



VISUAL DIARY: Dramatic Flair Opens Art Basel Miami Beach's Public Sector

December 6, 2015

by Pat Rogers

Sculpture and installations that encouraged participation opened with a dramatic flourish at Art Basel Miami Beach's Public Sector on Wednesday night (December 2, 2015) at Collins Park set in front of the Bass Art Museum in Miami Beach. People milled about taking selfies with the art, sipping beverages and getting up close and personal with installations designed for participation.

Highlights of the Opening Reception of the public art exhibition were two art performances, adding a strong dose of drama to the warm evening.

First up was *supreme ultimate exercise* by Xavier Cha. Featuring three burly men bench pressing and moving two 600-pound tires along a paved path across Collins Park, the performance piece demonstrated sheer strength, stamina, exertion and a physical achievement that hardly seemed possible. The tires weighted approximately three times each performer's weight (according to one of the men). In between using the oversized tires as dumbbells to bench press, crawling into the tires to execute sit ups or using the tires as weights to work their legs, the men hoisted hammers and kept rolling the tires along to the next optimum spot while crowds lined both sides to watch their travels.

Meanwhile, at the top of the park, a petite Asian woman executed graceful and challenging movements that looked like tai chi. For those following the men and their herculean task, she was impossible to notice until the men arrived near the front of the park and it became apparent another kind of "exercise" was unfolding. With the men clad in black and the woman in white, it was impossible to miss the contrast between the brute force and physical show of power and strength required to move the length of the park with the grace and flow of slow and small movements taking on the beauty of dance.

Each operating as a counterpart to the other, the dual performances demonstrating different possibilities of strength, determination, focus, control and stamina. At the end, the men raised the woman performer above their shoulders in a triumph shared by all.



"supreme ultimate exercise" by Xavier Cha. Performance. Photo by Pat Rogers.



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"supreme ultimate exercise" by Xavier Cha. Performance. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

The Beautiful by Pope.L. was a musical art performance piece featuring a band of superman clad musicians with fake bulging muscles in blackface (and redface). Setting themselves upon a stage, the singers performed a choral arrangement with electric guitar back up of "America the Beautiful" but with a twist.

Using a song writing technique of relying on a refrain of lyrics whose meaning changes over the course of the song, the performance rose to its crescendo when American dollar bills (or its facsimile) vomiting from the singers into the crowd who scooped them up, while the singers vocalized "confirm thy soul in self-control" providing a harsh contrast to the song's lofty ideals of brotherhood, beauty and abundance portrayed in the American patriotic song.



"The Beautiful" by Pope.L. Performance. Photo by Pat Rogers.



"The Beautiful" by Pope.L. Performance. Photo by Pat Rogers.

Even before the art performances claimed attention of most visitors, engaging with the public art exhibition was a favored pass time at the Opening. Selfies with the art were rampant. At least 6 out of the 26 works offered additional kinds of personal engagement for visitors wanting an art experience beyond viewing alone.

Paraiso by Ishmael Randall-Weeks offered a walkabout experience in his architectural work made of carved bricks and wooden pallets. The large-scale work invited curiosity of its meaning...was the five-section structure meant to be viewed from afar in reverence to something whose time had passed or walked among to see if meaning would seep from its towering walls and purposeful

paths.

The uncertainty may spring from the work itself: the overall structure is designed to invoke a “scarred landscape of a destroyed pre-Columbian funerary site,” according to the artist statement. Made of contemporary materials, the mesh of implied history with contemporary materials made for a powerful experience.



“Paraiso” by Ishmael Randall-Weeks, 2015. Carved bricks and wooden pallets.
Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Also asking for direct engagement from visitors was *Elevation No. 2*, (2013) by Xiao Yu. Inset inside a round building, double-sided paintings were suspended from the ceiling. Visitors could view the work clearly from the building’s entrance but could also walk among the dangling paintings. Each dangling artwork contained an original painting on one side and a replica on the other. Sometimes the paintings appeared identical; others offered reverse perspective creating doubt on how the installation should be viewed and what was real and what was not. It was difficult really see the paintings while walking among them yet taking a step back only offered a single perspective.

Confusion that leads to reflection on art and perspective is part of the point of *Elevation No. 2*. The pairing of original works with replicas and the installation of the work on multiple heights is designed to create doubt and what that might mean.



“Elevation No. 2” by Xiao Yu, 2013. Acrylic on canvas, UltraGiclee art print, steel wire and hooks, dimensions variable. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Untitled (Healing pavilion), 2015, by Sam Falls seemed to channel Marina Abramović durational performance *The Artist is Present*, 2010, at MoMA with connected seating that situate two viewers looking face forward into each other. The work incorporated healing gemstones, including crystals, infusing an added dimension to the experience. Feeling the pull or influence of the crystals added additional layers of experiences with the work, whether *Untitled* was viewed standing from a distance or seated solo or as part of a pair.



“Untitled (Healing Pavillion)” by Sam Falls, 2015. Steel and terrazzo with aventurine, amethyst, blue calcite, green calcite, hematite, jasper, labradorite, orange calcite, lapis lazuli, red calcite and rose quartz, 183 x 61 x 183 cm. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Nearby, *Untitled* by Jacob Kassay, 2012-2015, encouraged visitors to sit and rest a while in a complete different way. The installation featured eight bronze modules set into the grassy ground arranged in a conversation pit that seemed to encourage the hearty to step down and take a seat, along with many onlookers and selfie takers. The bronze boxes I gazed into seem to require a commitment before getting comfortable, almost like stepping into a shallow abyss before getting to relax, legs dangling, while gaining a new vantage point of the world around you.

Those who did climb in seem to enjoy the experience. The modules were positioned close enough that conversation seemed guaranteed. Overhead, an onlooker remarked that if the art had been installed at Watermill Center, there would be naked people as part of it, referencing Watermill Center’s notorious (and popular) Summer Benefit featuring durational performance set among the grassy grounds and gravelled courtyard each July. And, yes, the benefits typically feature painted nude performers.



“Untitled” by Jacob Kassay, 2012-2015.

Easier to climb upon was Hank Willis Thomas’s *Ernest and Ruth*, 2015. Made in the shape of a speech bubble typically found in comic books and cartoons, people climbed aboard the steel sculpture gladly and posed for pictures taken by friends. It’s a fun piece that encourages exploring the unusual shape and the different ways a person can appear or relate to the space created. Most people chose to sit in the center with the bubble around them and taking center stage. Others took a whimsical tactic with the bubble seeming to hold their thoughts.

The artist created the work with the intention of having participants “stand in” for the text to reveal some kind of truth as well as truth’s sometime “porous nature”, according to the artist statement. It’s comfortable seating also encourages contemplation and provides a comfortable and unusual place to do it in.



“Ernest and Ruth” by Hank Willis Thomas, 2015. Various steel plate and pipe, 211 x 244 x 61 cm. Photo by Pat Rogers.

Since art and sitting was already on my mind, it was difficult not to notice there were quite a few stationary artworks inspired by chairs or drawing inspiration from seating at this year's Art Basel Miami Beach's 2015 Public Sector. In addition to participatory works by Sam Falls, Jacob Kassay and Hank Willis Thomas, sculptures by Athena Papadopoulos, Sterling Ruby and Robert Wilson (who is known for his extensive chair collection as well as his roles in international avant guard theater).



"Big Yellow Mama" by Sterling Ruby, 2013. Powder Coated Aluminum, 244 x 142 x 152 cm. Photo by Sage Cotignola.



"Einstein Chairs" by Robert Wilson, from Einstein on the Beach, 1976" produced 2002. Galvanized pipe, set of three chairs, 226 x 25 x 25 cm each. Photo by Sage Cotignola..



"Two Serious(ly) (young) Women" by Athena Papadopoulos, 2015. Synthetic wig clippings, steel, cement, pigment, jewelry chain, cotton, flag fabric, polyester stuffing, found objects and resin, 200 x 45 x 55 cm each. Photo by Pat Rogers.

Overall, the exhibition included figurative, abstract, text-based and figurative sculptures installed throughout Collins Park. All of the art was provided by galleries exhibiting at Art Basel Miami Beach taking place in the nearby Miami Beach Convention Center. The exhibition was curated by Nicholas Baume, Director and Chief Curator of Public Art Fund of New York City. Exhibiting artists include Tony Craig, Ursula van Rydingsvard, Olaf Breuning, Ruben Ortiz Torres, Katharina Grosse, Rirkritt Tiravanija, Marianne Vitale, Tony Tasset and others.

An installation by Olaf Breuning of "thoughts" that were each tucked into the simple shape of a head caught my attention and allowed for an interesting pause among the art. It was there that the third performance piece caught up with us. A man, smiling broadly, asked if we liked the art and offered that it was great. I smiled, murmured something and turned back to my task so he wouldn't keep talking. Had I engaged, I'm sure he would have tried to continue chatting and then try to sell the art to me...as obnoxiously as possible... as part of Ryan Gander's *Earnest Hawker* performance piece.

Turning back to the sculpture and installations, I found *Eternity Now* to be a striking piece, installed at the entrance to the currently-closed Bass Art Museum building. Glowing turquoise in a clean font with an art deco feel, the art work with a nod to luxury consumerism was installed regally on the front of the classically designed stone building. Viewed from afar, *Eternity Now* provided a solid anchor to the whirly world of sculpture and installation of all shapes, sizes and types selected for Art Basel's Public Sector.

If drama could be considered a theme for the Opening Reception, *Eternity Now* seemed to provide a subtle kind that would continue to last beyond the evening's spectacle.



"Eternity Now" by Sylvie Fleury and "Twisted Jersey Barrier" by Matt Johnson.
Photo by Pat Rogers.

To see images of works on view at the Opening, see our slideshow:

[View Slideshow](#)

BASIC FACTS: Art Basel's Public Sector remains on view through December 6, 2015.

A selection will remain on view until February 1, 2016 as part of "tc: temporary contemporary", a city-wide temporary public art program which is presented by the Bass Museum of Art in partnership with the City of Miami Beach.

Collins Park is located between 21st & 22nd Streets, Miami Beach, FL 33139. www.artbasel.com.

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