

## Press Reviews

Rachel Spence, 'Art Basel 2019 - the Feature section is a must see', The Financial Times, June 2019

FT Series **Art in Europe**

**Collecting**

### Art Basel 2019 – the Feature section is a must-see

The best booths are dedicated to artists with strong formal concerns



In the swirling commercial vortex of the Art Basel fair, quiet spaces of contemplation are rare and welcome. This year, they are to be found at Feature.

With 24 booths in total, the Feature section showcases curated displays which are often devoted to a single artist. Those under the spotlight range from historical figures whose reputations have faded to those who are emerging on to the international stage.

The outstanding booths are dedicated to artists with strong formal concerns. Such practitioners blossom in spare environments, where unlike in the mainstream fair booths, there is no danger of eclipse by a carnival of different expressions.

Notably illuminating was the stand devoted to German conceptual sculptor Bernd Lohaus, which was a joint effort by Berlin gallery Daniel Marzana and his Antwerp counterpart Tommy Simoens.

Born in Düsseldorf in 1940 and based in Antwerp from 1966 until his death in 2010, Lohaus' gritty, makeshift minimalism — a row of rough, mismatched wooden beams propped against the wall scrawled with a line of poetry in chalk, works on paper assembled from gaffer tape slapped down at skewed angles and echoed by hand-drawn lines — shines out with laconic integrity in their refusal to kowtow to geometry even as they were born from it.

More overtly joyous is the formal confidence of small-scale collages — known as “paper-cuts” — by Bengal modernist Benodebehari Mukherjee at Vadehra Gallery. With an average price of \$25,000 each, these images whisk the viewer into Mukherjee's dreamy, private circus of line, colour and rhythm. No surprise then that two of them sold in the first hours of Tuesday's preview, while “museum interest” had also convinced gallery director Roshini Vadehra that it had been “absolutely right” for her to exhibit at the Swiss fair for the first time. (She has participated in Art Basel's Hong Kong iteration.)



At Feature, the licence to unveil hidden talent means that buyers can get value for money that is unthinkable in the main Galleries section. From Milan, Galleria Raffaella Cortese brings together two mid-career American abstractionists, Helen Mirra and Allyson Strafella, in a visual haiku of geometric shapes and saturated shades. Mirra's bold, tactile squares, woven from linen, wool and hemp, are priced at €14,000. And Strafella's tattered jewel-bright works on paper, made by punching through the surface with a specially adapted typewriter, range from €4,200-€5,200. Little wonder four of Strafella's pieces sold by Tuesday afternoon, plus one work by Mirra.

Sometimes secret chapters lurk within familiar oeuvres. Who knew that Dutch Cobra member **Karel Appel**, famous for his tumultuous expressionist paintings, also flirted with Pop Art and

collage in the 1960s? On the booth of Munich dealer Jahn und Jahn, Appel's marriages of found materials — cardboard scraps; newsprint magazine photographs of pretty female models — with gouache, crayon and acrylic make for cheeky hybrids that still shudder with his trademark turbulence.

Appel once said painting should be like “the roar from a lion's breast”. Throughout Art Basel's Feature section this week, you can hear the echo of that devoted passion.

To June 16, [artbasel.com/basel](https://artbasel.com/basel)

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