



**Art Fairs** (<https://news.artnet.com/market/art-fairs>)

## How the Unhinged Reaction to Maurizio Cattelan's Banana Revealed the Thin Line Between the Art World and Total Anarchy

Everyone from the Guerrilla Girls to Popeyes Chicken had something to say.

**Sarah Cascone** (<https://news.artnet.com/about/sarah-cascone-25>), December 9, 2019



Fairgoers take pictures of Maurizio Cattelan's *Comedian*, for sale from Perrotin at Art Basel Miami Beach. Photo by Sarah Cascone.

When Parisian gallery Perrotin unveiled *Comedian*, [Maurizio Cattelan](http://www.artnet.com/artists/maurizio-cattelan/) (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/maurizio-cattelan/>)'s \$120,000 conceptual art piece of a real banana, duct taped to the wall (<https://news.artnet.com/market/maurizio-cattelan-banana-art-basel-miami-beach-1722516>), at Art Basel Miami Beach (<https://www.artbasel.com/miami-beach>), it sent the meme factory into overdrive. Within minutes of the kick-off of the fair's opening day, Cattelan was receiving texts from friends who were recreating the artwork at home. Almost instantly, it became a viral sensation.

The unassuming banana unleashed total chaos on Miami. Not one but two collectors purchased editions of the work in the fair's opening hours on Wednesday. The dealer then raised the price on the third edition to \$150,000, and sold it to a collector who will donate it to a museum, according to the *Art Newspaper* (<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/usd120-000-banana-edition-will-be-donated-to-a-museum>). Two artist proofs were not sold, despite widespread demand.

The banana installation became such a spectacle in the Miami Beach Convention Center that the gallery had to put up a velvet rope in front of the piece to control the crowds. The banana-induced frenzy hit its zenith Saturday afternoon, when performance artist David Datuna ate the artwork (<https://news.artnet.com/market/cattelan-banana-art-art-basel-1725678>). Datuna sauntered over, took down the banana, peeled it, and began eating it, telling the crowd he was a “hungry artist.”

Although the gallery had sourced a spare banana in the event of just such an incident, Perrotin chose to remove the banana from the booth for the last day. He was following recommendations from the fair, which was concerned that that the banana was drawing uncontrollable crowds that risked damaging other nearby artworks.

*The duct-taped banana at Art Basel is gone and has been replaced with “Epstein Didn’t Kill Himself,” which security quickly covered up. 😂*

*pic.twitter.com/nPtnuCm6sc (<https://t.co/nPtnuCm6sc>)*

*— Giancarlo Sopo (@GiancarloSopo) December 9, 2019*

*([https://twitter.com/GiancarloSopo/status/1203875430803087367?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/GiancarloSopo/status/1203875430803087367?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw))*

In its place, one fairgoer scrawled the phrase “Epstein Didn’t Kill Himself” across the empty white wall in red lipstick, referring to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, who had close ties to many wealthy and powerful figures in business and politics. His death at a New York prison was officially ruled a suicide, but has birthed numerous conspiracy theories. At Art Basel, the message—a popular internet meme—was quickly covered up with white cardboard, according to the *New York Daily News* (<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/ny-epstein-didnt-kill-himself-graffitti-art-basel-miami-20191209-rdspfufy5gn5d3vuzgnni2upa-story.html>).

Over the course of the week, hilarious interpretations of the \$120,000 banana abounded on social media, including a version from cryptocurrency artist CryptoGraffiti (<https://beincrypto.com/cryptocurrency-artist-recreates-famous-120000-duct-taped-banana-art-installation/>) titled *The Commodity*, which instructed collectors to find and claim a banana with a bitcoin key address (<https://beincrypto.com/cryptocurrency-artist-recreates-famous-120000-duct-taped-banana-art-installation/>) carved into it.

*I’m an artist now lol pic.twitter.com/yHQia26v53 (<https://t.co/yHQia26v53>)*

*— MoonPie (@MoonPie) December 8, 2019*

*([https://twitter.com/MoonPie/status/1203743398676566016?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/MoonPie/status/1203743398676566016?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw))*

Many of the posts replaced the banana with other food items, from sausages to pomegranates to Moon Pies. This last came in a post from the snack food company itself.

Not to be outdone, Popeyes Chicken immediately partnered with Miami’s San Paul Gallery Urban Art, taping its popular fried chicken sandwich—a viral sensation in its own right (<https://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/marketers-year-no-2-popeyes/2221136>)—to the wall. Titled *The*



*Sandwich*, it was listed at \$120,003.99. “And yes,” a press release boasted, “a buyer has already inquired about purchasing ‘The Sandwich’.”

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**View this post on Instagram**

A post shared by San Paul Gallery Urban Art 🇺🇸 (@sanpaulgallery) (...)

Others doubled down on the banana, taping ones up in unexpected places, including the New York subway and on a palm tree elsewhere in Miami. Photoshop experts also got to work, creating mashups with other famous artworks, including pairing it with Cattelan’s infamous golden toilet, *America* (<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/gold-toilet-selfies-656615>), recently stolen (<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/cattelan-gold-toilet-theft-1651129>) from Blenheim Palace in the UK.

Artnet News’s own photograph of two fashionable women photographing the banana has been reproduced in numerous mainstream news outlets, including CNN, NBC, and Fox Business. Artist Adrian Wilson (<http://www.interiorphotography.net/>) even turned my Instagram post about the story into a doctored image of the post, hung in a gallery as a piece of Richard Prince-style appropriation art.

Adrian Wilson created this image of Sarah Cascone's widely reproduced Instagram post of two women photographing Maurizio Cattelan's \$120,000 banana, reimagined as one of Richard Price appropriated Instagram artworks.

Wilson's other takes on the work included a new version of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, and a duct taped Jeff Koons tulip, inspired by the unpopular Parisian monument (<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/jeff-koons-tulips-unveiled-1670146>).

Then there were those who wanted to lay claim to the concept of the banana themselves. After the initial post about Cattelan went viral, I heard from an Instagram account dedicated entirely to photographs of bananas in distress, @yellow\_and\_helpless ([https://www.instagram.com/yellow\\_and\\_helpless/](https://www.instagram.com/yellow_and_helpless/)). Meth Fountain showed a half-eaten croissant ([https://www.instagram.com/p/B3zwe5JFo4\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3zwe5JFo4_/)) hung on the wall at this year's FIAC fair in Paris, and street artist Evgeny Ches dug up a photograph of a mural he painted in 2015 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/2TDf5ivB0s/>) of a banana taped to the wall.



**View this post on Instagram**

*([https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&utm\\_campaign=loading](https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=loading))*  
*([https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&utm\\_campaign=loading](https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=loading))*

Around 5 years ago I painted this artwork 🍌 Back then, i knew that taped bananas would be popular and expensive 😂💰

Maurizio Cattelan Is Taping Bananas to a Wall at Art Basel

Miami Beach and Selling Them for \$120,000 Each 🤯

*([https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&utm\\_campaign=loading](https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=loading))*

*A post shared by Artist | Urban Art | Graffiti ([https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&utm\\_campaign=loading](https://www.instagram.com/p/B5u1VmDHiQm/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=loading))*

Dutch artist [Carine Weve](http://www.carine-weve.nl/) (<http://www.carine-weve.nl/>) provided a screenshot of a banana attached to a canvas by zip ties, with metadata proving the work dated to 2006, when she was a student at the Royal Academy of Art in the Netherlands.

(Even my husband unearthed the desiccated husk of a banana that hung on his dorm room wall from 2007–2009, texting me a photo and declaring himself vindicated for all the times I had tried to get him to throw it away over the years.)

Carine Weve displayed this banana artwork as a student at the Royal Academy of Art in the Netherlands in 2006. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Art Basel's satellite fairs attempted to get in on the action as well—PULSE Miami Beach's publicist pitched a round-up of banana works on view around the city, noting that Allie Ellis's *Banana Grandma* (<https://www.artspace.com/allie-ellis/banana-grandma>) and Alexi Torres's *The Banana Cathedral* (<http://mail.alexitorres.com/Works-new-world-series.html>) were both for sale at the fair.

Of course, this humble fruit has had its fair share of art historical moments over the years. There was Andy Warhol's famed 1967 album cover for the Velvet Underground, and, as *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith pointed out on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/robertasmithnyt/status/1203757327129726976>), the Guerrilla Girls (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/guerrilla-girls/>) have been using the banana as a symbol for decades.



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FUNNY HOW MEN ALWAYS  
THINK THEY INVENTED THE  
BANANA JOKE.  
- GUERRILLA GIRLS  
BROADBAND

View More on Instagram



123 likes

guerrillagirlsbroadband

Green Banana, found objects, 8 x 8 inches, 2019. DETAILS AND PRICE  
INFO AT:

<https://tinyurl.com/theartworldisbananas> (link in bio)

#ht to @robertasmithnyt for the recognition. #provoke #protest #prevail



Among the many responses to Cattelan's now-infamous banana, sister group to the anonymous feminist artist collective, Guerilla Girls Broadband (<http://guerrillagirlsbroadband.com/>), is offering their own artwork inspired by *Comedian*, for sale for \$120,001 – one dollar more than Cattelan's piece.

The piece features an unripened green banana, taped to the wall above the message “funny how men always think they invented the banana joke” and “comes with certificate of authenticity and a healthy dose of feminism.”

See other social media posts inspired by Cattelan below.



*That's the Christmas decorations up. [pic.twitter.com/IDLHU7JLfD](https://t.co/IDLHU7JLfD)  
(<https://t.co/IDLHU7JLfD>)*

*— Dr Bendor Grosvenor (@arthistorynews) December 8, 2019  
([https://twitter.com/arthistorynews/status/1203659417545302029?  
ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/arthistorynews/status/1203659417545302029?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw))*

*NYC's response to Art Basel: [pic.twitter.com/biLJB1NJC1](https://t.co/biLJB1NJC1) (<https://t.co/biLJB1NJC1>)*

*– No Quarter Will Be Given (@chaedria) December 8, 2019*

*([https://twitter.com/chaedria/status/1203489897518108672?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/chaedria/status/1203489897518108672?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw))*



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