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FEATURED

## Art Basel shines in Opa-locka

Johania Charles Miami Times Staff Writer  
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“Art of Transformation” attendees engage with Phillip Thomas’ “High-Sis in the Garden of Heathen.”  
(3PM Media)

“Art of Transformation,” Opa-locka’s grand-scale art experience, returned to Miami Art Week after a two-year hiatus.

The free, four-day event organized by Ten North Group, formerly the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (CDC), was South Florida's largest display of African diaspora art presented during Art Basel, according to Opa-locka City Manager Darvin Williams.



Chef Jodhan Mourra introduces dishes at Café Afrique during the opening reception for “Art of Transformation.”  
(3PM Media)

It kicked off with a VIP reception last Wednesday featuring a live band and cultural dishes, and concluded Sunday night with the “Exodus to Opa-locka Grande Finale Block Party” hosted by CBS anchor Najahe Sherman and 103.5 The Beats’ Papa Keith and Stichiz.

The party also featured performances by Eric Roberson, Otis Kemp, Ronnie Vop, Angee Griffin, Gia Wyre, Chadwick and Dswervo.



Attendees at a VIP opening reception preview Café Afrique's African diaspora-inspired cuisine.

(3PM Media)

Now in its eighth year, “Art of Transformation” was created to foster economic growth within the city, create exposure for artists of the African diaspora and draw the Basel spotlight and its audience to Opa-locka.

“We’ve engaged in a planning process over the past couple of years to ensure that what we’re doing in the creative field would support and help actualize our desire to provide a community of choice for working families,” said Willie Logan, founder and CEO of Ten North Group. “This really is a community effort to bring the community together and demonstrate that art has the healing power – the power to build community, wealth – and can also be a catalyst for development.”



Willie Logan (L), founder and CEO of Ten North Group, formerly the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation, is pictured with curator Jean-Jacques Stephen Alexis.

(3PM Media)

Three blocks along Ali Baba Avenue were shut down for the art spectacle. The Arts & Recreation Center and Harry Hurt Building were transformed into temporary gallery spaces for the “This Here Place: Africa and the Global Diaspora” and “The Beautiful Human Love” exhibitions.

“We also wanted to bring this closer to the people so they don’t have to go 40-50 miles away in two hours of traffic in order to be engaged in fine art,” said Logan. “They don’t have to be an art collector with a VIP card to gain access to something like this.”





Café Afrique, a pop-up restaurant situated inside Opa-locka's historic train station during Miami Art Week.

(3PM Media)

"This Here Place: Africa and the Global Diaspora," curated by Tumelo Mosaka, was inspired by Toni Morrison's "Beloved" novel about the lasting and traumatic impact of slavery. The exhibition included pieces from international artists that included Senegalese mixed-media artist Viyé Diba, Malian artist Abdoulaye Konaté, Cameroonian painter Barthélémy Togo, Jamaican visual artist Phillip Thomas and Haitian artist Florine Démosthène. New-York based artist Mickalene Thomas and Chicago photographer Dawoud Bey were also part of the show.

"'A Beautiful Human Love' was a letter Jacques Stephen Alexis wrote to mankind," said Jean-Jacques Stephen Alexis, son of the acclaimed Haitian writer and curator of the exhibition of the same name. "He started off wishing everyone a happy new year, then hoped the new year would make humanity reflect on their actions toward one another. He wrote about how we can have different opinions but still love each other."



“The Beautiful Human Love” exhibition during Opa-locka’s “Art of Transformation” featured works created by Haitian artists. (3PM Media)

The younger Alexis wished to honor his father on what would have been his 100th birthday and decided to name the exhibition, which included a framed painting of the elder Alexis, after him.



Dozens of people socialize at the VIP opening reception of Opa-locka's "Art of Transformation" last Wednesday.  
(3PM Media)

"Haiti dedicated the whole year to him and there are also all kinds of events around the world, in France, Belgium and Canada to celebrate," said the curator. "So when they asked me to do this show, I thought why not include this exhibition as part of the 100-year celebration?"

Upon entering the Hurt building, event attendees were greeted by a private art collection that painted a picture of the evolution of art in Haiti. The exhibition also included more modern works by Philippe Attie, Fred Thomas, Claudine Exume and Jan Jak II – the younger Alexis' artist name.



A portrait of Jacques Stephen Alexis was displayed at “The Beautiful Human Love” exhibition, which was curated by his son.

(Courtesy of Ten North Group)



“We were interested in bringing artists and curators from the diaspora,” said Logan. “It doesn’t really matter the color of their skin, though most do have a darker complexion. We wanted them to be able to talk about their life experiences and what’s happening in the community or with their families.”

Programming included an educational component for local children. Logan told The Miami Times that his organization arranged for about 60 children to be bused to the event to participate in an art session with master artists to create their own masterpieces.

“Three to four years from now when we have this show, I really want to see us feature local artists from Opa-locka,” said Alexis. “Everything we do is for the kids.”



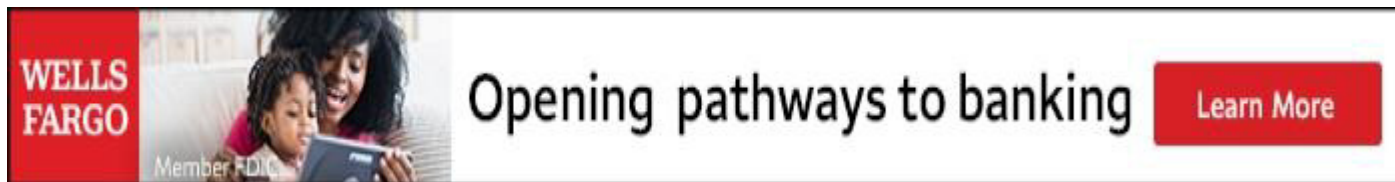
An elaborate setup of culturally inspired dishes at the Café Afrique pop-up.

(3PM Media)

On Thursday and Friday night, Opa-locka’s historic train station was transformed into Café Afrique, an elegant boho-themed pop-up restaurant experience priced at \$50 per person with African diaspora-inspired cuisine by chef Jodhan Mourra.

Logan said the intention behind revamping and repurposing historic spaces in the city can show both locals and outsiders the potential of the city and change current narratives.

“It’s so important that we become a part of what’s going on in our city,” said Papa Keith. “For too long we’ve watched billions of dollars come into this city and none of it trickles down to anywhere else besides South Beach or Brickell and now Wynwood, but we want some of that, too.”

A horizontal banner advertisement for Wells Fargo. On the left, the Wells Fargo logo is displayed in white text on a red background. Below the logo, the text "Member FDIC" is visible. To the right of the logo is a photograph of a woman and a young girl looking at a tablet together. The main text of the banner reads "Opening pathways to banking" in a large, black, sans-serif font. To the right of this text is a red rectangular button with the white text "Learn More".

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