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FEATURED

Hampton House furthers artful ambitions with 'Invisible Luggage'

New exhibitions explores the unseen burdens we all carry

Douglas Markowitz, Artburst

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Installation view of "Invisible Luggage" at the Historic Hampton House.

(Courtesy of Historic Hampton House by Oriol Tarridas)

Last year, the buzziest destination during Miami Art Week wasn't on the beach or in Wynwood. It was at a historically significant former motel in Brownsville little-known outside of the local community.

The Historic Hampton House on NW 27th Avenue, just north of the Airport Expressway is one of the last standing Green Book hotels, listed in the famous travel guide as a refuge for Black travelers in the Jim Crow south. Opened in 1961 as a luxury motor hotel by Harry and Florence Markowitz, a white Jewish couple, the two-story MiMo-style Hampton House became a magnet for celebrities, politicians, and significant figures of color looking for upscale lodgings. It was a destination in the years prior to desegregation, when famous and influential African Americans came to Miami for business or pleasure only to be turned away from "Whites Only" hotels elsewhere.

The room where Martin Luther King Jr. stayed, complete with an escape door in case of dangerous situations, is preserved on the lower floor. So is the room given to Muhammad Ali, who won his first heavyweight title in Miami in 1964. The evening he spent at the Hampton House with Malcolm X, Jim Brown, and Sam Cooke is immortalized in Regina King's 2020 film "One Night in Miami."

Now, 60 years later, a new generation is aiming to put the Hampton House back on the map by making it a destination for art. They opened their first art show, "Gimme Shelter," during Miami Art Week in 2023, as well as a show from Brazilian street artist KOBRA.

Featuring sections curated by Miami's top galleries and anchored by Palm Beach collector Beth Rubin DeWoody's holdings, "Gimme Shelter" attracted plenty of movers and shakers from Miami's art scene and beyond to the museum. Local artists such as Reginald O'Neal and Jared McGriff exhibited next to art world stars such as Rashid Johnson, Terry Atkins, Charles Gaines, and influential funk musician George Clinton.

Curb Gardner II, creative director at the Hampton House, says embracing art is a way for the museum and community gathering space to move with the times.

"It's a shift of the institution," he says. "We're a space to bridge racial, cultural, ethnic, social, and religious divides, and we have to tell that story."

That mission continues with "Invisible Luggage." Convening a new set of artists under a new theme, the show's title derives from a conversation between Gardner and an artist at Rudin DeWoody's birthday party.



"Invisible Luggage" is on view at the Historic Hampton House through Feb. 15, 2025./

(Courtesy of Historic Hampton House by Oriol Tarridas)



Artworks centered around travel and place are a feature of "Invisible Luggage."

(Courtesy of Historic Hampton House by Oriol Tarridas)

“We're sitting and we're talking about just where we are in the country, where we are individually, and in that dialogue the phrase came up. We have all this luggage, and most of it is invisible,” he recalls. “You don't know what people are carrying with them. I may see you happy in one moment, but there are things going on in your life that are sad, or things that you're carrying with you. And that luggage doesn't allow me to see you as you see yourself, or how you want to be seen.”

Along with Rudin DeWoody, a reshuffled curatorial team including Laura Dvorkin, Maynard Monrow, Zoe Lukov and Auttrianna Ward built the show around this theme. Artworks centered around travel and place are a feature.

A painting by Hugo McCloud made of plastic merchandise bags depicting an overladen Black motorcycle traveler greets visitors up front. Nearby is Barbara T. Smith's "Trunk Piece," an installation of a suitcase filled with precious stones. A sequence of photos documents Marina Abramovic's performance piece "The Lovers," in which she and partner Ulay walked for three months toward each other from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China.



Barbara T. Smith, Trunk Piece, 1969-72.
Antique trunk, Persian carpet, 100 unique objects, dimensions variable.

(Courtesy of Barbara T. Smith and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York)

A group of works by the Highwaymen, a group of Black Floridian landscape painters active during the mid-20th century, concludes the show. Dreamy beaches, surreal swamps, and other plein air scenes by Roy McLendon, Mary Ann Carroll, and Ellis Buckner feature in this section, all captured by the mostly self-taught traveling artists that painted and sold their work from their car trunks.

Other artists featured in the show include some prominent art world names such as Frank Bowling, Ed Clark, Sam Gilliam, and Cecilia Vicuña. A few locals also made the cut: There's a ceramic work by Joel Gaitan as well as a painting by Tomm El-Saieh, a major advocate of Haitian art and artists equally known for his abstract work drawing on the country's culture.

As impressive as “Invisible Luggage” is, it's still a massive effort for the small institution. The Hampton House is a short-staffed nonprofit run by a community trust; preservationist Dr. Enid Pickney spearheaded a \$6 million renovation in 2015 aimed at turning the hotel back into a community resource. Gardner hopes the increased attention paid will help raise funds to provide further programming.

“We're a little organization with big ideas, and we're implementing them the best that we can,” he says. With more support, we can do a better job of it. But at the very base is always excellence and quality, first and foremost, just like the excellence of each of the artists that performed here.”

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Marina Abramović, *The Lovers (Seated Figure)*, 1988, printed 2019. © Marina Abramović.

(Adam Reich/Courtesy the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York/Los Angeles)



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Mary Ann Carroll, Golden Reflections, ca. 1970s. Oil on Upson Board, 24 x 36 in.

(Courtesy of Mark Lerner and John Biederwolf Collection)



"Invisible Luggage" opened to the public on Dec. 2, 2024.

(Courtesy of Historic Hampton House by Oriol Tarridas)

Seamless tech.

2023 TUCSON Limited production model with optional leather seats. Actual production model may vary. 2023 TUCSON Limited Coming Fall 2024.