balla, Salvador Dalí, Kandinsky, Paul Delvaux, Alberto Giacometti, Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian, Oskar Schlemmer, Malevich, Tatlin, Naum Gabo, Moholy-Nagy, Vantongerloo and Rodchenko, with an interest towards Abstraction and Russian Constructivism, together with young artists, such as Christo (and then Jean-Claude). Therefore, there was a combination of primary and secondary market.

They have also supported British artists like David Hockney, the painter Allan Green, the sculptor Nigel Hall, all of whom they have been represented until today, and John Davies, as well as female constructivists like Ljubov' Sergeevna Popova, with works from the series *Compositions* of the 1920s.

In 1971, Annely and David Juda decided to present a Christo's solo show, who, at that time, with Jeanne-Claude was working on the groundbreaking *Valley Curtain* project, that was finally accomplished in 1972. Therefore, the fair was used in order to fundraise for this temporary artwork.

Diverse sketches were exhibited, with unrealized projects such as the collages *Allied Chemical Tower, 1968*, conceived for New York, and *Wrapped Trees at the Champs Elysees, 1969*, a projected aimed to wrap 330 elms on the Champs Elysees towards the Arc de Triomphe, in Paris, as well as other collages and drawings concerning Arco della Pace, Packed Coast and the Krefeld Museum⁴⁷. The first Christo's work was purchased by another gallerist, named Mr. Kornfeld (ArtBasel, 2020b).

It appears that this specific solo show with Christo is what started the trend of booths devoted to solo exhibitions. The "Solo Shows" section,

⁴⁷ See the pictures: Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1971, pp. 128-129.

together with “New Trends” and “Avantgarde”, were officially established by the fair in 1974, primarily due to the initiative of the exhibitors (Internationale Kunstmesse, 1974, p. 5). The gallery, which was also a member of the Exhibitor’s Advisory Board representing Great Britain⁴⁸, decided to focus on Alan Green that year and the following one. Green was an abstract painter and one of the pioneers of the English color field movement. For instance, *Cut Out* was one of the works exhibited, an acrylic on canvas, made in 1975⁴⁹. It was a large diptych, composed of the juxtaposition between one dark and one lighter part. The gallery has been working together with this artist until today⁵⁰, and exhibited him at the fair for many years.

At the fair, Annelly Juda frequently held solo exhibitions for the young artists they represented, many of whom were Royal College of Art graduates. For example, the gallery took part in the “One-Man Shows” section with Alan Green in 1974 and 1975, John Davies in 1976, and Nigel Hall in 1978 and 1979⁵¹.

In 1975, a show devoted to British art and overseen by David Juda together with Godfrey Pikington, John Kasmin and Felicity Samuel, was planned for *Art 6*, and exhibited at the first floor - Hall 14. This can be considered as an epochal exhibition, supported by the galleries themselves and also by auction houses such as Sotheby’s, as well as loans from various collectors. It included a group of artists who subsequently made contemporary art history, many of whom were represented by Annelly Juda, such as John Davies, Alan Green, David Hockney. Here we also find, Francis Bacon, Peter Blake, Lucian Freud, Gilbert & George, Barbara Hepworth, and Henry Moore⁵². It can be considered as a masterpiece exhibition featuring paintings and installations, mostly from the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, an installation by John Davies, titled *Three Figures: One Standing, One Standing on Chair, One Kneeling*, created in 1971, was located at the center of the room⁵³. It appeared to be a silent

⁴⁸ Other female gallerists served on the committee that year, including Juana de Mordo for Spain, Denise René for France, and Isy Brachot for Belgium.

⁴⁹ See the picture: Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1975, p. 300.

⁵⁰ The last solo show at the gallery was held in 2022, in close collaboration with Green’s wife, June.

⁵¹ This analysis was conducted by studying all the fair’s floorplans at the end of the catalogs.

⁵² See the catalog: British Exhibition Art 6 '75 Basel (1975), Schweizer Mustermesse Basel, Hall 14, 1st Floor.

⁵³ See the picture at the end of the catalog: Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1989.

conversation between three disturbing life-size wax figures. The kneeling man seemed to be making amend with the other two, who looked to be judging him. This is undoubtedly a sophisticated piece of art that deserved a museum setting. Here, it is offered as proof of how *Art Basel* was already starting to embrace an institutionalizing process for the art works and the fair itself, serving as the model for future sections like *Art Unlimited*.

For this exhibition a short catalog was published⁵⁴. Unfortunately, it lacked a critical commentary and provided only the names of the artists and images of the works. However, it is an interesting publication if we also consider the background, where we find a historical map of the most important British galleries indicated.

Denise René founded her gallery in Paris in Rue La Boétie in 1938 (René, Millet, 1991, p. 7), committing her artistic research to geometric abstraction and kinetic art from the very beginning and becoming one of the first showcasing artists such as Victor Vasarely. She was in touch with him since the 1939 and organized his first exhibition in 1944.

Her significance in art history cannot be overestimated, as she was the first to present Mondrian in Paris in 1950 and promoted *Le Mouvement*, a collective exhibition curated by art critic and philosopher Pontus Hulten in 1955 (Alviani, 2015), with Vasarely who had the primordial idea (René, Millet, p. 74), and Roger Bordier. All together, they accompanied the exhibition through a "*Manifeste Jaune*" (René, 1955), a sort of leaflet in which Vasarely stated: «The screen is flat but, allowing movement, it is also space»⁵⁵. This show ran from June 6th to June 30, 1955, and featured the following artists: Alexander Calder, Marcel Duchamp, Yaacov Agam, Pol Bury, Jesús Rafael Soto, Jacobsen, Jean Tinguely, and Victor Vasarely. Afterwards, some of these artists were included or quoted in the famous exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, held at MOMA, New York, in 1965, and at least five artworks were credited with the courtesy of Denise René, who was also mentioned in the acknowledgments and who supported with advice the exhibition⁵⁶. So here we are dealing with a figure in the art world who, at the time of the fair, already had 30 years of experience, with a national and international network, and respected even by institutions. By participating in *Art*, she brought with her not only this already

⁵⁴ British Exhibition Art 6 '75 Basel (1975), Schweizer Mustermesse Basel, Hall 14, 1st Floor.

⁵⁵ Translated by me.

⁵⁶ Own analysis based on the catalog of the exhibition: Seitz, 1965.

settled cauldron of knowledge, but also some art movements that, at that time, were at the height of their flourishing. This was a period when she had established a business partnership with Hans Mayer, a young gallerist from Dusseldorf, with whom she would later also open a space in New York during the 1970s at 6 West 57 Street, very close to Sidney Janis' location (René, Millet, 1991, p. 102). This is also why the size of their booth reflected its importance to the fair and likewise makes it possible to set up kinetic works and installations.

Thus, the artists shown in the 1970s also represent these types of art movements. In 1973, however, she seemed to paving to American Pop Art, presenting, together with Victor Vasarely and Karl Gestner, works by Robert Indiana. In the catalog, a page stands out devoted to his iconic sculpture *Love*⁵⁷. It was in 1979, that she dedicated her booth to Jannis Kounellis, thus opening her roster up to Arte Povera. She did so, however, in a performative way, including in the catalog that marvelous canvas with a leporello, which is activated through a musical performance by a cellist. It was *Untitled (Bach)*, 1971⁵⁸ a work that gives us an insight into her relationship with Lucio Amelio's Modern Art Agency, where it had been previously exhibited⁵⁹.

Denise René was also appointed Director of the French Exhibition in 1978 with a show entitled *L'art en France de Mondrian et Marcel Duchamp à nos jours*, held at the first floor. On either side of the exhibition there were the two booths of Leo Castelli and Ernst Beyeler, who presented many French artists that year.

In the exhibition, there were artists such as: Agam, Arman, Arp, M.Barré, Bishop, Buren, Bury, M.Cahn, Calder, L. Cane, César, Claisse, Cruz-Diez, Damian, Degottex, S.Delaunay, Devade, Dewasne, Deleuze, Dubuffet, Duchamp, Gorin, T. Grand, Hains, Hantaï, Hartung, Herbin, Honneger, Jacquet, Joubert, Kirili, Klein, Le Gac, Le Parc, T. Long, Marignoli, Mauboulès, Mondrian, Morellet, Mortensen, Mosset, Palazuelo, N. Pastra, Poliakoff, M. Raysse, Saint-Phalle, Sarkis, Schoffer, M. Simon, Soto, Spoerri, Takis, Tàpies, Thiolat, Tinguely, Tsai, Vantongerloo, Vasarely, Venet, Vi-
allat.

⁵⁷ See the picture in the catalog: Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1973, pp. 134-139.

⁵⁸ Internationale Kunstmesse Basel, 1979, pp. 516-517.

⁵⁹ The artwork is now part of the Tate Museum's collection in London, where it is stated that the work comes from Lucio Amelio's Moder Art Agency.

In the catalog of *Art 9'78* she wrote a long page which was also published as a single leaflet⁶⁰. It can be considered the first type of critical essay seen in the fair's extensive history of catalogs. Previously, only the president would contribute to writing the edition's foreword, but surely not with the intention of creating a critical dialog on the artists shown.

This critical essay, composed in the form of a letter, was written in May 1978, a month before the opening. Here, the gallerist clearly emphasizes that she intends to keep proposing her type of research by choosing artists belonging to Abstraction and Constructivism, with whom she felt comfortable, and by deliberately excluding figurative painting. It is also worth mentioning that she intended to show artists who have worked in France, not only those who were born there. For this reason, French and Swiss galleries collaborated for this project. It is important to point out that this exhibition at the fair could be considered particularly farsighted for the relationship between art and technology. Therefore, it would be worth developing further historical analysis about that, especially given that such an important event like *Les Immatériaux* was inaugurated almost ten years later, in 1985 at the Centre Pompidou.

As it is historically significant, here below is the complete letter, which has never been published elsewhere, besides in this catalogue:

By accepting the invitation of the organizers of the Basel Fair to present "French Art" within the framework of ART 9'78, I had to make some decisions. The first one was that I will remain faithful to my constant line: the defense of the abstraction deriving from Constructivism, without neglecting other forms of abstraction of different tendencies, whose rigor I also estimate. It is thus deliberately that I have excluded the various figurative schools.

The second, seemingly incompatible with the title "French Art", was the affirmation of the international character of the art that has made Paris one of the most important places for creation. The selection I have made does not consider the nationality of the artists. The only thing that matters is that they have worked in Paris, that they have confronted their research and created a climate conducive to the development of their work, that they have made Paris a world center of art.

The same apparent contradiction applies to New York, which also attracts artists of all national and technical origins.

I am aware of the perilous nature of my mission and the questions it will inevitably raise. The choice I have made is an attempt to consider certain currents of art in France and their evolution from the abstraction of the 1930s with its continui-

⁶⁰ René, 1978.

ties and ruptures. This starting point is arbitrary as is any attempt at classification.

However, I have tried to represent the main currents coming from geometric abstraction: kinetic art, New Realism, art and technology, conceptual art, analytical painting, minimalism and various independent trends. The most diverse means of expression, techniques and media are presented, the essential being the authenticity of the creation.

I do not claim to have given a complete picture of the current art in France, nor to have made a show of objectivity. But what does objectivity mean in the field of art? (Anon, 1978, pp. 10-11)⁶¹

In that period, Denise René was also appointed president of the *FIAC* organization in Paris, called Cofiac (René, Millet, 1991, p. 147), thus becoming a pivotal figure in the world of contemporary art fairs as we know them today, contributing to their development but also to their institutionalization and rigor.

⁶¹ The original text was in French. The translation was made by me:

En acceptant l'invitation des organisateurs de la Foire de Bale de presenter "l'Art Francais" dans le cadre de ART 978, j'ai tnu à apporter d'emblée certaines précisions.

La première était que je resterais d'abord fidèle à ma ligne costante: la défense de l'abstraction issue du Constructivisme, sans pour autant négliger d'autres formes d'abstraction de tendances différentes, don't j'estime aussi la rigueur. C'est donc délibérément que j'ai écarté les diverses écoles figuratives.

La seconde, en apparence peu compatible avec le titre "l'Art Francais", était l'affirmation du caractère international de l'art qui a fait de Paris un des hauts lieux de la creation. La selection que j'ai opérée ne tient donc aucun compte de la nationalité d'origine des artistes. Seul importe qu'ils aient travaillé à Paris, qu'ils y ont confronté leurs recherches et créé dans un climat propice au développement de leur oeuvre, qu'ils ont fait de Paris un centre Mondial de l'art.

La meme contradiction apparente s'applique à New York, qui attire elle aussi des artistes de toutes origines nationales et techniques.

J'ai conscience du caractère périlleux de ma mission et des interrogations qu'elle ne manquera pas de susciter. Le choix opéré tente de rendre compte de certains courants de l'art en France et de leur evolution à partir de l'abstraction des années 1930 avec ses continuités et ses ruptures. Ce point de depart est arbitraire comme l'est toute tentative de classification.

Je me suis pourtant efforcée de représenter les principaux courants issus de l'abstraction géométrique: l'art cinétique, le Nouveau Réalisme, art et technologie, l'art conceptuel, la peinture analytique, le minimalisme et diverses tendances indépendantes. Les moyens d'expression, les techniques et les supports les plus divers y sont presents, l'essentiel étant l'authenticité de la création.

Je n'ai pas la pretention d'avoir donné una image complète de l'art actuel en France, ni d'avoir fait oeuvre d'objectivité. Mais que signifie objectivité en matière d'art?

Denise René Paris, Mai 1978.

In her own words, she describes them as follows: «International art fairs are now part of the art market landscape and, without taking the easy way out, as long as we are rigorous, we must continue to develop them»⁶² (1991, p. 147).

Conclusions

In the introduction to the 2013-2014 exhibition at MoMA dedicated to Ileana Sonnabend, curator Ann Temkin analyzed the role of the gallerist, arguing that: «At a point when the decision makers at art institutions were primarily men, the role of the dealer offered a rare opportunity for a woman who wanted to use her creative intelligence to make a mark» (Temkin, 2013, p. 11).

Thus, this essay aimed to narrate a new story in the history of art markets and the world of art fairs, analyzing the presence of key figures of women gallerists in the 1970s in relation to *Art Basel*.

The first part of the text attempted to outline a historical framework both in terms of the fundamental publications that marked the 1970s, focusing on the study of women in art and their relationship to Feminism, as well as intended to discuss about contemporary research in the art markets on these topics that, in most cases, focused on women artists.

Instead, it is crucial to focus on other players in the contemporary art system, i.e. gallery owners. They have been key figures in the European scene and beyond, in promoting art movements, supporting artists, and organizing groundbreaking exhibitions, either in their galleries, or collaborating with institutions and within the fair itself.

On this occasion, Trudl Bruckner, Denise René and Annely Juda were the main figures considered, who not only participated in all of the fair's first ten years, but also held leadership positions.

As a result, the birth of *Art Basel* coincided with an era in which Feminism and the role of women in society were absolutely crucial.

It is hoped that this research on such significant years will serve as a starting point for shedding light on leading figures who have shaped the history of contemporary art and art market. This should be a new research area worth developing.

⁶² Translated by me. The original states as follows: «Les foires internationales font maintenant partie du paysage du marché de l'art et, sans tomber dans la facilité, à condition d'être rigoureux, il faut continuer à les développer.»

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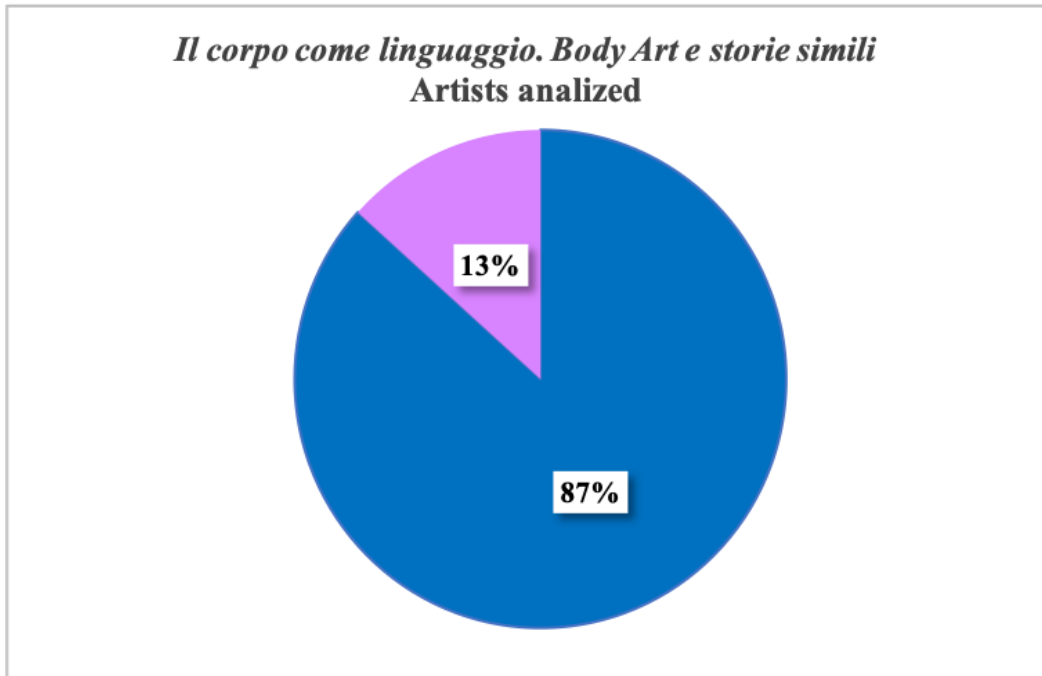
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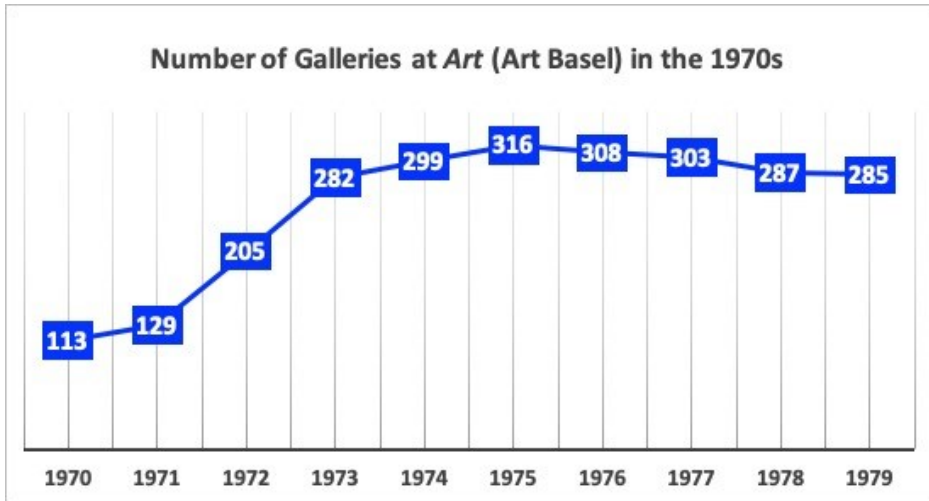
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Appendix A: Data Analysis



TAB. A – This chart shows the gender of the artists addressed in Lea Vergine's book *Il Corpo come linguaggio. (La "Body-art" e storie simili)*, considering the biographies. The 87 % (blue) is represented by the male artists (n.52) and 13% (pink) is represented by female artists (n.8).
Quantitative analysis and Graphic Design by Giada Pellicari © 2023



TAB. B - The evolution of the number of galleries at *Art, Art Basel* in the 1970s. Only the galleries have been counted for this chart.

Data collection, Analysis and Graphic Design by G. Pellicari © 2023

Appendix B – Interview with Gilli Stampa – Galerie Stampa (March, 2023)

Giada Pellicari: *What was the state of the art scene and the art market in Basel before the opening of the fair, and how did the fair alter the Swiss landscape? Were you already aware of the Basel Gallery Association, which was founded in 1968, when you opened the gallery and how was your gallery conceived at the beginning?*

Gilli Stampa: There were female gallery owners in Basel early on, e.g. Suzanne Feigel, Galerie d'Art Moderne, 1945-1993. She also took part in the first *Art Basel*. However, the art scene in Basel was already very active in the 1960s and 1970s, especially around the Kunsthalle Basel under Arnold Rüdlinger, Peter F. Althaus, Jean-Christophe Ammann, Galerie Handschin, Galerie Hilt, Galerie Riehentor Trudel Bruckner, Galerie Beyeler and of course the Kunstmuseum Basel under Franz Meyer. At that time there was no gallery association. In 1969 we opened with the idea of creating a cultural place. We didn't just want to be a traditional gallery, our slogan was «STAMPA INFORMS». We made exhibitions, readings, performances, video, architecture and integrated a bookshop with a focus on art, architecture, photography, design, music and artist's books. We participated in cultural urban projects and had exchanges with avant-garde galleries in Europe and the USA. From the very beginning, we have exhibited both artists. The eras of the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by the upheaval in the entire art scene and cannot be compared with today's global art world/art market.

G.P: *In your opinion, why has the importance of the figure of Trudl Bruckner always been relegated to the background when compared to Ernst Beyeler, even though she was the true inventor of the fair? How did she get you involved in Art Basel? How do gallerists and collectors view her?*

G.S: The first art fair was in Cologne, as that was one of the liveliest art scenes at the time. The idea of launching something like this in Basel came from a small group of gallery owners, to which Trudl Bruckner also belonged, and committed personalities from the cultural sector. She was the only woman on that committee at the time. Ernst Beyeler was also

one of them, but he was not the initiator. Because of his top-class international gallery, he was simply very well known. With her gallery program, Trudl Bruckner was primarily committed to Swiss art.

However, she was very well known and appreciated in Basel society and in art circles. Trudl Bruckner was very committed to our participation in the first *Art Basel* because she thought it was great to have a young gallery from Basel with us.

G.P: Could you please describe the first edition in 1970? Looking at the map, it seems that you were outside, how was your booth organized, and how did the other booths look?

G.S: At the first Art Basel, we were only placed in the adjacent sculpture park, since the booths inside were already taken after our admission. But we still got a lot of attention and were even able to sell works. The stands of the other galleries still had a very classic layout. Painting, sculpture and graphics, but for the most part at a high level.

G.P: Many female gallerists have participated in the fair since the beginning. First of all, Trudl Bruckner, and other names such as Annely Juda, Denise René, Verena Muller (since the first edition). Following that, during the 1970s other important gallerists like Ileana Sonnabend, and the Italians Lia Rumma or Marilena Bonomo.

Many female gallerists were also on the Exhibitors' advisory board, and others such as Annely Juda for the British Exhibition of 1975 and Denise René for the French Exhibition in 1978 played major roles. Would it be possible for you to share some memories about these figures, their participation in Art Basel and their booths?

G.S: Unfortunately, we don't have that many memories of the gallerists from that time. Ileana Sonnabend and Denise Renée were instances. Diego and I were the youngest participants and worked alongside the gallery to finance it. We enjoyed the internationality of the galleries and visitors. We were interested in contemporary art, that was our focus.

G.P: In the first edition of the fair, you have shown artists like Franco Marsili, Christian Rotacher and Albert Siegenthaler, but afterwards you opened up your gallery programme and the artists roster to such empowering and strong women like Valie Export, Ulrike Rosenbach and later Miriam Cahn,

Marlene Dumas, Rosemarie Trockel, Pipilotti Rist who dealt with topics like feminism and sexuality. Could you perhaps explain your decisions and how you feel about them? How have their pricing changed over time?

G.S: We were in close contact with the artists you mentioned. We were one of the first galleries at *Art Basel* who actively presented video artworks plus installations and hosted performances. I was myself actively involved in the women's movement together with Miriam Cahn and other artists. Pipilotti Rist later became one of them. Some of the artists who had their first exhibitions in our gallery are world famous today. The gallery system has changed drastically since then. Financially strong large galleries emerged, which immediately poached away the best of the best. The solidarity of the artists with their first galleries has more or less come to an end.

Despite this, we still have a friendly relationship with most of them. The issue of pricing is complex and a chapter in itself. In the beginning, Marlene Dumas' paintings cost a few thousand francs, depending on their size. Today, they're worth over a million at auction. In conclusion, one can say that *ART Basel* was the prelude to the emergence of art fairs worldwide. However, these increase the focus on the trade in established, high-priced works of art. It is becoming increasingly difficult for young artists to find a gallery that supports artistic development.

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This essay is dedicated to M., who prefers Joan Mirò to Old Masters.

May she grow like a strong, compassionate, independent woman, with great taste.