

GULF COAST
MUSEUM OF ART
AT PINWOOD CULTURAL PARK

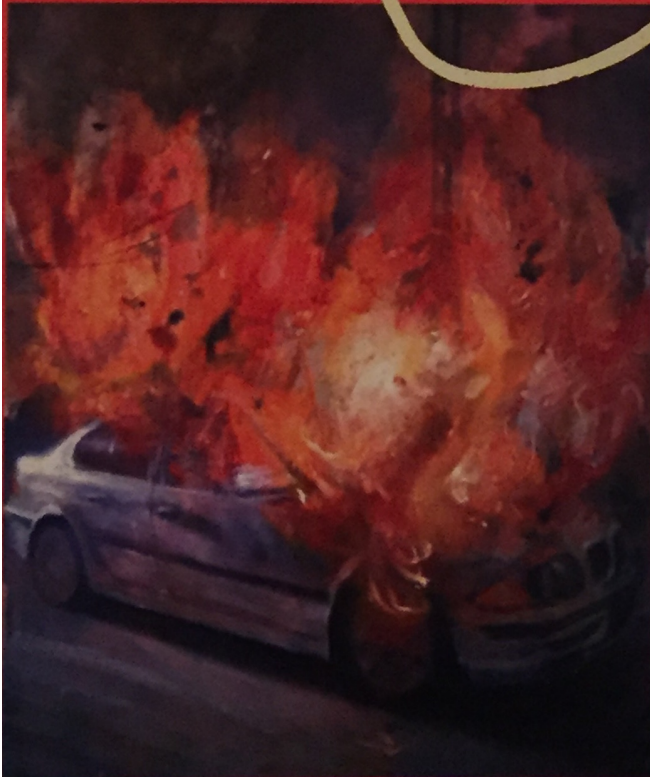
FLORIDA FOCUS

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SEPTEMBER 5 - NOVEMBER 3

Hot!

Miami



Jordan Massengale
U70-SVP (Hot Wheels), 2002

FLORIDA FOCUS 2003

MIAMI HOT!



Curator's Statement

There's no doubt about it, Miami is hot, hot, hot! A big, brash, hyper-stimulating, multi-cultural melting pot of visual and conceptual creativity, part born-in-the-USA, part Latino, part Caribbean, part European, it is boiling over as I write. A history, albeit brief, of the ascendance of Miami as a cultural mecca, is germane to any reference to this phenomenon. Historically speaking, the Art Deco hotel renovations, led by visionary South Beach entrepreneurs, came first, followed in rapid succession by the fashion, food, and entertainment worlds' discoveries of Miami Beach and greater Miami as the perfect place to shoot (please think photo), dance, eat, film, record, hang, or just plain strut their stuff.

For the first fifteen years not fifteen minutes, as some would believe of Miami's fame, the visual arts scene lagged behind, shut out of the white-hot glare of critical attention. Sure, galleries, art centers, and educational institutions, located all over the city, nurtured, fostered, and promoted artists as best they could, but it wasn't until the late 90s that things really began to sizzle. At that moment in time, derelict buildings were transformed into galleries by enterprising dealers; brash young artists who couldn't get a tumble elsewhere created alternative exhibition spaces; art centers expanded; a few prestigious out-of-town galleries relocated to Miami; Miami-Dade's cultural funding loosened up; and Miami museums began featuring a young crop of Miami artists. In the wake of all this fervor, cool critics, well-heeled collectors, and ultra-hip art audiences began to descend on Miami in almost as great number as fashion editors, placing it squarely on the art map. Last year, Steve Kaplan wrote that Miami was "on the brink". Not any more. Miami is over the top. The ultimate imprimatur of acknowledgement of Miami as a serious player on the international arts scene came at the conclusion of 2002, as Art Basel Miami Beach arrived, meeting and exceeding the wildest of expectations of attendance and sales. Things would never be the same again.

Hopefully, this second installment of the Gulf Coast Museum's series, Florida Focus, reflects more than just the hype and buzz; it is intended as a sprawling slice-of-art life, as I know it, and like Miami itself, there might be plenty of reasons to love it or loathe it. Curatorially, my choices were informed by the vastly different creative expressions and intents of Miami artists, an appreciation of the city's cultural salsa, and finally by a desire to acknowledge some of the multiple spaces and places that are responsible for this visual arts revolution/evolution. Miami artists tend to fall into several categories. Some are fortunate in having sophisticated gallery representation, which generates press, catalogues, glamorous openings, and high visibility. Other artists work and thrive within a

Acknowledgements

This is the second edition of the Florida Focus exhibition series. Designed to examine innovative work occurring in various regions of the state from the point of view of independent curators. Inaugurated last year with Jade Dellinger of Tampa as our guest curator, Jade chose to present an overview of his perspective of some of the important work occurring in the State of Florida. This year we have engaged Denise Gerson, Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs at the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami as our guest curator. I have asked Denise to focus her curatorial efforts on the exciting Miami art scene - a formidable task which she has handled brilliantly. The works included in Miami Hot! clearly demonstrate the vibrant art scene occurring in the sophisticated metropolitan area of Miami, an international crossroads with strong Latin influence.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Denise for curating this exhibition and for the wonderful insight she brings to this project. I am also extremely grateful to all the artists who participated in this truly magnificent visual art endeavor.

Ken Rollins
Executive Director
September 2003



cooperative atmosphere, encouraged and stimulated by what might be called a communal embrace. Finally, some create art largely as a solitary endeavor, frequently dependent on individual funding sources to bring their projects to fruition and prominence.

Edouard Duval-Carriès's work is rich in narrative and decoration, a feast for the eye, a journey through the exotic world of Haitian culture and religion that permeates Miami. Clearly, he has benefited from representation by Bernice Steinbaum, whose well established New York gallery was closely associated with a roster of internationally acclaimed artists before she moved to Miami and added several local artists to her stable, thereby granting them instant gravitas. Carlos Betancourt, whose art references his Caribbean-Cuban ancestry, has also had his career enormously enhanced within the last few years by the machinery of another influential New York dealer, Robert Miller, whose attention Betancourt drew, when his idiosyncratic style coalesced into huge-format color photography.

Of course, it is local gallerists who have labored longest to raise the community's art consciousness. Among them, Fredric Snitzer was tuned into the young Miami art vibe long before anyone else. An instructor at Miami's hotbed of creativity, the New World School of the Arts, Snitzer, whose gallery is located in main-line Coral Gables, has long had an inside track on up and coming talent; more importantly, he has been instrumental in placing works of art in important Miami collections. Snitzer continues to offer exhibition opportunities to a host of edgy young people, whose art is so conceptual that when you view it you'd swear you were somewhere else - anywhere else, but Miami. He has championed film projects by Elizabeth Withstandley, Cooper, and Norberto Rodriguez; represents New World-trained Naomi Fisher, whose color photography challenging stereotypical notions of femininity has been attracting serious interest abroad; and he was an early supporter of Westen Charles, whose quirky plush garden and cheeky panty parquets are on view in Miami Hot! Of late, a popular gallery and studio crawl has been born in North Miami, benefiting from proximity to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), which has proven to be the most supportive museum to date of Miami's über-talented, emerging artists. Patrons and artists alike are steadily being lured to the area; like Vickie Pierre, who is represented by North Miami gallery pioneer, Genaro Ambrosino, they have discovered a receptive commercial community and a burgeoning art scene.

Still, many artists in Miami Hot! cannot count on patronage from a single dealer for exposure. Franklin Einspruch and Vickie Pierre often exhibit elsewhere, but these days, along with Pedro Gonzalez, they call the Art Center/South Florida professional home. Einspruch's imagery, large and small, is grounded in figuration and voluptuous impasto; Pierre lyrically traces mysterious, surreally organic shapes; Gonzalez', in-your-face photography addresses sexuality and violence with a fashion editorial twist. While these artists could not be farther away from each other aesthetically, a result of training, interests, and acculturation, they are all reliant on Miami's most respected

artists-in-residence space. Opened in 1984 and located on trendy Lincoln Road, the Center has been providing affordable studios and exhibition turns to juried artists from all over the globe, in exchange for their teaching classes and opening their studios to the public.

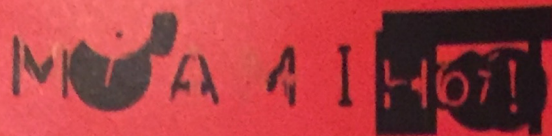
Not far from downtown Miami, in the once defunct Design District, some derelict warehouses, decrepit buildings, and funky single-family homes have been transformed into vibrant exhibition showcases, alternative and otherwise. Locust Projects is one such enterprise. Initiated by an ensemble of three young artists, it is entirely artist-run. Founders Elizabeth Withstandley, Westen Charles, and Cooper, along with Norberto Rodriguez, offer Miami Hot! audiences a loop of haunting, if enigmatic, video/sound pieces that bear witness to Miami's emergent video art scene. Jordan Massengale, Ramón Fernández-Bofill, as well as Einspruch, all show at Dorsch Gallery, where Brook Dorsch, whose day job is sophisticated communications, operates a converted warehouse that he turns over on a rotating basis to guest curators. Fernández-Bofill credits his Afro-Cuban heritage with informing his expressionistic whirls of color, while Massengale addresses quasi-journalistic events in an aggressive, figurative style, his tongue usually planted firmly in his cheek.

A few of the artists in Miami Hot! do not move within gallery, co-op, or art center circles. They work largely by themselves, proceeding from project to project, depending on the availability of funding that they must find, or that must find them. The Dominican artist, Charo Oquet, creates engaging, ramshackle installations of plywood and colorful textiles - when she can afford to get them built and installed. Tori Arpad, a former Midwesterner, is a professor of art at Florida International University. When she is not guiding aspiring artists, she creates hypnotic video installations that speak to the fragility of the environment. Tim Curtis, until recently a professor of art at the University of Miami, sculpts cool, elegant forms that redefine the spaces they occupy. Presently lacking gallery representation in Miami, both Arpad and Curtis rely largely on their teaching salaries, grant monies, and international collaborations for professional sustenance.

In the final analysis, the artists of Florida Focus: Miami Hot! are a compelling lot. Possessed of wildly divergent points of view, techniques, and inspirational muses, the threads that metaphorically connect them, that transcend iconographic, philosophical, and expressive distinctions, are their shared passion for art as a conduit of mood and thought, and their instinctual desire to engage the viewer on some experiential level. Some of these artists have gained a fair amount of success locally; others are part of a generation whose recognition and acclaim are spreading beyond South Florida's borders; the remaining few have not yet achieved the acknowledgement they deserve. My thanks to Ken Rollins and the Gulf Coast Museum of Art, for offering me the opportunity to allow them all their day in the hot Miami sun.

Denise Gerson is Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs at the Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami. A Miami resident since 1960, she has been organizing exhibitions at the Lowe for fourteen years.





September 5 - November 9, 2003

Exhibition Sponsors:

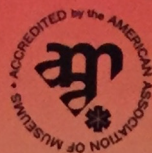
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Gulf Coast Museum of Art

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