

THE INSIDER'S INSIDER

Before, during and after Art Basel, Heather Urban keeps going and going and going BY KITTY BOWE HEARTY



Heather Urban and the artist Pablo Cano among his work

When Heather Urban thought about moving to Miami in 2000, she was told by people in New York (where she had worked at the Museum of Modern Art and the Feigen Contemporary Gallery) and in South Florida that there was nothing happening in Florida culturally. She was delighted to find out that they were wrong.

A week after her arrival, she attended a meeting about the art scene in North Miami. There she met Bonnie Clearwater, who was just starting to develop the Museum of Contemporary Art's highly successful young professional group, the MOCA shakers. Urban's enthusiasm for the program eventually turned into a full-time job. "This was a way for vibrant collectors and art enthusiasts to meet, explore basic questions and make connections," she said.

In 2002, the Miami collectors Debra and Dennis Scholl asked Urban to assist them with a group from the Guggenheim Museum that was going to be visiting Art Basel Miami Beach. Since then, through her company, Urban Art Access, she has developed education programs and customized art tours of Miami that highlight the best of the arts community to locals and visitors alike. She has arranged tours for groups from the Menil in Houston, the Des Moines Art Center, the Whitney Museum and the Norton in West Palm Beach.

These days, she is the go-to girl for high-end collectors and art lovers hoping to make the most of their days and nights at Art Basel Miami Beach 2005. This year, as in the past, she will be shepherding visitors through private collections, museums and artists' studios as well as the offbeat NADA and Scope exhibits. One stop definitely on her tour is the studio of Pablo Cano, whose puppet shows will be featured both at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami (as they have for the last seven years) and at a special program at the Sagamore Hotel. Cano, who was born in Cuba, makes his marionettes out of found objects, and the marionettes are then sold as sculpture.

"What's most important is for these visitors to tap into Miami and its emerging art scene," said Urban, who believes that the art being created here is on a par with edgy and evolving cities throughout the world. In 2003, Jason Hedges, a Miami artist, created *Aesthetic Experience #11 (Cheese [blue])*, a participatory performance piece focused on eating, for Urban. It took place at a seated table for 34 in the reading room at the Sagamore Hotel.

Urban counts among her supporters the Miami collector Rosa de la Cruz. "There is a real need in Miami for art education programs of outstanding quality," de la Cruz said. "Heather addresses those needs." ■