



Downtown Miami

by Laura Albritton

For three years, Miami has watched the frenzied construction of the 200,000-square-foot Herzog & de Meuron-designed Pérez Art Museum Miami in downtown. The museum's Web site featured a "live cam" of the progress, but anyone impatient with the pace—and Miamians make a fetish of impatience—could view time-lapse footage showing the building's rise, a crane abruptly shifting in a jerky dance. There's no doubt that the opening of PAMM this month, with more than 10 exhibitions—including "Ai Weiwei: According to What?" (on view through March 16, 2014)—marks a milestone in the city's advance as an art capital. But

another development is quietly afoot, one that has received local coverage but has otherwise been easy to miss.

And it's not happening by accident. The transformation of downtown into Miami's next epicenter of art has been carefully designed. Frances Trombly, one of the owners of the pioneering new downtown gallery Dimensions Variable, observes, "The most interesting thing about downtown is the convergence of the private sector, local government, and the city's best cultural producers. This has never happened in the Design District or in Wynwood." Dimensions Variable, founded by sculptors Adler Guerrier, Trom-

bly, and Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, mounts exhibitions of international sculpture, most recently from Iceland and the U.K.

The Miami Downtown Development Authority has been a prime mover in the effort to bring the arts into downtown. An independent public agency funded by the City of Miami, Miami DDA facilitates relations between private interests and local artists and gallerists. "We connect artists with each other as well as with businesses in the area," notes Sonja Bogensperger, team leader for business development. In one success story, Miami Worldcenter, a development company focused on urban renewal, renamed its 20,000-square-foot property DWNTWN ArtHouse and awarded a two-year, essentially rent-free lease to tenants. Located at 100 N.E. 11th Street,

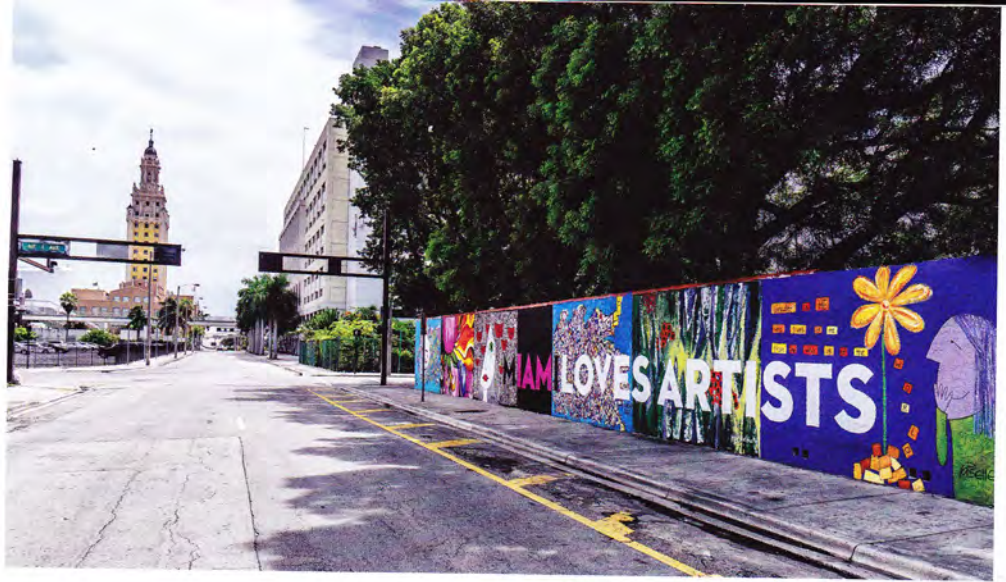
with a striking wave-like exterior mural, DWNTWN ArtHouse accommodates Turn-Based, a community print shop that also exhibits work; Dimensions Variable; studio space for the performance artists TM Sisters; and Bas Fisher Invitational, an exhibition space run by artists Naomi Fisher and Jim Drain.

Miami DDA's ultimate goal is to magnify the neighborhood growth already occurring organically. Bogensperger estimates, "Downtown Miami is home to more than 50 artist studios, the majority of which have opened over the last year and a half." This represents a major shift away from Wynwood. Trombly says, "Most artists do not have studios in Wynwood. Many of the gal-

Above: Downtown Miami. Below: Exterior of DWNTWN ArtHouse.



eries that started there are gone." As artists have moved to downtown, select galleries are opening here, sometimes in tandem. Sean McCormick recently transformed his 1924 McCormick Place building into an arts complex, with exterior murals by Stephen Gamson, Eleazar Delgado, and students from the Miami International University of Art and Design.



The venture houses the McCormick Place Art Gallery, along with studios for 11 artists such as Delgado, Monique Lassooij, and Gustavo Gonzalez. Developers and property owners remember that artists migrating to Wynwood's empty spaces in the early 2000s had a huge impact on the district's fortunes.

The Artisan Lounge at 500 N.E. First Avenue shares a similar mission. The complex features three exhibition galleries, two artists' lounges, and 26 studios. Artists-in-residence include Cuban sculptor Aurora Molina, who creates eccentric, doll-like figures and three-dimensional collages, and Argentine artist Augusto Esquivel, who works extensively with buttons to make vivid hanging pieces. Along N.E. Sixth Street, a lengthy outdoor mural with a series of intensely colorful paintings bears the words "Miami Loves Artists." The cheerful, upbeat message reflects the fact that The Artisan Lounge is sponsored by Christ Fellowship Church, which donates 9,000 square feet of its space to the studio project.

The nonprofit Cannonball takes the residency concept one step further. During one-year residencies, artists are awarded live-work studios of 600 square feet at Cannonball's 1035 N. Miami Avenue center, located across the street from

CIFO (Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation). Kitchen, dining, and lounge areas are communal, which promotes conversation and exchange. The building also houses program offices and an exhibition space. The Warhol Foundation recently awarded Cannonball's residency program a \$100,000 grant, and it receives additional support from the Miami-Dade County Cultural Affairs Council and the James L. Knight Foundation.

New gallerist Marc Schmidt comments that "downtown seems to be the new focus in Miami. Quite a few artists are coming to downtown because they seem not overly happy about new developments in Wynwood. There are clear signs that downtown is waking up out of a long sleep. The architecture is fantastic, and it feels great to be right in the middle of it." In fact, when Schmidt and his fellow Europeans Roger Weber, Stephen Goettlicher, and Bernd Mueller decided to open CU-1, a gallery dedicated to European photography, they chose the 1926 Security Building in downtown over a Wynwood industrial space. Glass and steel high-rises may exemplify the new downtown, but the Downtown Miami Historic District includes 60 historic buildings, many dating from the 1920s and encompassing Med-

iterranean Revival, Classical Revival, and Art Deco architecture. Schmidt adds, "We are working closely with DDA and the Arts and Business Council, and we get a lot of support from their side. Together with the American Institute of Architects, DDA, and the Arts and Business Council, we hosted the Creative Happy Hour for Downtown Art Days at our gallery."

Schmidt is referring to the second annual Downtown Arts Days, which featured three days of exhibitions, studio visits, performances, and bike and walking tours in September. This being Miami, an atmosphere of exuberant festivity marked the occasion. Downtown heavyweight CIFO participated by inviting the public to view "Deferred Archive," its 2013 Grants and Commissions exhibition, with new work by Latin American artists. When CIFO first decided to install its extensive private collection in downtown (in an AIA award-winning, renovated 1930s warehouse), the choice of geography seemed questionable. Today, it appears prescient.

The main anchors of the downtown art scene will, of course, be CIFO and PAMM. Other players, though, are beginning to round out the neighborhood, including Nina

Above: Exterior mural at The Artisan Lounge. Below: Nellie Appleby, *Biophilia*, 2010. Detail of installation at Dimensions Variable.

Torres Fine Art on Bayshore Avenue, which represents Latin American and Mexican art, and the multidisciplinary arts space Primary Projects, on Seventh Street. The Miami Dade College Gallery in the historic Freedom Tower building occupies a prime location at 600 Biscayne Boulevard, only blocks away from PAMM. PAMM itself stands within Museum Park, a 29-acre public garden with a spectacular view of the bay, which will host outdoor





Left: Jenny Brillhart and Carolyn Salas, *Cut Outs*, 2013. Detail of installation at Dimensions Variable. Right: Augusto Esquivel, *Fire Hydrant*, 2010. Buttons and monofilament, 48 x 12 x 12 in.

sections could look eerily empty and feel dangerous. Now, however, a lot of vested interests believe that this state of affairs has begun to change. DWNTWN ArtHouse epitomizes the gradual progress: it stands across the street from a louche nightclub with trails of broken glass littering the sidewalk, but it has a view of PAMM, only blocks away, and just a little further, the Adrienne Arsht Center. Similarly, The Artisan Lounge finds itself close to both a homeless center and a hip bar, The DRB, in a renovated historic building. Trombly notes that “there are more people on the ground in our neighborhood.” And everyone expects the opening of PAMM to push the evolution even faster. “They have already brought member groups over to visit us and have worked closely with artists in downtown to create museum programming,” Trombly adds.

As far as the rest of the world is concerned, Wynwood



remains the happening spot for Miami art, but local newspaper headlines such as “Where is the Next Wynwood?” (*Miami New Times*) and “In Miami’s Wynwood district, the party has overtaken the art” (*Miami Herald*) portray a situation in flux. Wynwood’s Second Saturday Art Walks, complete with food trucks and rowdy, hard-drinking crowds, have become problematic for some galleries, with cases of artwork getting damaged. Meanwhile,

rents have risen sharply, driving out individual artists as well as galleries.

This resembles the normal gentrification loop: artists move in, the area improves, commercial interests explode, and soon everyone wants to be there, pushing out the artists who still need affordable studio space. Perhaps as Wynwood landlords expect, restaurants, nightclubs, and retail will step in to fill the vacant spaces. Wynwood Kitchen and Bar, Joey’s, and Salumeria already bring in diners. But on an average day—outside of Art Walks or Art Basel—large swaths of Wynwood and the Design District can appear deserted. Crime has diminished, but it remains a nagging problem. Should many more galleries depart, what exactly will be the draw? As the migration toward downtown picks up speed, corporate interests and public agencies should be pondering how they’ll retain artists and galleries in this latest, possibly largest arts epicenter to emerge in Miami.

Below and detail: Julie Hill, *A Rake’s Progress*, 2012. View of installation at Dimensions Variable.

