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How Well Do Miami Museums Represent Local Artists?

LENA KATZ | DECEMBER 28, 2016 | 8:00AM



On December 10, rains pounded Miami so hard that a citywide flood advisory was declared. During the downpour, 305 female-identifying artists from around Miami-Dade County braved the violent squalls, forded the puddles morphing into ponds, and evaded a multilane I-95 pileup to answer the call from Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM).

They came for Now Be Here #3, a participatory photographic event organized by Los Angeles-based artist Kim Schoenstadt that goes city-to-city encouraging female-identifying artists to appear en masse in a photo – each identified with a unique number. The point is to "shine a spotlight" on local women creatives, first in Los Angeles and New York, and then in Miami.

Amid that biblical deluge, Miami's artists proved that even when they have to physically forge their way upstream to be accounted for, they will do it. They're here. They're passionate. But how well do local institutions back them up?

The day of the event, everyone – from Schoenstadt to local curator Jane Hart to PAMM staffers – sounded an enthusiastic note about Miami's scene. "It was a beautiful moment for artists to connect with each other and be with each other," Schoenstadt says.

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However, her goal goes far beyond organizing a stirring group photo. Schoenstadt plans to create an archive of each artist who participated in the event in each city and then to distribute that work to all the museums in town. Her hope is to end the "willful ignorance" among art-world influencers about the number of working female artists in their cities.

She has published complete lists for the L.A. and New York events on the website [nowbeherela.com](#). If grants come through, she hopes to make the database more extensive, including not only participants but also all the artists living and working in the respective cities. "It's so important to get these artists seen and recognized," she says.

So how far does Miami's art world have to go to fully integrate the hundreds of women producing work in the 305? The artists who participated in the event say Schoenstadt's work is vital.

"Traditionally, women are underrecognized in the arts," says Dana Donaty, who drove from Palm Beach County. "Yet there are women doing great work, important work, critical work."

Schoenstadt's plan assumes that those in charge of finding and supporting artists are interested in combing through her lists and that they'll be compelled to seek out more local female-identifying artists after seeing their faces in a video. Neither of these assumptions might have any bearing on reality.

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Franklin Sirmans, PAMM's director, praised Schoenstadt's message and her art – but also said he would be unlikely to use her database.

"I have an amazing team of four curators who are all over the world, and that's how we go about thinking what we're going to show in the museum," Sirmans says. "We use more interpersonal types of methods, like going to studios and talking to people."

There's opportunity for community, for meaningful projects, and for making a living.

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The unspoken – and disheartening – takeaway for artists at Now Be Here #3 is that if they weren't already on PAMM's radar before the event, participating didn't increase their visibility.

But that's not to say PAMM doesn't actively support female-identifying artists in its programming and permanent collection. In February, the museum received a \$100,000 gift from Darlene Pérez earmarked for acquiring works by Latina artists for the museum's permanent collection. The current exhibition calendar shows a strong female representation. And Sirmans voices excitement about several upcoming shows by female artists, especially the Australian-born, L.A.-based Toba Khedoori, who's exhibiting at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Most of the institutions in Miami follow the same pattern: enthusiastically promoting the female artists they represent – either in permanent collections or exhibitions or live programming – but not providing any hard data as to what percentage of pieces in their collection are by female-identifying artists.

The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in the Design District is a notable exception. ICA director Ellen Salpeter says her institution has leaned heavily on female artists.

"Of the 11 solo exhibitions presented at the museum since its founding, seven have featured female artists," Salpeter says. Her museum's education programs also aim to place female and queer artists at the forefront.

"In the past two months, our residents' program highlighted gender-queer performer Genesis P-Orridge and hosted Fall Semester, a theory symposium led by Odalis Valdivieso and Felice Grodin," she adds.

The Bass, Miami Beach's contemporary art museum, could not provide hard data on female representation, although a spokesperson attributed "a strong female presence in [the Bass'] programming" to the executive director and chief curator, Silvia Karman Cubiñá. When the museum reopens next spring after a renovation, it plans to present exhibitions by at least two female artists. The first work acquired as part of the Bass' new acquisition fund was by Sylvie Fleury.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in North Miami was refreshingly transparent, but its data wasn't particularly encouraging. Though its past exhibitions have been equally balanced male-female, only 16 percent of the artists in the permanent collection are female.

The only institution that expressed an outright commitment to supporting local female-identifying artists was Girls' Club, the private collection and alternative art space in Fort Lauderdale that helped whip up support for Now Be Here #3.

Gallery director Sarah Michelle Rupert says that 80 percent of the Girls' Club's permanent collection is by female artists and that all of the programming is focused on women creatives. The self-described "small artist-run organization" has become a beacon for emerging and midcareer artists in the region.

Even if Schoenstadt's work doesn't spark an immediate uptick in female representation in local shows, Rupert says the event was important. "It was a great event for women to connect with each other regarding the issues that are important to them," Rupert says.

The nonprofit Margulies Collection – which makes no conscious effort toward male-to-female parity in its presentations or permanent collection – might be doing the most to change the world in a practical way for women. One hundred percent of the proceeds from admission, tours, book and art sales, and fundraisers goes directly to Lotus House, a Miami shelter and resource center for homeless women and children.

"We partner with Lotus House in every way that we can, providing the means with which they can carry out the good work they do," Margulies Collection curator Katherine Hinds says.

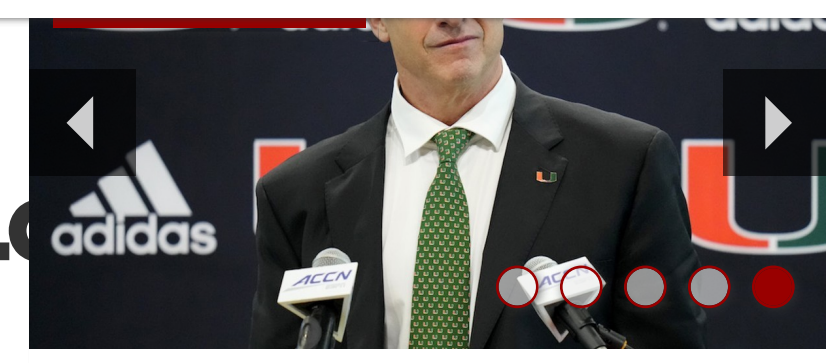
During Art Basel, \$40,000 was raised in one week. Over the holidays, the foundation is promoting the photographic portfolio "By and About Women." Featuring ten photographs by female artists such as Carrie Mae Weems and Miami-based Natasha Duwin, the portfolio will be sold as individual works – and each photograph comes packaged with poems written by Lotus House residents.

For female-identifying artists living and working in Miami, there's opportunity for community, for meaningful projects, and for making a living. The challenge for many artists is how to balance those three goals.

Donaty, the artist from Palm Beach County, earns a living through her art. She owns a thriving commercial art business in Delray Beach and maintains a studio at Bakehouse Art Complex in Wynwood. She admits that much of the money comes through commissions, whether murals for public spaces or portraits or decorative finishes for luxury homes. Those clients are pleased with her fine-art credentials. The fine-art world is not so enthusiastic about her commercial CV.

Yet for this world, she willingly spent an entire Saturday participating in an unpaid effort to shine a spotlight on more than 300 of her fellow female-identifying Miami artist peers.

"Events like this are great, but it needs to go even further," she says. "That recognition needs to go further. More of this dialogue needs to be opened."



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