

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

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Art Basel: Michael Landy's swipe at the art market is the talk of the fair



Installation view of Michael Landy's *Out of Order* exhibition at Tinguely Museum CREDIT: PHOTO BY DANIEL SPEHR/2016 MUSEUM TINGUELY, BASEL

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By Louisa Buck

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Worries about the impending EU referendum (the international art world is overwhelmingly in favour of a British Remain) and general economic wobbles have done little to dent sales at the 47th edition of Art Basel, the world's leading modern and contemporary art fair. Works have been flying off the booths of its 283 participating galleries in the two preview days before it opens its doors to the general public from today until the end of the weekend.



Paul McCarthy, 'Tomato Head (Green)', 1994, at Unlimited, Art Basel's pioneering exhibition CREDIT: FABRICE COFFINNI/GETTY

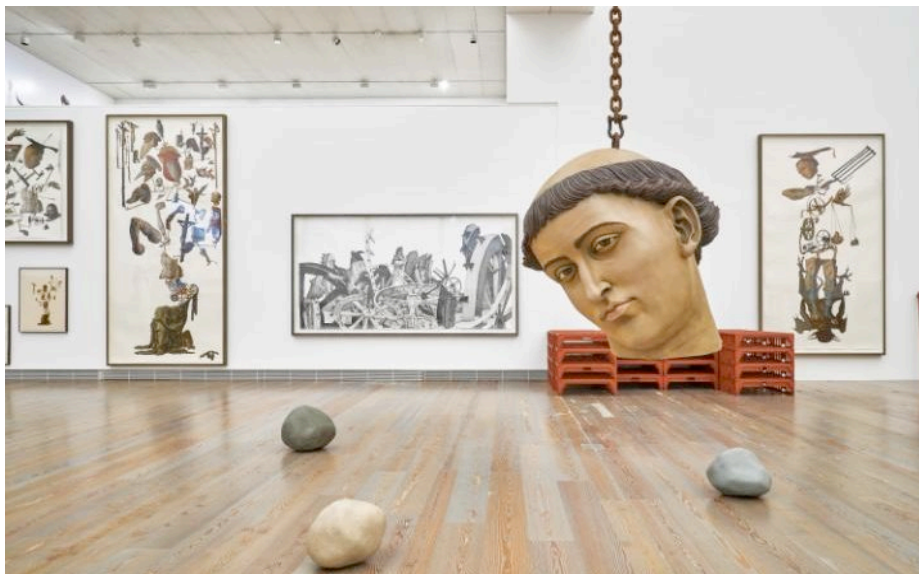
Even in the specially curated Unlimited section devoted to pieces too large and unwieldy for conventional display, business has been brisk. Here, notable sales have included veteran Los Angeleno bad boy Paul McCarthy's classic 1994 sculpture of a well-endowed tragi-comic Tomato Head figure surrounded by scattered toys and utensils, which has been snapped up by an American collector for \$4.7 million. Also sold is Danish-Norwegian duo Elmgreen & Dragset's installation, made last year, which spoofs art market mechanics by pitching the almost unbearably cacophonous recorded voices of two clashing auctioneers across rows of empty chairs and a pair of unoccupied auction house lecterns complete with gavels, for which a thick-skinned Danish buyer has stumped up €200,000.

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Installation view "Michael Landy. Out of Order" at Museum Tinguely Basel CREDIT: PHOTO DANIEL SPEHR/2016 MUSEUM TINGUELY BASEL

Artists famously like to bite the hand that feeds them and the art market seems to take an almost masochistic delight in embracing work which criticises its very existence. The talk of the fair this year is the first institutional survey show of English artist Michael Landy, which is taking place across town at Basel's Tinguely Museum. A classmate of Damien Hirst at Goldsmith's College, Landy is probably best known for pulverizing and disposing of all his material possessions – including his car, passport and all his own artworks – in a 2001 work called Breakdown, which the artist has described as “the best two weeks of my life”.



Installation view of Michael Landy's Out of Order exhibition at Tinguely Museum CREDIT: PHOTO BY DANIEL SPEHR/2016 MUSEUM TINGUELY, BASEL

One of the most popular works in Landy's Basel show is his Credit Card Destroying Machine, an elaborate contraption which is precisely that. Although when activated it noisily renders anyone's plastic into a heap of tiny fragments, the

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versatile piece also produces a mechanical 'Meta-matic' drawing (on a sheet of paper pre-signed by Landy in advance) by way of compensation. This form of exchange is proving a major draw with Art Basel fair-goers who, after all, are quite accustomed to offering up their plastic in return for art – albeit not in quite such a draconian fashion.



Installation view of Michael Landy's *Out of Order* exhibition at Tinguely Museum CREDIT: PHOTO BY DANIEL SPEHR/2016 MUSEUM TINGUELY, BASEL

However, although Landy has spent the last three decades making art that – whether overtly or obliquely – criticises consumption, he insists that he is not a political artist. “I’m interested in value, worth and labour, those are my preoccupations,” he says. “What kind of value we give to human beings, people thrown on the scrapheap, or weeds, or lowly crates – stuff that's quite mundane, that's what interests me as an artist.” All of the above can be found in his Basel show, from empty market stalls and bread crates, to meticulous etchings of common weeds, drawings of his family and memorial-like, wall-mounted lists of all his 7,247 possessions destroyed in 2001.



Michael Landy, *Breaking News*, 2015-2016 and *Saint Apollonia*, 2013 CREDIT: PHOTO BY DANIEL SPEHR/2016 MUSEUM TINGUELY, BASEL

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Another long-standing obsession is the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely. Landy first fell in love with Tinguely's anarchic and often dysfunctional kinetic sculptures at a Tate show in the early 1980s when he was still a teenager, and in 2010 he curated an exhibition of his and Tinguely's works at Tate Liverpool. Over the years Landy has made drawings, prints, films and moveable sculpture (including the Credit Card Destroyer) in homage to his hero, and considers it a "great honour" to be showing in the Tinguely Museum. (Although sometimes his homages can be double edged as, without looking at their labels, it is often tricky to distinguish the handful of real Tinguelys which Landy has incorporated into this exhibition from the sculptures that he has meticulously made in their likeness.)



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Back in the booths of Art Basel, Landy has a few other market-teasing tricks up his sleeve. On the stand of Thomas Dane Gallery one of his large and beautiful drawings is conspicuously on display, with a price tag of £24,000. But look carefully and you can spot another tiny, palm-sized work on paper, depicting one of Landy's trademark red figures incongruously pinned down almost at floor level, which is on offer for the much more modest sum of £200. Closer scrutiny reveals that the tiny fellow seems to be in a none too healthy state. Whether he is chucking up due to his own excesses or revulsion at all the commerce surrounding him is anybody's guess. Certainly Landy isn't letting on, and the art world isn't that bothered either.

Art Basel is at Messeplatz until Sunday June 19th. Michael Landy: Out of Order is at Tinguely Museum, Basel until 25 September

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/luxury/art/art-basel-michael-landys-swipe-at-the-art-market-is-the-talk-of/>