

ARTSY

Rose B. Simpson: "The 10 Best Booths at Art Basel in Basel 2021"

By Josie Thaddeus-Johns

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Exterior view of Art Basel, Basel, 2021. © Art Basel. Courtesy of Art Basel.

With its 2020 edition held only online, and its 2021 edition delayed until September to allow the global vaccination program to take effect (at least in some countries) and global travel restrictions to be loosened, the 51st iteration of Art Basel in Basel has already overcome challenges. The second of Art Basel's fairs to happen in person since the pandemic hit (the first was [Art Basel in Hong Kong](#) in May 2021), the event opened amid questions: Would dealers be able to make it? Would collectors be deterred by the challenges of travel and complex safety measures? Masks are required for all visitors, in addition to a negative test result or vaccine proof, which, due to the shift in Switzerland's travel protocols, those who received the Astra-Zeneca vaccine outside the European Union were only able to obtain at the eleventh hour.

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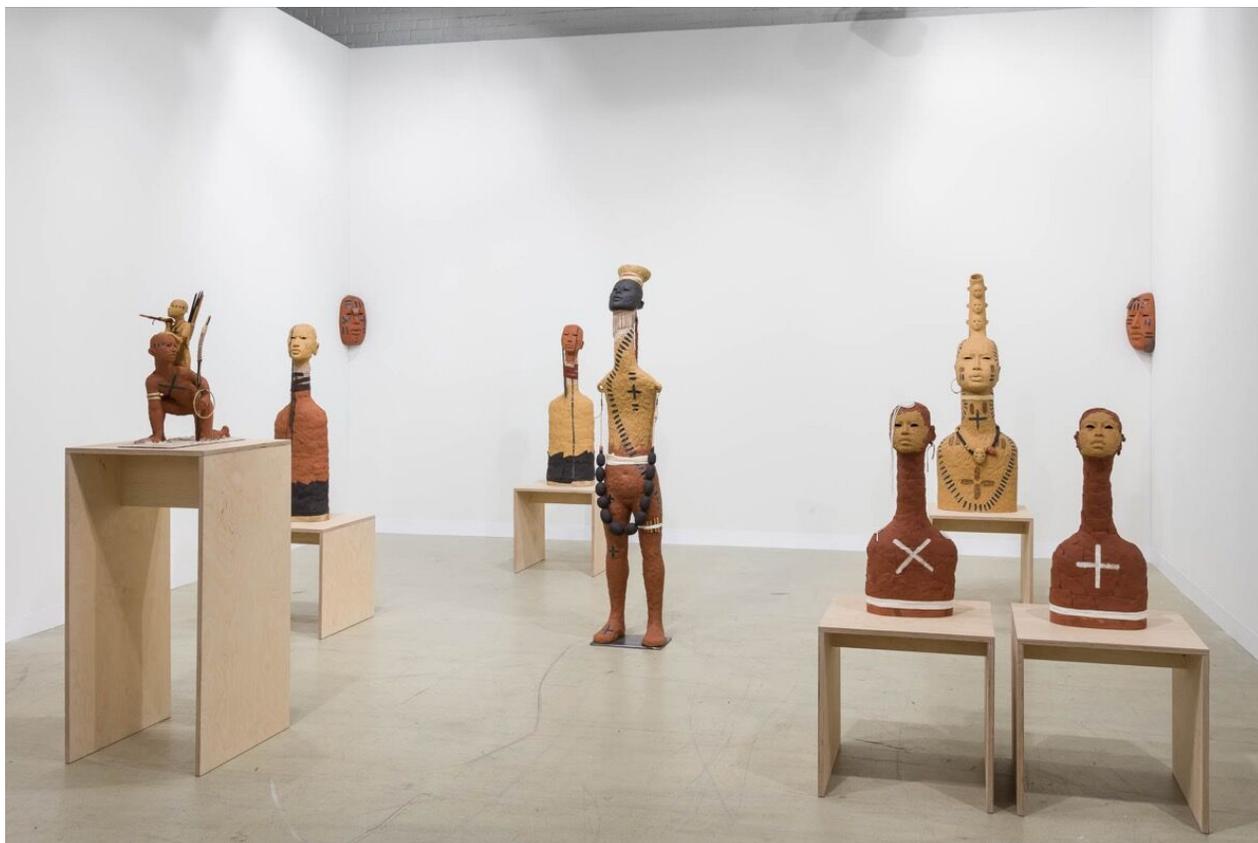
In the fair's opening press conference, Art Basel's global director, Marc Spiegler, voiced his appreciation for the galleries that made the trip "despite unprecedented challenges," and noted the changes the fair had made to pull off this in-person edition. Even given all those difficulties, collectors seemed to be enjoying being back to viewing art at Messeplatz at last. Crowds at Unlimited—Art Basel's sector for museum-sized works—ducked in and out of the baguette eaves of [Urs Fischer's](#) \$3 million *Untitled (Bread House)* (2004–05), presented by [Jeffrey Deitch](#), and ogled the peacefully sleeping male couple spooning in a car full of art in [Elmgreen & Dragset's](#) *The Outsiders* (2020), presented by [Pace Gallery](#).

The return of this annual staple of the art market, with a pre-pandemic-level lineup of 272 galleries (24 of which were making their first appearances on the Rhine)—plus a coterie of satellite fairs including [Liste](#) and [Photo Basel](#)—is proof that the world is opening up again, albeit in a changed form. Below, we share 10 booths that are highlights of this year's fair.

[Jessica Silverman](#)

Statements Sector, Booth N2

With works by Rose B. Simpson



Rose B. Simpson, installation view in Jessica Silverman's booth at Art Basel, Basel, 2021. Photo by Mark Blower. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman.

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If the hordes of people at the fair are too much, the calm, all-seeing humanoids in Jessica Silverman's booth are a tonic. The 10 ceramic sculptures here are all by [Rose B. Simpson](#), who is making her European debut at the fair and describes her works as "androgynous empaths." *Syncing 1* and *Syncing A* (both 2021), for example—both busts with elongated necks—bring together three different types of clay, a symbolic union between people across the globe; their titles, featuring a number and a letter, are intended to create a parity between the two. Often, the artist uses a layering effect by throwing clay repeatedly on the diagonal until it's very thin—what she calls a "slap-slab" technique—as well as a very sparing use of glaze. Informed by Simpson's Indigenous upbringing in a pueblo outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico, the works also include twine and leather in the form of necklaces.

Another calming sculptural face peeks out from the corner of the booth: Simpson insisted these talismanic presences be here to watch over the presentation, even fabricating an extra one when she realized the booth would have one more corner than expected. The spirits were clearly helping, with 7 out of the 10 works sold at the end of the first day of previews, and a few works being held back to ensure institutional interest is met (a representative from the [Guggenheim](#) had just left the booth when I arrived). "As a gallerist, I wanted to bring Rose's work here because I think Europeans aren't as aware of Native American cultures," Silverman explained. "I wanted to be a conduit."

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