

## The Art Newspaper Art Basel Daily Edition, June 10, 2009

### Nice, but does it come in blue?

*Increasing numbers of artists are making commissioned works for collectors*

By Georgina Adam and Cristina Ruiz

The German advertising mogul Christian Boros has commissioned his own version of Tomas Saraceno's vast installation of black elastic ropes that fills the central hall of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Venice, at the heart of Daniel Birnbaum's "Making Worlds" exhibition at this year's Venice Biennale.

Speaking to *The Art Newspaper* in Venice last week, Boros revealed that Saraceno had been recommended to him by another artist, Olafur Eliasson. "I was so impressed with Saraceno's spider's web installation that I asked him to create a version of it for me," said Boros. The work is destined for the Boros Collection, the collector's new contemporary art space in a former air-raid shelter in Berlin open (by appointment) to the public.

While the practice of commissioning art is hardly new, dealers and collectors say it is on the increase owing to a less frenzied commercial climate and collectors' desire for a more personal engagement with individual artists.

Because of the sheer complexity of Saraceno's installations, collectors are more likely to want a personalised version, according to Ethan Sklar, the director of the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2.1/D2), which is showing two installations by the young Argentinian artist at Art Basel. Sklar says the gallery also gets numerous requests for site-specific works by other artists, including Ernesto Neto and Olafur Eliasson.

"There is a lot more of this going on now than two or five or even 20 years ago," says Scott Zieher, of ZieherSmith, New York, showing at Volta (A7). "Artists are more amenable now than they were," he says. This year he organised a commission for two Park Avenue collectors for a piece by Liz Markus in her "Failed Target" series. (Others, priced between \$1,000 and \$7,500, are on show in Zieher's booth.) "They were delighted to have engaged in this way with the artist," says Zieher.

The personal relationship is crucial. Commissions are "absolutely on the increase", says David Maupin of Lehmann Maupin, New York (2.1/F2). "People like the intimacy and the engagement with the artist," he says. Fellow director Rachel Lehmann adds: "People like having something that is special for them, that no one else has." Among the commissions the gallery has recently undertaken are two for the Benesse House Museum on Naoshima Island in Japan by Teresita Fernández and Hiroshi Sugimoto, and a Lee Bul hanging crystal figure for a Hong Kong collector.

Not everyone is so keen, however. According to New York collector Adam Lindemann: "Commissions are great for people who need site-specific works, but they don't often result in great work." One problem can be a curbing of the artist's creativity, which is accentuated when the commission is a highly personal work,

such as a portrait of the collector. "People say 'my hair is not that grey' and that can cause all sorts of problems," warns Scott Zieher.

Design Miami/Basel founder Craig Robins believes that artists, not collectors, should call the shots. "I prefer to look at a body of work and choose what I find most interesting." But he does not rule out the commissioning of a work for "a specific purpose", he says.

If a project turns sour, mutual unhappiness is almost inevitable. Mexican collector José Noe Suro, who has worked successfully with over 60 Mexican and international artists, including Jorge Pardo, Liam Gillick, James Turrell and Philippe Parreno, cautions would-be commissioners: "Some projects have been very difficult, and sometimes you have to back off, to save the relationship with the artist."