

The Betsy's Florida-Georgian façade



# The arts incubator

*Jonathan Pluznik, co-founder of The Betsy Hotel, South Beach, is not only showcasing talented artists at his chic South Beach hotel, but also nurturing and promoting talent through artist-in-residence programmes and communal creative spaces*

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The arts in all their forms have long held a special place in the heart of Jonathan Pluznik. As the son of three-time Pulitzer Prize-nominated poet Hyam Pluznik, he grew up with an appreciation for creativity. This passion has come to life in the form of his and his wife Lesley Goldwasser's, art-focused South Beach hotel, The Betsy.

"Soon after opening in 2009, we held our first public programme to honour Zimbabwean singer, Prudence Mabhena, who was featured in Roger Ross Williams' Oscar-winning documentary about a band of disabled musicians," he recalls of the short film *Music by Prudence*. "The event attracted a broad section of Miami for a screening and musical performance alongside our luxury hotel guests. Since then we've worked with prominent partners in dance, theatre, literature and visual art."

The hotel's mission was unique: that public spaces are more than just waiting areas, and that art builds bridges to global understanding – a worthy endeavour that's needed in the world now, more than ever. The hotel has nine galleries, not to mention art in its bar, atrium, elevators and board room, and hosts year-round shows and

exhibitions, mostly in the field of photography. Alongside art, there is a focus on literature. "Our artist-in-residence programme – The Writer's Room at The Betsy – has hosted more than 1,000 visiting artists, the vast majority of writers," explains Pluznik.

## **WHY WAS IT SO IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT THE BETSY DEVELOPED ITS OWN ARTS AND CULTURE PROGRAMME?**

It is widely known that Ocean Drive in Miami Beach is one of the most beautiful beachfront thoroughfares in the world and has long been a destination for the world's most interesting, and interested, people. While Miami and Miami Beach have a multi-generational reputation for fun, it has always been a destination for artists of all kinds. It is fun to remember that before Las Vegas, this was where Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack came to play. Many stay for an extended period and are looking for opportunities to enjoy arts and culture as well as the sea, sun and sand. We believed that there was a large audience looking for an elevated, sophisticated and culturally rich environment, and so we were intentional about creating a hotel dedicated to the comforts of home where – like in our own homes – art lives and public spaces are created for purposes of



above, The Gallery at The Betsy featuring art by Carlos Betancourt  
 facing page, **RAY TENORIO**. *The Journey of Life*. 2022. Monochromatic colour pencils, pastel, 300gm mix media canvas. 121x 91cm  
 following page, **NADIA HUGGINS**. *Transformation no.1*. 2015. Digital photography. 76x114cm

social gathering: through the bountiful presence of books, our music programme and art installations, curated by co-owner, Lesley Goldwasser.

**WHAT HAVE BEEN THE STAND-OUT EXHIBITIONS AT THE HOTEL?**

The Betsy has over 25,000 sq ft of exhibition space on the property, featuring 1,000 pieces. Photography exhibitions that opened in December 2022 during Art Basel Miami Beach include new work by Tamary Kudita (Zimbabwe), Nadia Huggins (Trinidad/Tobago), Eric Kroll (USA), Alessandro Sarno (Italy), Carlos Andres Cruz (Colombia). We also featured new mixed-media work by Sri Prabha (India) and Ray Tenorio (Cuba). All the work is also for sale.

**DO YOU THINK THE ARTS ARE INTRINSIC TO MIAMI LIFE, AND DO THEY HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ITS HOSPITALITY SCENE?**

Miami Beach is a place where the arts thrive. We've found it powerful to celebrate our nearby cultural institutions and also provide guests with an opportunity to see an unexpected art show, attend a poetry reading, enjoy a pop-up opera event or simply listen to our nightly jazz. Guests let us know that 'just knowing' an event took place while they were there means something to them about culturally rich Miami Beach and our hotel. Public areas should be designed and defined as places where people feel welcomed and gather for a shared experience

– rather than to simply wait. And so, we believe that experiencing art in unexpected places is powerful – and wholly positive.

**WHAT KIND OF IMPRESSION DID YOU INTEND TO GIVE VISITORS ENTERING THE BETSY FOR THE FIRST TIME?**

Our goal is to make our guests feel like they can find happiness within our walls. We often observe that we are creating a place to get away, to hide, with others or in solitude. The Betsy's guests also tell when they come through our doors that they feel like they are visiting a great friend with exquisite taste. They feel at home and, because we imbue our spaces with the sights and sounds of the arts, they also feel renewed.

**HOW DOES MIAMI AS A CITY INSPIRE YOU? WHAT CHANGES DO YOU HOPE TO SEE IN THE FUTURE?**

We love Miami Beach and greater Miami. In addition to the ocean and palm trees, our hotel is located within blocks of some of the great cultural organisations in the world, such as the New World Symphony, The Bass and Wolfsonian Museums, Adrienne Arsht Center, Jewish Museum of Florida and Miami New Drama – our hometown theatre company, all of which are partners of ours. I am hopeful that the hospitality sector can play a leadership role in realising that vision in the coming years ■



