

Sculpture Rocks The Art World

"An Experimental Age"

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You'll see it when you walk the aisles of the sprawling Armory Show on Piers 92 and 94 and visit the booths at the upscale Art Dealers Association of America Art Show at the Park Avenue Armory. You couldn't miss it at last December's Art Basel Miami Beach. And you will undoubtedly notice it, by artists like Oscar Tuazon, Kate Levant, and Matt Hoyt, when you visit the Whitney Biennial this spring.



It is contemporary sculpture—and it is hot. It's the most exciting area of the art world right now for collectors and viewers alike, and there's a simple reason for that. "Some of the strongest work being made today is sculpture," says Mary Hoeveler, an independent art advisor who was once managing director of Citigroup's Art Advisory Service.

Joseph Seipel, a sculptor who is dean of the highly ranked School of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), says, "It's a really experimental age for sculpture," partly because of

digital imaging, the addition of sound, and other innovations that offer new opportunities to be creative in three dimensions.

Museums both reflect and add to this sculpture surge. At the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, no sooner did the highly popular Maurizio Cattelan exhibition of 128 sculptures, suspended from the museum's apex, come down on January 22, than curators began loading nearly 100 of the late John Chamberlain's sculptures into the famous rotunda on Fifth Avenue. Just before the death of Cy Twombly (known mostly for his enormous paintings) last July, the Museum of Modern Art put seven of his sculptures on view. Ellsworth Kelly, aged 88, just had his first-ever sculpture-only exhibition, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, even though he has been making wood sculptures since the 1950s. And one of the signature images at the new Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas is turning out to be *Yield*, a silvery, tree-like "dendroid" sculpture created by Roxy Paine, whose work has been in demand since the Metropolitan Museum of Art installed his sprawling, stainless steel *Maelstrom* in 2009 as its annual crowd-pleasing rooftop exhibition.

"Almost every collector I know buys sculpture," says philanthropist Becca Cason Thrash, a regular fixture on the New York social scene, who owns pieces by Louise Nevelson, Bernar Venet, and Tony Cragg, among others. Soho-based art advisor Thea Westreich points out, "Sculpture is more in demand today, because the disciplines of art—painting, film, drawing, media—are all blending, and it's impossible to consider a serious collection of art without sculpture." She gives the example of Cheyney Thompson. "Everyone says, 'Get me a painting, get me a painting,' but you have to have the sculpture along with paintings in a serious collection because they are related."

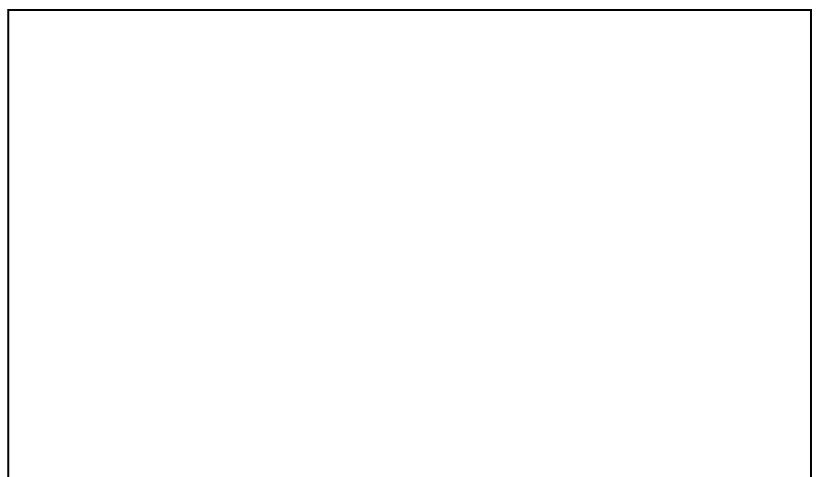
New York dealer and gallerist Joe Sheftel is also seeing a strong interest in sculpture, personally and professionally. "We live in a three-dimensional world, and a lot of ideas can't be contained in 2-D anymore," he says. "I love seeing an idea executed in different materials." Among his treasures are several pieces by Paul Lee, a British artist who makes works from found and everyday objects.

"The collectors I know are more willing to embrace sculpture, and to be more diverse in what they buy," says Hope Alswang, director of the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach. "They are buying quite demanding sculpture, in subject and in size, not just the traditionally pretty pieces." And sometimes they are buying a lot, as Clara Ha, a director of Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York, notes, because "many collectors are increasingly interested in building sculpture parks."

While it has been a generation or two since sculpture was the graceful, tame sector (think Maillol, Hepworth, Moore) of an art world where painting predominated, and even longer since marble, ivory, and bronze sat at the top of the hierarchy of sculptural mediums, it is only in recent decades that sculpture has embraced so many other materials with such abandon. Plastic, wax, light, paper, barbed wire, detritus, feathers, and environmental objects are common components, and the line between sculpture and installation art has also blurred.

With some exceptions—Paine, for one, who is in his 40s—few young artists self-identify as sculptors. Even many middleaged artists no longer do. Kiki Smith started her career as a sculptor in the late 1970s, but soon branched out to prints, drawings, jewelry, and installations. Nowadays, says Seipel, "They're just artists, and if they have a three-dimensional idea, it's a 3-D piece; if it's virtual, they do that; and if the idea works best with paint on a canvas, they do that." It's an expansion that began in the '80s, he adds.

Some 30 years on, there isn't really a separate market for sculpture; an in-demand artist is simply in demand. "People are looking to buy important works," says dealer James Cohan, who operates galleries in New York and Shanghai, where he frequently shows three-dimensional works. In this market, says Justine Durrett, director of sales at David Zwirner Gallery in New York,



"People have gravitated toward the established names, and those prices are close to where they were even at pre-recession levels."

Here's one example: the price of a polychrome aluminum Love sculpture by Robert Indiana. In May 2009, Christie's sold a 36-inch piece, from an edition of four plus four artist's proofs, for \$422,500, including the buyer's premium. Last November, an 18-inch version, from an edition of eight plus four artist's proofs, fetched the same amount, well above the presale estimate of \$180,000 to \$220,000.



Diana al-Hadid in her studio, Courtesy of Gotham

About two years ago, Alberto Giacometti's sculpture *Walking Man I*, set the record for any work of art sold at auction—\$104.3 million—although Picasso's *Nude, Green Leaves and Bust* eclipsed that record, just barely, in May 2010, fetching \$106.5 million. The highest price for any art sold in 2011 was probably the \$120 million reportedly paid by an unknown collector for Matisse's suite of four bronze sculptures of a woman's back.

The solid appeal of sculpture, along with the interests of the artists presented by the gallery, led David Zwirner to stack its booth with a lot of sculpture, plus some photographs, paintings, and drawings, at Art Basel Miami Beach last December. Among the offerings were five sculptures by Carol Bove, who creates intricate assemblages of found and made objects including books, driftwood, and peacock feathers. All sold quickly, at prices ranging from \$60,000 to \$150,000, Durrett says. The booth's centerpiece, *La Traversée Difficile*, was purchased by La Colección Jumex, a prestigious private Mexican collection. Yet it wasn't long ago, Hoeveler says, that a work by Bove commanded merely \$12,000 to \$15,000.

Cohan, whose gallery represents Paine, says prices for his works have "probably doubled" over the last six years, "but it's not about the medium." Rather, he says, "like the entire market, the artists embraced by museums and the wider public—their values have gone up." In addition to the Met and Crystal Bridges, last year the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City gave Paine an indoor-outdoor exhibition.

Sculptural pieces may cost more than works in other mediums solely because they cost more to make. For large-scale sculpture, "Production costs can be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars" Cohan says. Otherwise, prices for what he calls "indoor sculpture" (smaller pieces suitable for home, office, or interiors), where material costs are not as high, tend to go up in tandem with prices for other kinds of works by the same artist, though prices vary according to size. Cohan cites Yinka Shonibare as an example—one of his sculptures would be priced at \$100,000 to \$200,000, while a

photowork would go for \$40,000 to \$60,000. Both have risen with the renown of Shonibare, who was given a major international traveling exhibition, shown at the Brooklyn Museum in 2009, and was commissioned to fill the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square in 2010.

Other in-demand artists with three-dimensional works include El Anatsui, who in 2011 had an exhibition at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; Teresita Fernández, whose work has been shown by the Museum of Modern Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Rachel Harrison, also shown at San Fran's MOMA and at The Saatchi Gallery; and Sarah Sze, who employs plastic eating utensils, notepads, scissors, ladders, and other everyday objects to make fantastical installations. Her work is on view at the Asia Society on Park Avenue until March 25.

As for younger artists, Seipel says Diana Al-Hadid, who graduated from VCU's MFA program in 2005, is getting attention, including a recent solo show at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. Her works, made with steel, wood, fiberglass, polymer gypsum, and paint, often resemble baroque cathedral spires, classical columns, and other architectural forms. They sell at Marianne Boesky Gallery, for \$12,000 to \$40,000 for small sculptures and works on paper, and \$75,000 to \$150,000 for large sculptures. "She'll be a star," predicts Seipel.

Will Ryman, in the space of a year, has become just that. He burst onto the scene in January 2011, when his gigantic pink and red roses, some 25 feet tall, were placed on the Park Avenue Mall on Manhattan's Upper East Side. "The attention from American, Japanese, and European collectors was tremendous," says Ha of the Kasmin Gallery. During Art Basel Miami Beach, the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in nearby Coral Gables showed roses by Ryman, and Kasmin exhibited a six-foot-tall red rose in its booth. Of the edition of eight, three sold, for \$85,000 each, and Kasmin is asking \$95,000 for each of the remaining ones.

In February, Kasmin gave Ryman shows in both of his Chelsea galleries; they run through March 24. One space will be filled with a 12-foot-high, 16-foot-wide *Bird* that Ryman fashioned from 1,500 nails, some as long as six feet. The work, loosely inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven*, weighs two tons and at press time had not yet been priced.

As sculpture sells, the enthusiasm to make it spreads. Jay Sanders, a cocurator of the 2012 Whitney Biennial, says that on his travels to see new art he noticed that paintings are being manipulated beyond the flat surface, including adding elements or deconstructing the canvas; an example is work by Richard Aldrich, who was included in the 2010 Biennial. Another telling sign: At Zwirner this winter, Neo Rauch, hailed as the founder of the New Leipzig School of painting, showed his first sculpture in the US (and only his second ever), depicting a wandering figure, in bronze, with a bird on its shoulder. "This is a new medium for him," says Durrett.

He's just in time.