

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

At Art Basel Miami Beach, Measuring a Calder Against a Raven



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Installation view of art sculpture by Nathan Mabry and painting by Bernard Piffaretti with Cherry and Martin at Art Basel Miami Beach (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

MIAMI BEACH — Aviator Charles Lindbergh is quoted as saying “that if I had to choose, I would rather have birds than airplanes.” There’s an elegance of flight and form that the sleekest of human creations can’t match in the body of the bird, even a common pigeon or raven. A few of those avians are gathered on Los Angeles artist Nathan Mabry’s colorful sculptures, which reference the attempts at lightness in the heavy metal sculpture of Alexander Calder and are on view at the Cherry and Martin booth at Art Basel Miami Beach.

The Los Angeles-based gallery pairs Mabry’s sculptures with paintings by French artist Bernard Piffaretti for a dynamic installation that stands out amidst the frenzy of the

fair. The work also might get a few double takes as Art Basel is the kind of place you might very well see an authentic Calder up for grabs. But Mabry uses our familiarity with certain art to challenge our ideas about it, and comment on its original shapes. For example, he's previously augmented Donald Judd-like boxes with pre-Columbian heads and turned a Giacometti sculpture's body into a fountain.



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Alongside these mash-ups, Piffaretti's paintings add another layer of misdirection in terms of authorship, as what at first appear like identical, symmetrical diptychs were actually created through copying his own work. Starting with a line down the center of the canvas, he builds abstract forms on one side, and then attempts to replicate the image on the other, a methodical approach he's experimented with for over three decades.

Calder sculptures are ubiquitous as art park features (and in architectural renderings), so it's easy to overlook the fact that those sweeping, wing-like sculptures are actually hulks of metal that are more likely to crush than soar. The late sculptor of course never intended them to be aircrafts, yet through his mobiles there's also this fascination with instilling a lightness in industrial materials. When Mabry crowns his bright blue, Calder-esque "The Nostalgia of

the Infinite (Le Papillon)” behemoth with two ravens, and the sun-yellow “Composition (Loop/Pool/Polo)” with a pigeon, there’s a contrast with the natural that considers the limits of human creation.