

Sculptures in the Garden

Written by Anne Tschida - BT Arts Editor
February 2012

The Deering Estate becomes the latest green space to take the contemporary art plunge



Maybe it was the full foliage in Miami-Dade's historic parks that for years covered up the art they attempted to exhibit. Or perhaps it was because art was never the focal point -- and selling point -- it is today. Whatever the reason, area parks and art never seemed to mix. Until recently. As public art has flowered, our parks have begun to double as exhibition spaces.

Like Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, which planted magnificent Dale Chihuly glass sculptures throughout the park several years ago to much applause. During this previous Art Basel, Fairchild brought in giant rose and insect sculptures from another well-known artist, Will Ryman.

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens has ratcheted up its visual arts program as well, giving space to intriguing conceptual artists such as Ernesto Oroza ("Mapping Vizcaya," April 2011) and, most recently, Naomi Fisher.

Now this month, the Deering Estate is also opening up its art program to include an adventurous embrace of 21st-century work. As part of its SoBay Festival of the Arts, the estate will feature works from members of its residency program, including Aurora Molina and Christina Pettersson, along with artists from the first two years of LegalArt's residency, such as Jiae Hwang, Manny Prieres, and the TM Sisters -- a talented group of compelling, contemporary Miami artists. But outdoors is where some boundaries really will be pushed.

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For the first time, the Deering Estate is letting artist and teacher Ralph Provisero curate an exhibition that somewhat defies traditional notions of a sculpture show. Called “Wedding Crashers,” the show includes site-specific sculptures from 12 well-known local artists who, indeed, crashed the grounds and made works that would interact with the unique location and history of the estate.

That history starts with agriculture mogul Charles Deering, the Chicago businessman behind the International Harvester Company, who later in life dedicated himself to collecting art and amassing mansions. In the early 20th Century, he built the manor and cottages comprising his estate on Biscayne Bay, along what is now Old Cutler Road. (Some interesting connections between Deering and the previously mentioned garden parks of Miami: Charles had botanist David Fairchild work on his grounds; and his brother, James Deering, built Vizcaya.)

After his last heir died and most of the art collection was donated or sold off, the property was turned over to the state and Miami-Dade County in 1985. Today the 444-acre estate is a nature preserve and encompasses hammocks, mangroves, salt marshes, and a new, burgeoning art collection.

Like its sister mansion, Vizcaya, the Deering Estate may be best known as a wedding, birthday, and *quince* party destination, which is why Provisero named this exhibition what he did. Last

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year he installed an outdoor sculpture at the estate -- he has had a number of outdoor commissions and shows with the Dorsch Gallery -- and they asked him back to produce an entire show for the annual festival.



Provisero says he invited artists he knew would be creative and self-guided in their projects. He asked them to visit the expansive property and decide how they would interact with it, not in a blatantly obtrusive way, but also not in a traditional way. He didn't want them bringing in pre-made sculptures and plopping them down. He also wanted them to make work that would intrigue the next wedding party that passed through.

"I want to bring some communities together [that may not have interacted in the past]," he says. "The point was not to be over the top, but to break down barriers." Many of the people in South Miami may not be regulars at Wynwood art walks, just as artists and their colleagues from the county's northern reaches may have no idea that a place like the Deering Estate exists.

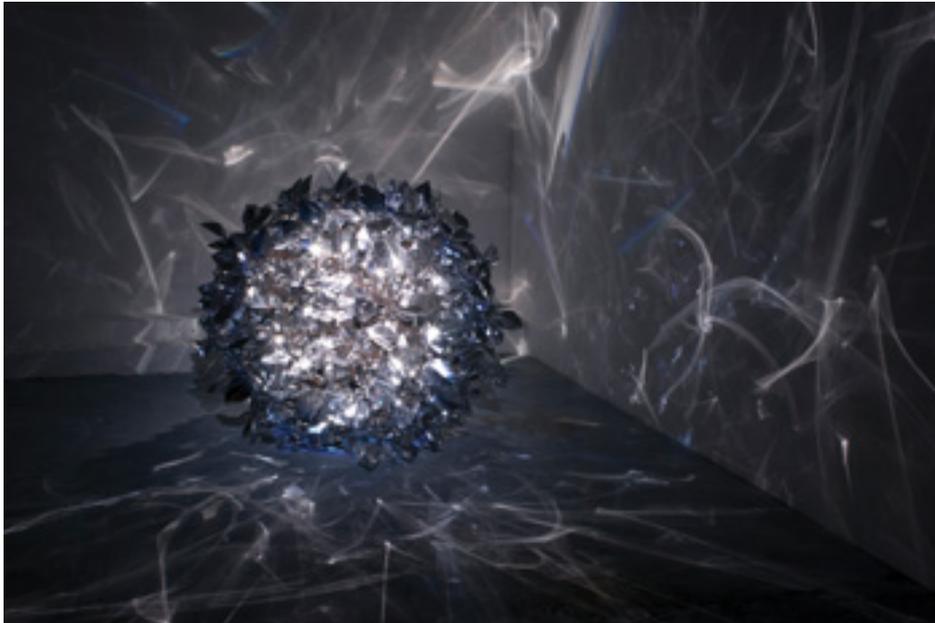
Provisero also wanted to riff on the inherently conservative event that is a wedding reception, where everything is coordinated and little is left to chance. So he decided the artists "would respond to a given area by creating an altered space through an alternate sense of reality."

In the end, the 12 artists came up with proposals that Provisero thought fit well, and which

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would be scattered all over the grounds; another part of Provisero's mission is to get visitors to explore the property, by drawing them through with specifically placed artwork. So while avoiding, for the most part, the main reception areas, the artists targeted various nooks and crannies and got to work.



Jason Hedges built a cooking spit, as he has done in the past, in a vertical teepee form. After the opening "cooking" performance, the scaffolding of the spit will remain, like the remnants of a wedding reception.

Felecia Chizuko Carlisle will float gold cubes on the water, maybe a reference to the fortune that it took to build the massive estate. The cubes will be made from actual bricks, with floating pontoons keeping them above water.

Robert Chambers devised a sculpture out of old shelving that resembled bleachers, perhaps reminiscent of a place from which to watch a wedding. Cheryl Pope wanted to bring in an antique phone booth, where people could walk in and listen to somebody's history. Bhakti Baxter was interested in taking over two positions that straddle a waterway, joining them with an architectural intervention, while Frances Trombly will set up caution tape, suggesting a designated area for something special or foreboding; the tape is actually the artist's woven, handmade piece of cloth. Wendy Wischer will provide a light sculpture tucked into the grass.

Clifton Childree took a special liking to the wine cellar of the main house, where he was told

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ghosts live. Childree is known for sets and sculptures that relate to the history of a particular era or figure, so this basement, which still holds 3000 bottles from an illegal distillery of the Prohibition era, inspired him to make an era-specific “sculpture machine.”

The exhibit technically only runs through March 10, but Provisero hopes the pieces will be invited to stay. In fact, while some of the works will be performance-based and therefore fleeting, such as a dance on a boat from Pioneer Winter, Provisero wants everyone to leave something behind. (Winter will leave his boat.) Ideally, he says, these works will form the foundation for building an ultra-contemporary sculpture collection.

Whether or not that happens, just the fact the Deering Estate was open to “Wedding Crashers” is progress, pushing the envelope a little, and in an area of town that has been off-the-beaten art path.

The SoBay Festival of the Arts kicks off on Valentine’s Day, with the official reception the night of February 18. Along with the performances and indoor and outdoor art, Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez will project her alt-cinema on the trees and landscaping near the entrance on opening night. The evening is free.

“Wedding Crashers,” through March 10, the Deering Estate at Cutler, 16701 SW 72nd Ave., Miami, 305-235-1668; www.deeringestate.org.

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