

A congress of curators is coming to town



It has changed Miami profoundly over the past two decades. In an inside-baseball type of way, those in the art scene knew that one of the largest art fairs in the world, Art Basel Miami Beach, landing in South Florida would make a mark when it set down in 2002, specifically on the economy of South Beach and an elite tourism.

But few, locally or nationally, could have predicted the much broader consequences it would have on the makeup and reputation of Miami itself. Since then money has poured in to support local culture, through such heavyweights as the Knight Foundation and Miami-Dade County, and through other prestigious and lucrative grants.

The visual arts started to shape the landscape itself, with the Arsht Center for the Performing Arts becoming one of nation's bigger performing centers. Local playwrights and choreographers created waves across the country, and formerly nascent museums grew into major local attractions. On a Thursday night or Sunday afternoon, arts institutions might be the choice for an outing as much as a traditional visit to a beach or park.

Nonetheless, aside from art fairs, Miami isn't really an arts destination for an international crowd. That reputation, however, is also changing, thanks, for instance, to the arrival of the International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art (known as IKT in Germany, where the

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organization, which now has more than 500 members, was formed more than 45 years ago).



For only the second time in its history, the IKT Congress, which meets every year, will be held in North America (the first was in 2008, in Montreal); they're coming to Miami in mid-April with follow-up programming the week after in Havana.

Your average layperson may not appreciate the importance of this, but for those in the art world, it gives Miami street cred and opens doors.

To begin, this is how IKT describes itself and its mission:

“In practical terms, IKT offers its members the opportunity to find partners for the co-production of exhibitions, publications, or other events. At a time when the art world is increasingly structured around biennales and art fairs, IKT’s annual congresses provide a moment for reflection and in-depth discussion amongst colleagues.”

According to IKT’s director, Julia Draganovic, from her base in Osnabrück, Germany, IKT was formed by a group of mainly German-speaking “exhibition makers” around Swiss-born art

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historian Harald Szeemann.

“In the early 1970s,” she says, “Szeemann and his colleagues and friends wanted to create meeting and networking opportunities for a group of professionals who worked in the field of contemporary art. They organized annual meetings and site visits to investigate art scenes.” According to Draganovic, Szeemann first coined the term “curator.”



With the exception of Tel Aviv (2012) and Montreal, the Congress has always been held in European cities.

A concerted effort to bring the meeting to Miami began in 2017 in Oslo, where the Congress was being held that year, when IKT board member Ombretta Agrò-Andruff and members Susan Caraballo and Cathy Byrd, Miami-based curators, brought in representatives from the Wolfsonian-FIU, Pérez Art Museum Miami, the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami, and other Miami-based organizations, and presented Miami as a potential venue for the IKT Congress, adding in Havana as a natural “part two” for the event.

“I was able to get several Miami-based curators to join IKT and attend congresses over the past three to four years, and they all accepted with enthusiasm the challenge to bring the Congress

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to Miami,” says Agrò-Andruff, after returning from a stint in Italy. “We created the itinerary thinking about the diversity that is at the core of what makes Miami such a special place.”

Aside from introducing local curators to their international counterparts and vice versa, Agrò-Andruff says, she has an extra interest in holding the conference here.

“Personally, I felt that the Miami cultural scene has a lot to offer, but that it is often perceived as being heavily focused on the commercial aspect of the art ecosystem -- this has been the blessing and the curse of Art Basel,” she explains. “It’s my hope that those who will attend the Congress will be able to experience the breadth and depth of what this city has to offer -- from the large institutions to smaller artists-run spaces, the artists, residency programs, and everything in between.”



Experiencing the art in Havana seemed to be a clear extension of that outreach. “The relation between Miami and Havana is quite obvious,” says Draganovic. “The Cuban art scene has not been widely explored by our IKT members yet, and the research about the main topics of the IKT symposium 2019 -- resilience and sustainability -- will find a natural continuation there.”

Agrò-Andruff agrees with this multi-regional collaboration. The IKT Euro-centric view is

somewhat lacking in a knowledge of the neighborhoods around us. “We are hoping to increase the visibility of our association in the U.S., [but also] ... Central and Latin America and the Caribbean, and obviously Miami is the perfect springboard for this.” Caraballo will be spearheading this part of the art excursion.

The Congress will kick off on April 11 at the Wolfsonian-FIU, and the subsequent three days will involve visits to 17 other Miami-Dade arts institutions and 19 individual events, five of which will be free and open to the public (the four-day event in general will cost 70 Euros, about \$80). There will be keynote speakers and a “sustainable cultural production” symposium at PAMM.

According to the most updated program itinerary, the part-two, **post-Congress** will take place in Havana from April 15 through April 18. The IKT Miami Committee had been working closely with Havana-based curators and art professionals who are assisting with organizing a program for the group.

The Miami committee is made up of 12 members, with some influential people who helped bring the Congress to Miami and Havana, including independent curators Byrd, Tami Katz-Freiman, Claire Breukel, Leilani Lynch; PAMM's René Morales; and ICA's Gean Moreno and Stephanie Seidel.

The visit will include Havana institutions such as the *Casa de las Americas*, *Museo de Bellas Artes*, and *Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam*, as well as artists' studios. The Havana Biennial will open the weekend prior, so the group will visit several special projects organized in conjunction with that event.

Registration is open until March 15 for the Miami part. The Havana segment is filled as of this writing. For more information on the 2019 Congress and previous events, and for registration, visit www.iktsite.org.

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