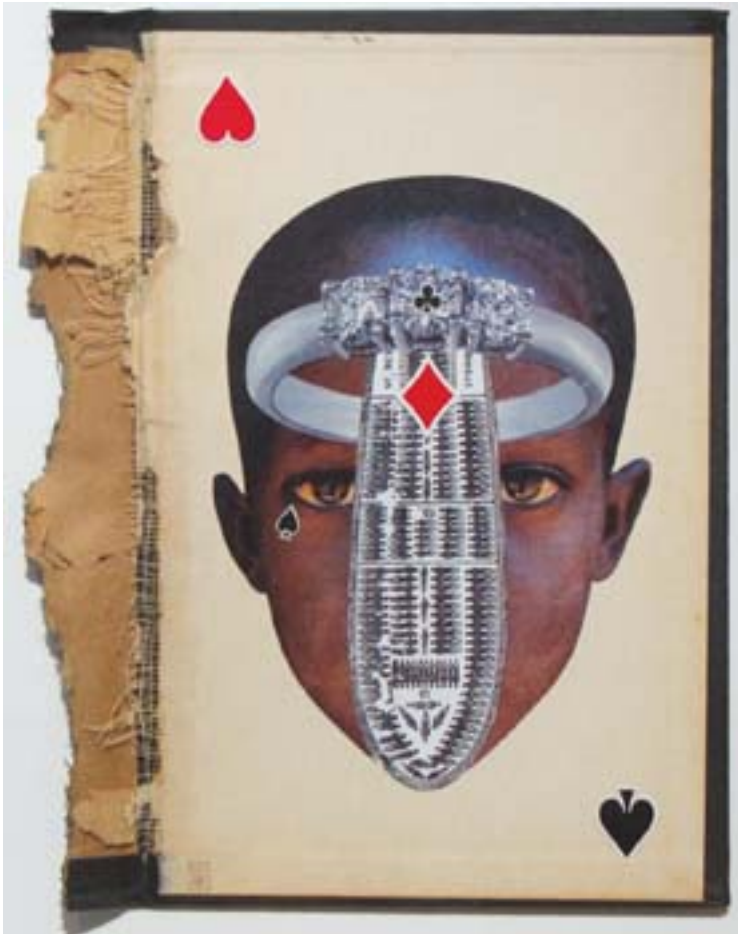


Be Our Guest

Written by Anne Tschida - BT Arts Editor
August 2013

The Fountainhead Residency is bringing artists from across the globe to Miami

A



year ago this spring, Berlin-based artist Hannes Bend opened an exhibit at the Charest-Weinberg Gallery in the Wynwood Lofts that featured piles of car tires salvaged off the coast of Fort Lauderdale. Once upon a time, thousands of tires were dumped there in the hope they would create an artificial reef. It turned out to be an ecological disaster.

The intense smell from those long-submerged rubber tubes filled the gallery, emphasizing the point the artist was trying to make about manmade disasters. Foul odor or not, it was one of the most memorable shows in recent years.

Bend was also a participant in the Fountainhead Residency, a short-term home for a number of outstanding artists who've passed through town in the past few years, enriching Miami's visual arts life.

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While the local art scene has been growing and maturing, work from beyond our borders, with its varied conceptual and national and international origins, can only help accelerate the process. Which is why the Fountainhead Residency program has become a true treasure.

Some of the artists, who hail from all over the globe, arrive in Miami for an exhibit and then are encouraged to apply to the residency; others come for the program and then land shows. What their work tends to have in common, no matter the discipline or the artists' country of origin, is a high level of quality and intriguing subject matter.

Take, for example, another German alum of the Fountainhead, Lena Schmidt, whose somber wood sculptures comprised one of the best exhibits at the artist-run Primary Projects space in the Design District in 2011. Schmidt used a thin knife to carve up found wood planks, depicting lonely urban landscapes inhabited by power lines, traffic lights, and abandoned brick buildings. The Hamburg-based artist used both her hometown and Miami as visual backdrops (although these days Detroit might come to mind when contemplating these pieces).



Andre Leon Gray came down from North Carolina for his stint at the Fountainhead, and ended up with a solo show at the Carol Jazzar Gallery and was featured at the Scope art fair during Art Basel Miami Beach 2012. His work, made from such items as books, brooms, tar, and sports

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trophies, is deeply rooted in social commentary and the black experience, with titles such as *Temporary Government Housing* and *There's Always Room, They Say, At The Top*.

These three artists are representative of the sophisticated perspectives and arresting work Fountainhead residents have brought to South Florida. But there have been many others.

Sitting in the living room of her home in Morningside, Kathryn Mikesell, who founded Fountainhead with her husband Dan in 2008, clearly loves the results of the venture thus far. The house is filled with art from Fountainhead residents, and is across the street from the MiMo-style home that hosts (usually) three residents at a time, for no more than two months.

Mikesell's two children, who are as ubiquitous at art openings as she is, are lounging about, while fish swim around in a mini-pond set into the floor. This is a laid-back operation.



It has to be. One of the questions Mikesell freely address when artists are applying deals with the “bathroom situation.” (Answer: There are two, with three separate bedrooms and workspaces.) Which isn't to say that it isn't a pretty nice gig. The house is near the bay, and only blocks from bus stops on the Boulevard. Once an artist is accepted into residency, Fountainhead will pick up airfare, as well as foot the bill for the accommodations.

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In addition, after the brief but intense residency, if artists want to stick around, they may find space in the Fountainhead Studios, which currently house more than 35 artists on two floors of a revamped warehouse at 7339 NW Miami Ct. in Little Haiti.

When it comes to who will receive a residency and studio space, Mikesell says a major focus is on how artists complement each other and “bounce off” each other’s work, hence the close quarters. The point of both programs, she says, is to get artists to interact. If she feels an applicant might be unwilling to work with fellow artists, that will result in a rejection. But if that’s not an issue, any artist should feel free to apply.

On this early-summer evening, one of the artists working in the rear garage area is Jamaican-born Ebony G. Patterson, whose large, colorful collages and canvases reflect the bling, tensions, and expressive character that spring from the raw dancehall subculture of her native island. An exhibit of her work, along with that of Kenyan artist Peterson Kamwathi, opened in June (and runs through September 8) at Florida International University’s Frost Art Museum. It’s called “Six Degrees of Separate Nations.”

A couple of months earlier, during one of the Fountainhead’s periodic open-house nights, Los Angeles-based Matt Sheridan was busy explaining that his video work was based on his abstract paintings, then morphed into its own art form. Behind him, his work screened on a living room wall.

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