

artnet



The Haas Brothers The Strawberry Tree by at R & Company x Marianne Boesky for Design Miami 2024 Photo: Kevin Todora; Courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center

DESIGN MIAMI: 'BLUE SKY' OPTIMISM MEETS BOLD EXPERIMENTATION IN A SHIFTING MARKET

BY CAROLINE ROUX

December 2, 2024

Given the current state of the news cycle, to give Design Miami the over-arching theme of “Blue Sky,” as this year’s newly minted curatorial director Glenn Adamson has done, could either be considered ironic or delusional, or maybe just sweetly optimistic.

Still, the Miami edition of [Design Miami](#) (it started in the Floridian city in 2005, hence the name), is known for its more lotus-eating vibes. If the exhibits at the Basel version tend to the historic, and [Paris](#) is the ideal spot for elegance and style, then [Miami](#) is the place for the experimental and the upbeat. To wit, the Haas Brothers’ large-scale Strawberry Tree that is being co-presented by R& Company and Marianne Boesky in this year’s tent. “Glass is one of the most complicated and collaborative and most modern and historic crafts out there,” say the LA-based brothers, known for their fantastically trippy celebrations of the natural world. The tree is no exception with its bronze trunk encased in thousands of vintage blue beads and hung with luminescent pink glass drops, like oversized strawberries.

Since last October, the fair has been under the new ownership of Jesse Lee, a 40-ish resident of Los Angeles who cut his teeth in his twenties matching brands from Asos to Gucci to experiences from youth workshops to Coachella parties. Combing data from his invitation-only website, Basic.Space, that sells cool stuff (high and vintage fashion, contemporary design) to even cooler customers, he has deduced that design is now the major focus of Gen Z and Millennials. “It’s the next big thing for people in music and fashion,” he says.

In a world where there are too many fairs, and to survive they need to evolve, Lee’s entrepreneurial instincts could be for the best. He is, for example, introducing Devon Turnbull’s OJAS / USM sound system to the fair, on the grounds that “if you’re going to spend half a million on a kitchen, you’re probably happy to spend \$100,000 on speakers.”

But also because he believes in the experiential component. (It was, after all, the food offerings and the performances that helped make the early Frieze into a massive success. And look what's happened since.)

Lee is interested in finding new locations: Aspen and Seoul have been mentioned and he trialled a reasonably successful LA version in May this year. "I love Hawaii," he says, "but it's a bit far." Meanwhile he is increasing the Curio programme, which allows younger dealers to show at cheaper booths, and the range. For Lee, cars and watches (the dude categories) are not beyond consideration, and he wants to reinforce the fair's connection to fashion. This year, the Zanotta Sacco [bean bags](#), commissioned by Matthieu Blazy for Bottega Veneta's October fashion show will be on show.

Out of the 54 dealers coming to Miami, only a small number now show exclusively historic design. One of them is the Parisian Patrick Seguin, who is bringing a selection of iconic works by the 20th Century designer Jean Royere. "I would prefer it if there was more historic work in the fair," he says. "But most of it is coming from Europe, and shipping furniture is not like shipping a painting."

Seguin, however, is an industry expert and his offerings are at the highest end—the Royere Sphere table is \$500,000. He has a lot of American clients prepared to spend a fortune on these rare pieces. "At this level, the design market is disconnected from economic reality," says Seguin whose works appeal to those looking for furniture with the same status that a Picasso or a Basquiat might confer.

For Marc Benda, of New York's Friedman Benda, it is these top collectors who come on day one who tend to make the venture a success. "But southern Florida is a massive market. There are locals who come back several times," he says. "There is an openness in the Miami mindset, and I've often launched designers' careers here, including [maximalist] Misha Kahn and [gothic crafter] Chris Schanck." This year, he has a two-part booth. On one side: the first-ever furniture project, clad in multi-colored Mexican tiles, by the exuberant architect Javier Sanosiain; on the other a new lamp—called Robo—by the Italians Formafantasma, that plays into their insistence on rigor and restraint.



Marc Fish, Ethereal Bed (2024). Courtesy of Sarah Myerscough.

"It took us a while to key into what works in Miami," says London-based Sarah Myerscough, who is known for having created a significant market for sophisticated but authentically craft-based furniture. "We needed to lighten our palette, get designers to use woods like maple and ash, and respond to the climate." A couple of years ago, she created a sell-out booth, painting its walls with seductive yellows and blues and showing work including an Angela Demann sissal chandelier that tumbled like hair above a Christopher Kurtz maple table. ("The paints were by [LA

design queen] Kelly Wearstler. I figured she'd understand the aesthetic," says Myerscough.) This year, she is bringing a sinuously styled bed, with a transparent canopy, by Marc Fish and an equally rococo swing by Dana Barnes and Christopher Kurtz (each around \$200,000), all installed in a dusty pink dreamscape.

"Historically," says Trevyn McGowan of South African gallery Southern Guild (now with an outpost in Los Angeles), "Miami has been good for us." Specializing in work from the African continent, McGowan has effectively created the international careers for artists such as Andile Dyalvane and Zizipho Poswa. Their work will be among the 12 ceramists she is showing this year. "Clay is the most enduring, widespread material across the continent," says McGowan. "With it, the artists explore everything from women's rights to rituals to technology. It links up the continent and every possible narrative."



Christopher Kurtz + Dana Barnes, *Between Us Tête-à-Tête* (2024). Courtesy of Sarah Myerscough.

Where once contemporary design, and even near-historic work, was measured in quality and significance against 18th century furniture and porcelain, or the now questionable category of tribal art, as Marc Benda points out, "It is now measured against the contemporary art market. But we have a much more limited inventory."

However, Sarah Myerscough believes that "Design feels like it's on a firmer footing right now than the art market. But then, the price points aren't as high. And people need to furnish their homes."

Design Miami begins this week, with an invite-only preview on Dec. 5, and open to the public Dec. 6-10. The fair is at Convention Center Drive & 19th Street, Miami Beach, Florida.