



Art Basel Week 2015 guide: Public and free, in 3D



Work by Tim Ulrichs-Wentrup will be on display at the Public sector of Art Basel Miami Beach 2015. **Joachim Schulz**

BY SIOBHAN MORRISSEY

Matt Johnson's sculpture of bent metal — *Twisted Jersey Barrier* — could easily serve as a commentary on the driving skills of Miamians. It also perfectly illustrates the theme of this year's sculpture garden created for Collins Park during Art Basel Miami Beach.

Metaforms — a play on the word metaphor — is both the title and the theme of the sculpture show, which includes more than two dozen works and explores the

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public perception of form. That is, form from anything as seemingly simple as a chair to the multiple meanings assigned to thought bubbles that appear in cartoons.

“A lot of the works are about taking something that is a recognizable form, but then reimagining that, transforming it into something that then takes on different layers of meaning, and of course a different aesthetic,” says Nicholas Baume, who as curator of the fair’s Public sector selected the works for display. As for Johnson’s Jersey barrier, Baume laughs and says, “I cannot say it was conceived with any specific commentary on Miami driving, but you are free to editorialize on that.”

Baume, who also serves as director of the Public Art Fund in New York City, hopes the sculpture will prompt people to think about the layered meanings inherent to Jersey barriers. “Of course,” he says, “it’s a design object, an architectural form that is about control — controlling space, controlling access, keeping boundaries. It also has, in a way, a dialogue about power invested in that form.”

The same holds true for the untitled chain installation that Melvin Edwards updated from a work he created in the 1960s. “It also speaks to power, control and obviously the many associations — social, cultural, historical — one can have with the idea of a chain,” Baume says.

“And there’s Sterling Ruby’s *Big Yellow Mama*, which looks like this bright sun, joyful, almost like playful park furniture that you can just imagine kids clambering all over it, people taking a selfie,” he says. “But of course, it is based on the electric chair that was used by the state of Alabama, notoriously, for executions. So, I was really interested in how a number of these very recognizable objects also carry and resonate with metaphorical meanings and connections. I think visitors will enjoy peeling back that onion.”

Recognizing that not everyone will feel comfortable sitting on an electric chair, Baume included at least one sculpture that embraces power as a healing rather than controlling force. That’s the Sam Falls installation, a “healing pavilion, which is constructed with terrazzo made of healing gemstones,” Baume says. “We

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talk of power that's the more controlling kind. Here's power to heal. So, power in different ways being expressed in different work."

Hank Willis Thomas provides a more playful place to rest the bones — that of a speech bubble repurposed into a park bench.

"You can think of it just as a comic book form, but, of course, what Hank's been doing in much of his work is talking about freedom of speech, about people enabled to give voice to their own experience, people who are marginalized having the opportunity to speak," Baume says. "That's why I was interested in this thread about forms that are recognizable, but then peel back layers. I think bringing some of these objects together that do speak about power and culture in interesting ways will, hopefully, develop a resonant kind of experience for people who are bringing very different perspectives to the work."

Then there are sculptures that are powerful just by their pure presence, such as the monumental works by Tony Cragg and Ursula Von Rydingsvard.

Other works, by their very titles, seem ideally suited to Miami Beach's seaside setting.

There's Ishmael Randall-Weeks' *Paraiso*, which means Paradise in English; Francisco Ugarte's *Sunlight I*; and Robert Wilson's *Einstein Chair* (from *Einstein on the Beach*). Of course, Rubén Ortiz Torres' *Pimped Shopping Rides* could also play well with all the new glamorous development taking place in South Florida.