



Art for All

A midcareer survey of work by Nari Ward at the Pérez Art Museum Miami explores notions of cultural identity, violence, healing, and rebirth. by Jean Nayar

To the collision of cultures that is Miami—particularly during the week of Art Basel—“Sun Splashed,” a mid-career exhibition by Jamaican-born artist Nari Ward at the Pérez Art Museum Miami, adds a stimulating note. Running through February 21, 2016, it features more than 20 works by the artist (a winner of the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome)—including sculptures, collages, photography, and videos—and taps themes that Ward has explored from the 1990s to the present.

Ward’s oeuvre not only investigates notions of cultural identity, pain and recovery, reality and myth, and African American history, but it also aims to break down barriers to these ideas through works that incorporate found objects that anyone can relate to. “My approach to art is grounded not so much in racial ideas but in edu-

cation,” he explains. “I want to reach the guy who knows nothing about art and also one who’s totally indoctrinated. This has led me to work with found objects that reflect something inherent in everyone’s experience and allow other voices to dialogue with the art. It’s a delicate balance, to address the everyday person and someone on an elitist journey. But as a visual artist, I don’t have to be responsible to one intention—I’m not an ideologue, and I don’t have to have rules. But if there’s a reverential quality to my work, there must also be a touch of irreverence. With works that reference the past, there’s also something that collapses the historic moments with the current moment.”

In the exhibition, curated by the museum’s Diana Nawi, the juxtaposition of early and recent works aims to stimulate conversation by underscoring the ideas and materials they share.

A recent series of copper pieces called “Breathing Directions,” for example, contains echoes of the Congolese cosmograms carved into the floorboards of an old black Baptist church in Savannah, Georgia, allowing slaves to breathe as they hid during the day on their clandestine journey to freedom. An early work from 1995, *Iron Heavens*, features an assemblage of scorched baseball bats, ironed cotton, and oven pans salvaged from stoves abandoned on the street. “Both the new and old pieces reference ideas on violence and healing and on dying and being born,” says Ward.

Well known to Franklin Sirmans, who took over as PAMM’s director this October, Ward’s work also readily aligns with the curatorial philosophy he plans to continue developing at

Airplane Tears,
Nari Ward, 2005.

the museum in the years ahead. “The exhibition reflects a sense of place,” Sirmans says. “Ward wrestles with ideas around community, and this exhibition in Miami contributes to contemporary art in a way that can’t come from anywhere else. It also resonates with the vision for PAMM’s programming, which I feel very akin to and look forward to extending in the future.”

Running concurrently with “Bloodlines,” an exhibition of the work of Firelei Báez that explores black culture, Afro-Caribbean folklore, and the complexities of the diasporic experience (there’s also a collaborative performance by Brooklyn-based artist Ryan McNamara and musician Devonté “Dev” Hynes on December 3), “Sun Splashed” is bound to resonate in myriad ways for international visitors and locals alike. pamm.org **ABMB**