

OCEAN DRIVE®

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SOPHIE MONK

ON THE TOWN

nam and heading off to a \$750-a-plate dinner in honor of the Bass Museum's exhibition of the princess' imperial-jade collection, probably the most elitist exhibition a public museum anywhere has ever mounted. A later event was a \$200-a-head tea ceremony, all this in a publicly owned museum that should be spending its efforts on programs that actually reach out to the neighborhood, even if it means sacrificing all those photos in the society pages. Although I think some Miami museums should, from time to time, show us paintings and sculptures from the several thousand years of civilization that took place before 1950 or so, this jade collection does not really do it. The City—in the form of the commission and the Cultural Arts Council—ought to be demanding some accountability and exacting some activity from the museum it owns and underwrites, like exhibitions that really engage us, like a wide array of programs of general interest, like classes for kids that might bring some life to the museum on a Saturday morning.

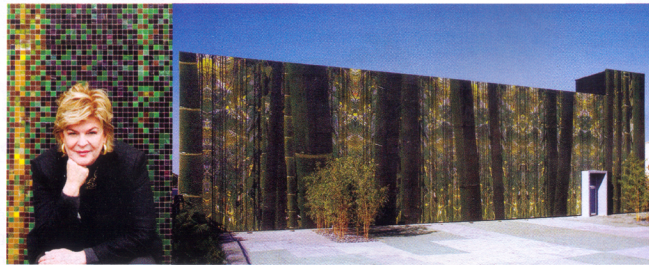
Which brings me back to the library, the ballet and the park. We need that park redone, and fast. The CANDO district might be a nice idea, though I don't know many self-respecting artists who think it is cool to live in a neighborhood where the average mixed drink costs \$20, if you can even get *into* Skybar. It seems to me that artists are going to want to live where their surroundings are not so prepackaged or pricey, but I will be glad to be wrong. However, in my experience, emerging artists like a little bit of toughness, some rigor and a lot of spontaneity.

At the very least, there is the area from 21st Street south to Lincoln Road, which has not been bought up, sanitized and regurgitated as an offering to the **ultra-cool, ultrachic typical Art Basel attendee**. Maybe as a start, the City could figure out how to wrest the boarded-up Collins Park Hotel complex (starting with the building that had the awful fire) from the hands of its do-nothing owners, but given our Byzantine attitude toward the rights of owners to let their buildings languish to the point beyond dereliction, that is not likely.

So perhaps start with what we might be able to control—the park. Get it done. Get some activity in there, and then maybe cafés facing the park will follow. And we need the Bass to open up what by all historical, aesthetic and urban rights should be its front door, and then do something that might encourage people to use it.

To see what the Bass could and should be, one only need go to the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami on a Wednesday afternoon, first Saturday

116 Ocean Drive May 2007



Clockwise from above: Ella Fontanals-Cisneros, in front of her CIFO museum downtown, has merged with the Miami Art Museum; the brilliant façade of CIFO is a tile mural based on photographic images of bamboo forests; Museum of Contemporary Art director Bonnie Clearwater with architect Charles Gwathmey, who will design MoCA's expansion; the courtyard leading to MoCA's entrance.



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of the month, or any time during the summer when many dozens of school-aged kids, from elementary on up through high school, participate in classes or camp or one of a number of youth-oriented programs. Like the Bass, MoCA is a City institution, but the director, **the amazing, energetic and indefatigable Bonnie Clearwater**, takes quite seriously her mandate to educate young writers, artists and thinkers and to give kids the kind of self-esteem and powerful self-image that comes with creating something worthwhile. MoCA is also fulfilling that all-important societal need to pass culture on from one generation to the next.

It is also intriguing to see what a well-run arts institution can do to foster neighborhood renewal. North Miami is a city of many faces—from the glamorous bay-front houses in Keystone Point to the far more modest inland neighborhoods that have attracted their share of immigrants from the Caribbean. The commercial spine near MoCA has had its ups and downs over the years, but anyone looking now can see the direction it is heading—which is forward. There are new restaurants, antiques shops, galleries and even a Starbucks that is the unofficial museum café for MoCA. That is what can and should happen in a museum district—**life, activity, regeneration**.

MoCA is about to embark on a much needed expansion project that will offer more education and exhibition space. Charles Gwathmey, the New York architect who designed the existing building, is doing the expansion, as well, and it should prove to be a

seamless process that will produce another quietly elegant building.

Ella Fontanals-Cisneros' decision to merge her South Miami museum, Miami Art Central, with the Miami Art Museum caused quite a bit of buzz when it was announced, both positive and negative. The merger will give MAM quite a significant footing in the worlds of Latin-American and contemporary art, as **MAC's exhibitions and programming are among the finest around**. But South Miamians (and those who live in what could be considered the other So-B, that is, South of Brickell—a geographical designation that actually covers many, many square miles all the way to Homestead or even the Keys) have rightly feared that MAC's brilliant and edgy programming will be consolidated with MAM's and all take place on Flagler Street. Scarily enough, there was not a program on the agenda starting April 15th.

That being said, at least some of MAC's innovative programming—not to mention some of the best curating in town—will live on at CIFO, the

not-yet-two-year-old home of the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation in its new building, a former boxing gym transformed by the wonderful Miami architect Rene Gonzalez. CIFO's brilliant façade is a tile mural based on photographic images of bamboo forests that were manipulated into a work of art and then, at Bisazza Tile, made into a million color pixels and then a million little tiles. The design is a knockout: **The tile jungle looks out on a simple, artful plaza planted sparsely with bamboo**, almost as a metaphor.

It is interesting, and important, that CIFO is located in what is now considered nowhere-land at Northeast 10th Street and North Miami Avenue, which is a straight shot down the street to the forthcoming Museum Park (or the park formerly known as Bicentennial), and eventually might be at the core of a fantastic downtown district that would include apartments (some of which are rising right now along Biscayne Boulevard), commerce and culture. For the moment, the neighborhood is, well, dicey. Not long ago I was taking a well-known book designer to see CIFO, and on our way there we were treated to such sights as a junkie walking along the street in underpants and a bra—and let me say that it only got worse after that. Still, **it is a neighborhood with lots of potential**, and one hopes that the level of gentrification will not be such that it is totally sanitized (but for my money, the junkies can go). In fact, it is actually the kind of neighborhood that could attract emerging artists, with its combination of grit and a little glimmer of glamour. ■