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## MIAMI NewTimes Arts

# “Modify, As Needed,” a new exhibit at MOCA, showcases artists who use found materials

By Carlos Suarez De Jesus *Thursday, Sep 22 2011*

As the midafternoon sun beat down on his pale shoulders this past weekend, Amilcar Packer struggled with a twin-size mattress he was wedging between the iron bars of a fence enclosing a lot in Wynwood.

The Brazilian artist, who had a GoPro camera strapped to his head, spent most of the day weaving mattresses, sheets of cardboard, rubber rafts, sofa cushions, album covers, books, and sundry materials through the bars at both ends of the space between the Waltman Ortega Fine Art and Praxis International Art galleries, near NW 22nd Street.

In the empty grassy lot between the fences, a pair of red charcoal grills had been set up for an early-evening barbecue. Nearby, a group of Packer’s assistants and some onlookers sipped beers fished from a cooler.

From across the street, as the afternoon progressed, the artist’s project, titled *Para\_site*, began to look like an abstract mural.

Packer is in town for the exhibit “Modify, As Needed,” opening this Thursday at the Museum of Contemporary Art. The exhibit, organized by Ruba Katrib, MOCA’s associate curator, showcases the work of 11 artists who use readily accessible materials and employ playful tactics in making their art. “It is an international group that have related work but haven’t necessarily been put in context with one another in the past,” Katrib says. “I knew it would be very fruitful to see what work they would come up with for the show and how their works would dialogue.”



Amilcar Packer's project *Para\_site*

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In addition to Packer, participants include Kathryn Andrews, Darren Bader, Nina Beier, Karl Holmqvist, Adriana Lara, Natalia Ibáñez Lario, José Carlos Martinat, Nicolás Paris, Nick Relph, and Anders Smebye.

Packer says his project deals with the notion of how fences segregate people from one another, the concept of private versus public property, and how contemporary society has become more isolating and restrictive. "My idea of the fence is as a device that functions as a barrier to keep us from confronting the ‘other,’ or that perceived potential enemy we fear or seek protection from," he says.

"You see fences everywhere walling off private property. You see bars on windows in people’s homes. This restriction of space — areas one is denied access to — also reminds one of prisons and of a growing surveillance society."

His impromptu wall, which brings to mind Brazil’s favelas, boasts a pair of books by French philosophers Jacques Rancière and Michel Foucault. The first deals with aesthetics and politics, the other with penal systems and punishment. "It’s the idea of the panopticon," Packer mentions, "the idea of a prisoner being watched without knowing it."

By interlacing the fences with items he collected from MOCA’s storage space and local thrift shops, Packer liberated the enclosure, turning it into a sort of urban agora, or gathering place, for a ritual early-evening meal. "I wanted it to be a very humble gesture," the artist says. "One of the concerns was not to create an event, a spectacle, but rather to inscribe the action/intervention as an everyday practice of gathering people."

About 30 people showed up for the meal, including artists participating in the exhibit, museum employees, their friends, and even a few homeless. Packer prepared Korean-spiced barbecue, salad greens with mangoes and tomatoes, fish with soya/ginger/honey sauce, and grilled sweet potatoes.

Attendees engaged in lively discourse. "The conversations varied from trivial talks on pop music, frustrations towards the art world, hopes in the art making, considering not doing art anymore, resistance and friction, possible lectures of the improvised walls in the metal fences, new muralism, what we would do later that night... and a lot of other conversations that I didn’t participate in," says Packer, who filmed the day’s proceedings for the video he will show at MOCA.

Relaxing and sipping a beer while the sun set was José Carlos Martinat, a 37-year-old artist who is unintentionally spoofing Miami’s plastic-surgery-addled vibe. He has developed a technique to give walls a face peel. In his native Peru, he typically appropriates political signs and slogans painted on public buildings and private homes using liquid glue.

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"I paint over the signs with the stuff, and when it dries, I peel off the sections or individual letters to create my own words or slogans in response on the same wall," he explains. Martinat says the first piece he made was the word *mentira* (lie) in his series *Ejercicios Superficiales* (Superficial Exercises).

"I'll appropriate one letter from each of the different painted signs to create my own. The political campaigns back home are very aggressive; some of these signs have letters up to three meters in height. It's crazy — the stuff is painted everywhere, creating this huge visual noise," Martinat says.

Last year, when the artist appropriated bits of graffiti to exhibit in a gallery, several graffiti artists stormed the space and defaced the walls in protest, even assaulting the art dealer with cans of spray paint. "They waited for him outside and covered him with spray," Martinat says. "But they were very respectful of my other work and left it untouched. It's ironic because I was working with the notions of some who see graffiti as vandalism of public space.

At MOCA, the artist will show a 12-by-12-foot section of museum wall whose surface he peeled back until it curled down to the floor.

Denmark's Nina Beier is also creating new work for the show. She has selected used clothes from local sources to represent her interpretation of characteristics and qualities of fashion found around town. In her project, she uses everyday objects such as radiators, chairs, and clothing racks and affixes billboard paper posters onto them with glue.

"I am producing a new series of works entitled *The Demonstrators*. It follows a simple principle: hanging posters dipped in poster glue to dry on objects, as one would leave a towel out to dry," Beier explains. "The drying process joins the two objects in an inseparable union, generating something like a wet T-shirt effect."

The artist says her images are selected from photographs available in image banks. "They use the vocabulary that has been developed to predict what we need to express today."

Beier, who has shown her work in Miami during Art Basel, says she collected clothing for her project from area thrift stores. "This selection of clothes can be seen as a type of group portrait of the people here," she says.

Concludes Katrib, MOCA's associate curator: "The inspiration for the exhibition really came from looking at these artists and some of their works... I realized that there were relationships between them that should be articulated."