

PIN-UP

The Exhibitions and Biennials to
See in 2026
ArtReview
Saodat Ismailova
January 2026

BASEL INSTINCTS

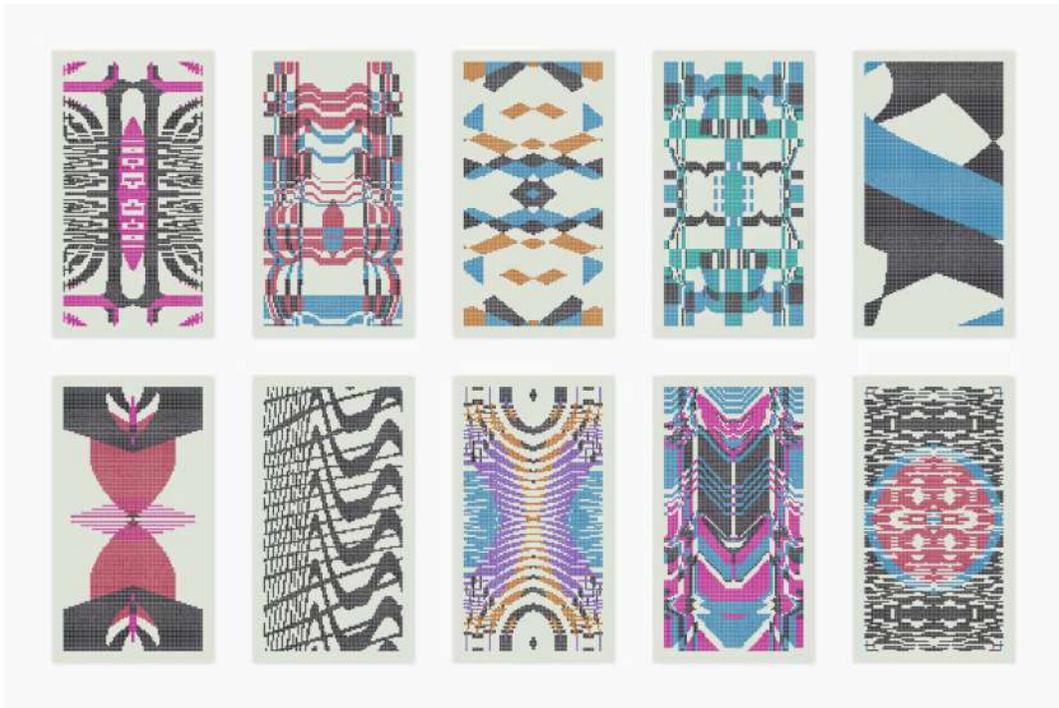
Art Basel's First Awards Night Reframes the Fair's — and the Art
World's — Reinvention
by Felix Burrichter



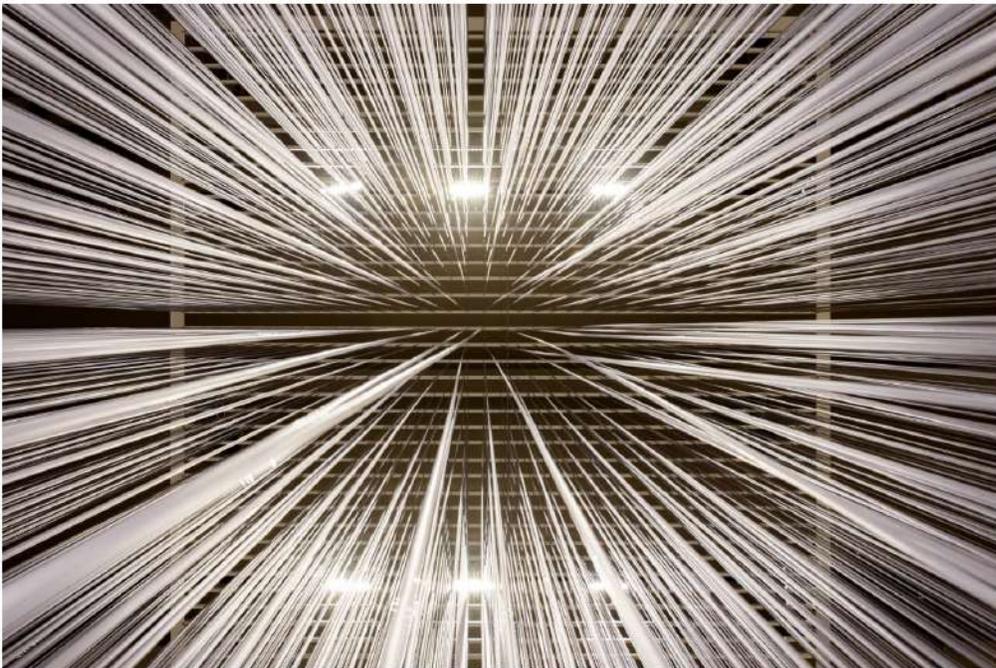
The inaugural Art Basel Awards at the New World Center in Miami Beach. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards. From left to right: Noah Horowitz, Ibrahim Mahama, Mohammad Al Faraj, Alessio Antonioli, Robert Leckie, Vincenzo De Bellis, Candice Hopkins, Cecilia Vicuna, Nairy Baghramian, Joel Wachs, Marie Helene-Pereira, Andrea Trimarchi, Simone Farresin, Meriem Bennani, Saodat Ismailova, and Marco Falcioni.

Art Basel, which returned to Miami Beach this December for its 23rd edition, remains the art world's most glamorous annual gathering. But with U.S. art sales falling by almost ten percent in 2024, the fair is increasingly tasked with demonstrating its ongoing relevance in a shifting landscape. This year, Art Basel's leadership made that effort unmistakable, responding to a collector base that is younger and more diverse. "It's about remapping the canon," says Vincenzo de Bellis, Art Basel's Chief Artistic Officer and Global Director of Fairs.

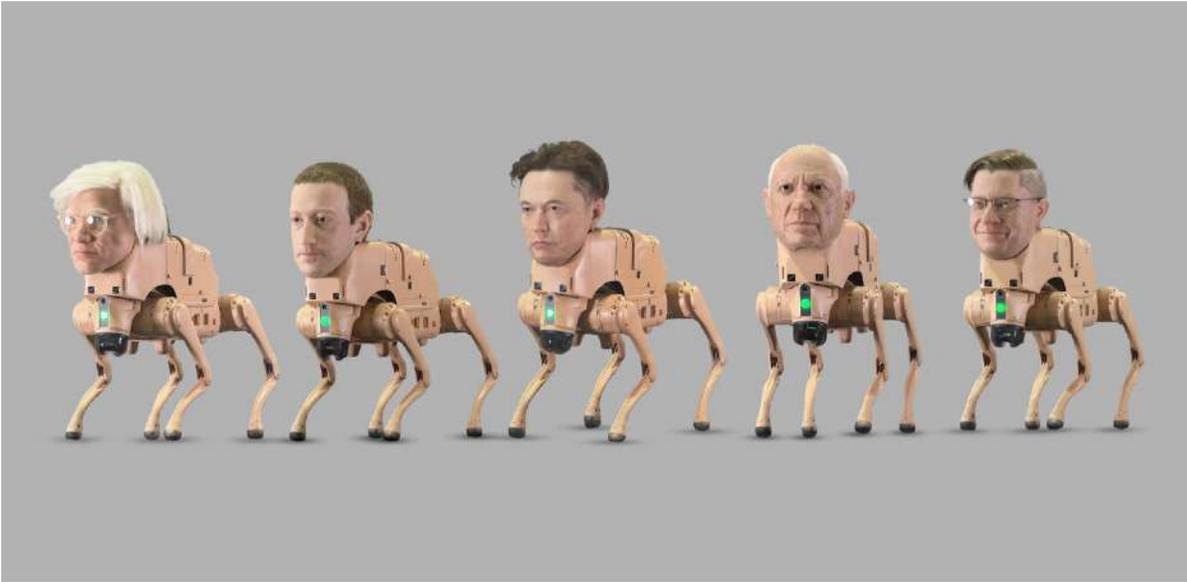
Inside the 130,000-square-meter Miami Beach Convention Center, the fair felt as full as ever. Presenting roughly the same number of exhibitors as last year, Art Basel Miami Beach boasted a structural expansion: a new section dedicated to digital and time-based media — known as Zero 10 — signaled an investment in the formats that have grown rapidly in cultural visibility, even as the market tests their long-term durability. "A bridge between the digital sphere and the art market," as Art Basel Miami Beach Director Bridget Finn remarked. While media darling Beeple hogged the social-media spotlight with his tech-oligarch dog show — four-legged animatronic robots with hyper-realistic silicone masks of Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and, confusingly, Warhol and Picasso — there were more interesting proposals by Kim Asendorf, Michael Kozlowski, and Larva Labs. This digital shift coincided with a more globally diffuse exhibitor list, with new galleries from Brazil and across Latin America underscoring Art Basel's framing of Miami Beach as a crossroads between North America, South America, and the Caribbean.



Larva Labs, *Quine*. Courtesy of Larva Labs.



Jésus Rafael Soto, *Pénétrable*, 1992. Courtesy of Galería RGR.



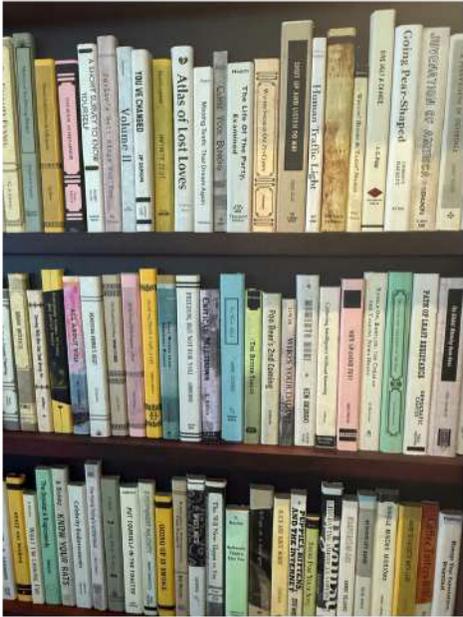
Beeple, *REGULAR ANIMALS*, 2025. Courtesy of Beeple Studios.

The fair's curatorial sections felt similarly attuned to a broader, more porous art world. In *Meridians* (now curated by former *Städel* rector *Yasmil Raymond*), large-scale installations offered some of the fair's most memorable moments with works attuned to more institutional audiences. Standouts were *Dozie Kanu's On Elbows* (*Anonymous Gallery*), a large kinetic work by *Jesús Rafael Soto* (*Galería RGR*), a destabilizing video installation by *Silvia Rivas* (*Rolf Art*), and an installation by *Stephanie Syjuco* described as "a stage set or modern-day vanitas" (*Catharine Clark Gallery*).

But even beyond Meridians there was a willingness among galleries large and small to show work that went beyond the oft-bemoaned “safe” painting ware — from the people-pleasing [Koons](#) (who popped up at both [Zwimer](#) and [Gagosian](#)) to more challenging pieces like *Isacholo* by [Zizipho Poswa](#), a nearly three-meter-tall bronze sculpture at [Southern Guild](#) (Cape Town). Another sign of the increasingly porous boundary between design and contemporary art was the presence of Miami dealer [Nina Johnson](#), who made her *début* in the main fair this year with a program that fluidly moved between disciplines, and [Candice Madey Gallery](#), which showed textile artist [Liz Collins](#). Other highlights included [Akeem Smith](#)’s collaboration with [Heidi Gallery](#) and [Pavilion](#), a [Dan Graham](#) structure at [Marian Goodman](#) that once stood in the gardens of the [De Pont Museum](#) in the Netherlands.



Dozie Kanu, *On Elbows*, 2022. Concrete, steel, glass, and black liquid (5 gal of: glycerin, purified water); 39.5 x 29 x 127 in. Images courtesy of the artist and anonymous gallery. Photography by installshots.art.



Detail of *The Last Library IV: Written in Water* (2025), an installation by Ward Shelley and collaborators. Paper, ink, and wood. Courtesy Freight+Volume, New York



Zizipho Poswa Isacholo (2024); Bronze, glazed earthenware. Image courtesy of Elizabeth Carababas/Southern Guild



Liz Collins, *This Year*, 2025; Linen, polyester, and silk. Courtesy Candice Madey Gallery, New York.



Akeem Smith, *John Crow 1*, 2025; Salvaged building material and digital print mounted on dibond. Courtesy of the artist and Heidi, Berlin. Photography: GRAYSC.

Still, the gravitational center of the week was the hotly anticipated premiere of the [Art Basel Awards](#), held Thursday, December 4. It was staged at the [New World Center](#), designed by [Frank Gehry](#) who, in a dramatic piece of cosmic stage direction, died the following day. While awards in the art world are not new, the structure of this one is decidedly different: nominees are selected by an international jury, and all honorees — across categories spanning artists, curators, institutions, “storytellers,” and patrons — receive financial recognition. Gold honorees receive \$300,000 total, and the Icon Artist receives a \$50,000 donation directed to a cause of their choice. With substantial support from [BOSS](#), the program aims to distribute resources more equitably across the cultural ecosystem and, in the words of the organization, “shape the future of art,” not merely celebrate it.

Basel’s attempt at an Oscar-level cultural coronation came complete with a black carpet, roaming camera crews, and a dress code that leaned heavily on BOSS. The production was unapologetically glossy — and the live interviews (including by yours truly) left some art-world veterans positively puzzled, if not slightly annoyed, by the level of showmanship. Kasseem Dean, aka [Swizz Beatz](#), an avid art collector himself, hosted the ceremony with the confidence of someone who knows exactly how to command a room worth several billion dollars. The ceremony itself was not without the occasional glitch — a missed cue here, an obstructed teleprompter there — sometimes lending the inaugural affair the charming chaos of a wedding rehearsal.



Icon Artist of the inaugural Art Basel Awards, Cecilia Vicuña. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards.



Kasseem Dean, aka Swizz Beatz, hosting the 2025 Art Basel Awards. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards. Photo by Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for Art Basel



Art Basel Awards designed by Herzog and de Meuron. Photography by Jessica Dreier. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards.



Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi of Formafantasma. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards. Photo by Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for Art Basel



Kelsey Lu performing onstage at the 2025 Art Basel Awards. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards.



The Gold awardees, from left to right: Meriem Bennani, Ibrahim Mahama, Candice Hopkins, Andrea Trimarchi, Cecilia Vicuña, Joel Wachs, presenter Swizz Beats, Simone Farresin, Mohammad Al Faraj, Alessio Antonioli, Saodat Ismailova, Nairy Baghramian, Marie Helene-Pereira, and Robert Leckie.

None of this seemed to faze the 12 Gold Medalists. [Joel Wachs](#) of the [Warhol Foundation](#) was honored as patron of the arts; [Formafantasma](#) took Cross-Disciplinary; Emerging went to [Mohammad Alfaraj](#) and [Saodat Ismailova](#) (whose [Swiss Institute show](#) opens January 2026); [Nairy Baghramian](#) and [Ibrahim Mahama](#) were named Established; [Candice Hopkins](#) won for Curatorship; and [Negar Azimi](#) for Media & Storytelling, among others. The BOSS Award for Outstanding Achievement went to [Meriem Bennani](#), who fastened a green, red, black, and white flag pin to her German blazer and pledged part of her award money to [Bilna'es](#), a platform that supports artists without institutional backing, with a special focus on Palestine.

The most striking moment came from Icon Artist honoree [Cecilia Vicuña](#). Her breathy, incantatory acceptance speech — delivered while clutching her [Herzog & de Meuron](#)-designed award — called on the future of art to remain rooted in ancient wisdom: a total respect for the earth, humanness, and kindness. “Thank you I say on behalf of the ancient suppressed world I come from,” she said, “which is now being smashed to pieces by the investment of the powers of the north demolishing the global south: the forest, the breath, the oxygen.” It was a stark reminder that the art world should be built on something other more than capital accumulation. After a closing performance by [Kelsey Lu](#), Swizz Beatz delivered an unexpected parting shot: an appeal for collectors to support artists’ participation in resale royalties. The statement drew audible murmurs in the audience — a fitting end to an evening that attempted, sometimes boldly, to redraw the boundaries of who the art world is for, and who it is willing to listen to next.



Saodat Ismailova, recipient of the Emerging Artist Award. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards. Photo by Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for Art Basel



Meriem Bennani, recipient of the BOSS Award for Outstanding Achievement. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards. Photo by Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for Art Basel



Nairy Baghramian, recipient of the Established Artist Award. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards. Photo by Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for Art Basel



Mohammad Al Faraj, recipient of the Emerging Artist Award. Courtesy of the Art Basel Awards. Photo by Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for Art Basel.