



Miami: Sculpture in the Pleasure Dome

by Laura Albritton

In December, as crowds pour into town for Art Basel/Miami Beach, Miami will once again become the darling of the international art set. Art Basel puts Miami in a brilliant spotlight, but there are other major players contributing to the city's reputation. In addition to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and the Miami Art Museum (MAM), the city hosts excellent small museums such as the Bass, the Wolfsonian, the Rubell Family Collection, the Margulies Collection, Cisneros Fontanals Arts Foundation, and the Scholl Collection, all of which hold stunning examples of contemporary sculpture. And then there are the pioneering galleries that put the Wynwood District on the map. The developments do not stop there, however. The Museum of Contemporary Art recently opened a new space, MOCA at Goldman Warehouse, in Wynwood, and MAM is planning an ambitious sculpture park for its new home on Biscayne Bay. On Miami Beach, Frank Gehry's sculptural concert hall for the New World Symphony will become a signature feature of the city.

Meanwhile, a handful of impresarios and a loose-knit group of rising sculptors are generating a subterranean dyna-

mism. Among gallery directors, David Castillo of David Castillo Gallery stands out. Called "one of Miami's sharpest talents," Castillo puts together fresh, compelling exhibitions. Pepe Mar's aggressive works look tribal, robotic, and animal. At the other end of the spectrum, Frances

Trombly evokes the melancholic nostalgia of an early Sofia Coppola film with installations of post-party detritus, forlorn streamers against white walls, and a hand-crocheted orange extension cord, shown this past summer at MAM. Castillo cultivates a close relationship with

his six sculptors. Trombly notes that she came to him after seeing his attentiveness to fellow artist Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova: "Whenever Leyden had a question about anything David would be there." Rodriguez-Casanova, whose striking gate and door sculptures speak of guardedness and the sectioning of space, compares Miami to L.A. "in the late '50s, early '60s" when Kienholz, Bell, and Ruscha were taking off. The talented Castillo gang and their circle are certainly ones to watch.

Lin Loughheed has founded one of Wynwood's most innovative venues for sculpture, TheYard@CasaLin. CasaLin is a one-story private house on NW 30th Street, with permanent installations on view year round (from the street); during Art Basel, there are also temporary installations in TheYard. Raymond Saá transformed the house itself into a sculpture, with black and yellow murals and swooping, striped panels. Joshua Levine affixed strange, yellow creatures to a tree extending over the street in his playful and mysterious SWARM. He compares "how these animals suddenly appeared in an overwhelming



Top to bottom: Frances Trombly, *Extension Cord*, 2007. Crocheted cotton, 50 ft. Adriana Carvalho, *The Calumny*, 2006. Aluminum, steel wool, and brass, 60 x 25 x 25 in. each. Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, *A Seemingly Open Door*, 2007. Door, mixed media, and fluorescent light, dimensions variable.

swarm” to “what was happening in the Wynwood neighborhood.” In December, works by Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, Frances Trombly, Metta Tommerupp, Robert Chambers, and Ralph Provesario are featured in this unusual urban garden.

Another patron saint of Wynwood’s emerging talent, sculptor Alette Simmons-Jimenez, directs the cooperative Artformz. Openings at Artformz resemble events at an underground club, with flowing drinks and live music, and an edgy crowd excited by the sometimes raw exhibitions. Over on Miami Beach, new talent is nurtured on Lincoln Road at ArtCenter/South Florida, directed by Jeremy Chestler. Here, visitors may take in ongoing exhibitions and peer into the studios of resident artists. For the viewer, this creates the sense, some might say the illusion, of the creative process as a transparent experience, tearing down public perception of contemporary art as elitist or inaccessible.

Right: Joshua Levine, *SWARM*, 2004. Polyurethane foam and pigment, dimensions variable. Below: Jen Stark, *Sedimentary*, 2008. Card stock paper, 12 x 12 x 3 in.

With people wandering through, the artists are regularly “on show.” While potentially nerve-racking, such exposure also serves as an antidote to the isolation and anonymity often endured by art-makers. The ArtCenter proves its commitment to bringing art to the public, from satellite installations at Walgreens to openings with collectors, artists, and young revelers who, as Chestler observes, “happen across the celebration inside our gallery.” Current sculptors-in-residence include Magnus Sigurdarson from Iceland and Adriana Carvalho, a Brazilian artist who creates dramatic aluminum dresses and provocative body armor.

Where Miami seems to lag behind is in public art. Jen Stark, an up-and-coming sculptor mak-



ing vivid works out of hand-cut pieces of paper, “can’t think of a good public sculpture in Miami.” The most ubiquitous pieces are Romero Britto’s bright, irony-free confections. Miami-Dade Art in Public Places recently installed three environmentally themed works in the airport. Norie Sato’s *Ghost Palms* combines the structures of palm trees and windows along a 300-foot interior wall. Brad Goldberg’s enormous marble *Coral Eden* pays homage to Florida’s reefs, although its name is ironic; with pollution and development, waters here are hardly an Eden for coral. Barbara Neijna’s *Foreverglades* references the River of Grass, but its title is also double-edged; without restoration, the Everglades will not be “forever.” These works are mainly aimed at visitors. Plans for new MetroRail stations could bring public sculpture to Miami residents, if the stations are built. Art in Public Places has good ideas, but government often has other priorities.

To remedy the situation, sculptor Alejandro Mendoza has teamed up with Simmons-Jimenez to install temporary

public art in Bayfront Park. During Art Basel 2008, 10 Giants in the City, 30-foot-tall, inflatable sculptures, will stand along the downtown waterfront, creating, in Mendoza’s words “a colossal paradigm of an urban nomad.” Featured works include José Bedia’s enormous white whale devouring a ship and Gustavo Acosta’s noded lighthouse. Each work is constructed of vinyl, nylon, or plastic that can be inflated and deflated in minutes—appropriately fast, transitory pieces for a place blessed, or cursed, with frenetic impatience and few markers of the past.

As an art capital, Miami is still deciding what it wants to be when it grows up. The city boasts a carnivalesque resistance to following the rules, especially rules about how to be taken seriously. It’s difficult to know what to expect from a modern-day pleasure dome of Kubla Khan that is also a border-town for struggling immigrants. But it may turn out to be the moment for Miami’s anarchic new wave of sculpture.

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