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## From \$125,000 Robo-Snails to David Lynch's Nightmare, Here Are 6 of the Best Artworks at Art Basel Miami Beach 2019

Artnet News editor-in-chief Andrew Goldstein roamed the fair's miles of aisles to single out some of the most gripping art on view.

**Andrew Goldstein**, December 5, 2019



Guests attend the Art Basel Miami Beach VIP Preview 2019 at Miami Beach Convention Center on December 04, 2019 in Miami Beach, Florida. Photo by Cindy Ord/Getty Images.

Art fairs can be so fun. Sure, they're exhausting, and after a few hours of looking, walking, and talking you can feel your brain start to liquefy and your body turn to dust as if you just drank from the wrong chalice in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. But where else can you imagine finding so much beauty, wonderment, food for thought, and oddness from all over the world around every corner?

This bounty may not last forever. The world is beset by all kinds of ills, from politics to the economy to the environment, and there's a certain likelihood that we may one day look back on art fairs as the astonishing emblem of a bygone era. Might as well

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enjoy it—so here are some of the best works on view at Art Basel Miami Beach this year.

The Swiss artist Urs Fischer has become a juggernaut in the art world by marrying his madcap flights of fancy—making life-size candles of his friends, jackhammering a hole in the gallery floor, building a house out of bread—with flawless, NASA-worthy execution. The results are often a kind of delight that can cut across a wide spectrum of audiences, and such is the case with his quietly show-stopping piece at the Modern Institute’s booth: a pair of animatronic snails that circle around on the floor, leaving slimy little trails in their wake.

Miniature marvels, the snails run through clock-like mechanisms that operate their tiny wheels and wiggle their antennae, while their slime—a solution of arabic gum, ethanol, and water that a watchful gallery attendant said “you could drink if you wanted”—is oozed out from a reservoir in their shells. Originally debuted at the Glasgow International in 2018, where they commanded an entire gallery of their own, the mollusks at the fair represent the latest development in Fischer’s snail technology, meaning that now they can crawl across such obstacles as cracks in the floor. Now, just imagine the day when you’ll come across a pair of animatronic humans walking in circles around a gallery booth.

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**Maia Cruz Palileo**  
***Wild Flowers, 2019***  
**Monique Meloche Gallery - Chicago**  
**Price: \$25,000**

A 40-year-old Chicago native of Filipino descent, Maia Cruz Palileo paints dreamlike narratives of her family's history. Her process is far more complex than a viewer might expect: Beginning with source images she gathered from the enormous photographic archive of life in the Philippines at Chicago's Newberry Library, she traces images

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from the photos and then cuts them out, bringing together the components in different figurations; she then makes a rubbing of the composition, which becomes the basis for the final painting, which also brings in people and storylines from her ancestors.

Part of the idea behind all this transfiguration is Palileo's wish to wrest agency from the archive's photos, which were mostly taken by Spanish colonials. The process, in other words, acts as a kind of exorcism, allowing her to depict her family heritage—including a picture of her grandmother, shown in this painting's bottom right, or her father, shown in another painting serenading her mother through an open window—in a liberated pectoral context.

Now based in Brooklyn, Palileo's first show at the star-making Monique Meloche Gallery was in March. She now has a show coming up at the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco coming up.

**David Lynch**  
***Tree at Night, 2019***  
**Sperone Westwater - New York**  
**Price: \$145,000**



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There's little debate about the mastery of David Lynch's filmmaking, which earned him an honorary Oscar earlier this fall—occasioning an epicly short speech that ended with him telling his new award “you have a very nice face.” His long painting career, which in fact predates his cinematic work (and gave rise to it, when he wanted to try his hand making a painting that moves), is far less well known. This is a shame, because his paintings are magical portals into his darkly enchanting imagination. Looking at a Lynch painting is a strange, infectious process, where a scene he has rendered on canvas can plant a whole cinematic world in the viewer's mind.

Consider this painting here, which marks a career high in terms of visibility by being prominently displayed at Art Basel Miami Beach: on a gloomy night, a small naked female figure emerges from a growth on a tree in what resembles a puff of spores; her hand raised in front of her, she is heading to an unknown destination outside the canvas. Is she good or, as is more likely, evil? Is she heading into the open mouth of a sleeping child, like the moth-frog in the unforgettable eighth episode of “Twin Peaks: The Return”? It's this kind of macabre possibility and embrace of the uncanny that electrifies his greatest films. And it's all there right on a single canvas.

**Charles White**  
***Lo, I Am Black*, 1978**  
**Jack Shainman - New York**  
**Price: around \$1.5 million**



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The all-conquering virtuoso painter Kerry James Marshall has built his important career on the work of creating empowered, real, and honest depictions of African American life in art, so it's fitting that his several new works on view at Jack Shainman are displayed in the same booth as a major piece by his teacher, Charles White—an artist who was similarly devoted to creating “images of dignity” of African American men and women

Their approaches, however, are distinct. Whereas Marshall places his figures in settings that weave a narrative, White sets them on their own, rendering them in emphatic charcoal on paper in a way that is sculpted, monumental, and so powerful as to seem physically heavy. If they weren't so alive, you'd think they were statues.

This portrait, of a regal man comfortably at ease with his authority (and, as the tittle suggests, his blackness), was not featured in White's major MoMA retrospective from a year ago—his first in three decades—but it is as accomplished as many works in that show, and basically screams “art history.” Bought from ACA Gallery years ago by a collector who had a long relationship with White, its appearance on the market is one of the high points of this year's fair.

Amid all the frenzy and flash of Art Basel, where your attention is continually tugged this way and that by new visual wonders, there's a refreshing change of pace to be found at Bergamin & Gomide's booth, where a long, narrow room is given over to paintings by the Brazilian painter Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato as part of the fair's Kabinett section. A self-taught artist who was born in 1900 and worked for many years as a wall painter in his hometown of Belo Horizonte, Lorenzato only began making his own artworks in his late 40s, laying them down in ravishing yet muted colors that suggest a tropical Bellini and creating a signature stucco-like texture in his paint's surface with a comb, or sometimes a fork.

During his long life, his paintings—which partly drew from his experience remodeling churches—gradually became embraced by cosmopolitan collectors around Brazil, who relished seeing him as their discovery. Since his death in 1995, Lorenzato's paintings have risen significantly in value, meaning that, while his work might be a highlight for new discoverers at the fair, they are sadly no longer so easy to snap up and carry home.

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The businessman Do Won Chang named his now-crumbling retail empire Forever 21 because he believed that was “the most enviable age,” and this is a notion that the painter Dana Schutz has grabbed with both hands and run with in her spooky new painting at the fair. It’s not so easy to unpack, however. The painting features a radiantly healthy young woman sitting naked on her bed staring at a computer screen rendered as a floating blue halo; behind her sits an elderly woman who seems anxiously transfixed by what appears to be a glowing golden demon child. Get it?

A dealer at the booth gave some additional helpful information, saying that the artist is depicting a “woman who is jealous of her own online presence.” The three figures are avatars of the same individual, with the older figure perhaps being the authentic one. In other words, it’s a kind of modern-day parable, but mainly it’s just more proof that Schutz can make a dynamite painting out of just about anything.