

ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH 2014

Absurd and Elegant: Counting Grains of Rice with Marina Abramovic at Design Miami

By Paul Laster | 12/04/14 10:42am



38 Beams, Design Miami Collectors Lounge by Olson Kundig Architects. (Courtesy World Red Eye)

“Technology is great but it’s also a dangerous thing,” the mystical Marina Abramovic told a group of fawning fans at the opening of the Design Miami fair. “We have to learn how we can gain free time back for ourselves. The only way to emerge is with some long durational activities, such as Counting the Rice.”

How does this concept (or Marina, there to draw the crowd) fit into a design fair? Simple, it does because you’re performing the task at an elegant table and chair combination designed by starchitect Daniel Libeskind. “You might think it’s crazy to sit at a fair and count rice, but this is exactly what you have to do to reclaim time,” added Abramovic. “If you can’t count the rice for three hours, you can’t do anything good in life.”

While a young acolyte sat patiently separating rice from lentils, mega art and design collectors Peter Brant, Aby Rosen and Alberto Mugarbani ran

quickly through the aisles, stopping briefly to visit the booths of Galerie Patrick Seguin, Jousse Enterprise and Laffanour-Galerie Downtown—three Parisian design dealers that are founding members of the fair, which is celebrating a 10th-anniversary this year.

The look was lavish, if sustainable. The fair this year went an extra mile on the construction of the Collectors (i.e., VIP) Lounge, titled “38 Beams.” Designed by Olson Kundig Architects, it utilizes reclaimed timber from the Pacific Northwest that was stacked to create a lively space with open viewpoints. Meanwhile, Swarovski—Design Miami’s main sponsor—tapped another architect, Jeanne Gang, to collaborate with filmmaker and photographer James Balog. Their installation *Thinning Ice*, which consists of imagery of ice masses and a glacier-like table with “frozen” crystals, draws attention to the melting polar ice cap, which is hardly the kind of conversation one expects to find in tropical Miami!

The 10th edition offers 35 design galleries joined by Cabinet of Curiosities projects, which are sponsors’ booths that present experimental concepts and collaborations, plus a pavilion by young designer Jonathan Muecke outside the entrance to the tent and a booth dedicated to objects designed by and collected by Peter Marino, recipient of the fair’s first Design Visionary award.

The trends: there was more ceramics, more jewelry, more American designers. The highlights: Jousse Enterprise displayed a prized, Maria Pergay stainless steel and Plexiglass conference table from 1972; R & Company presented new rugs woven with schematic and natural motifs in Nepal by designers David Wiseman and the Haas Brothers; Carpenters Workshop Gallery exhibited functional bronze sculptures referencing architecture by Studio Job; and Koenig & Clinton and Joe Sheftel Gallery offered an assortment of furniture and lighting by Ettore Sottsass alongside works by the Memphis Group.