

TROPICAL LIFE



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BOOKS Her Brazil has moral bandits and hard choices

BY CONNIE OGLE
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Frances de Pontes Peebles would like us all to understand something about Brazil, where she was born: "It's not just samba and soccer and the Amazon."

Peebles, who grew up in Surfside and Coral Gables and graduated from Gables High in 1996, goes a long way toward proving that assertion in her breathtaking debut novel. Her rollicking, violent and heartbreaking story is set during the late 1920s and early

'30s in northeastern Brazil, a region "completely different" from the rest of the country with "its own way of doing things. People there speak a lot of Portuguese that can't be translated into English."

The Seamstress (HarperCollins, \$25.95), from which Peebles will read Friday at Books & Books in Coral Gables, is a sweeping historical saga that encompasses elements of Brazil unfamiliar to most of us: vast stretches of desert scrubland, daring bandits, crippling drought, a harshly repressive society and the lives of two sisters eager — desperate, even — to escape their impoverished existence in a tiny mountain town.

And lest you suspect the title reflects only a frilly, feminine sensibility, know this: While *The Seamstress* is rich in detail about sewing and its skills — "A good seamstress had to pay attention to detail. . . . A good seamstress had to be decisive" — the novel also features more decapitations than you'll find in a Quentin Tar-

•TURN TO PEEBLES, 2M



PEEBLES

ARTS

Filling in the picture of Miami's early arts scene

BY BRETT SOKOL
Special to The Miami Herald

"It's a freak show, an absolute freak show!" Helen Kohen chuckles. That's the false portrait of the Miami art scene found in the Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archives, where Kohen has been sifting through almost six decades of locally produced television shows. Miami's TV stations "weren't interested in the visual arts unless it had an

absurd hook. For three Hallows-eens in a row, [then-CBS affiliate] WTVJ visited the home of a man who placed huge, grotesque sculptures on his front lawn. Why? Not because he was an accomplished artist. But because he claimed to be a warlock!"

With a sigh, Kohen continues, "Miami has always had some of the finest artists of any place, but they've never gotten coverage on TV. The audience

there never got the whole picture — we have to fill it in."

To that end, Kohen is kicking off this year's edition of the Wolfson Archives' Rewind/Fast-Forward Film Festival on Thursday with a presentation on Miami's hidden art history — sans warlocks such as the aforementioned Lewis VanDercar. To annotate the cringe-worthy array of vintage television clips

•TURN TO ARTS, 4M



CARL JUSTE/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

A LOAD OF RESEARCH: Art historian Helen Kohen digs through archives at the Miami-Dade Public Library to prepare for a presentation on the Miami art scene before the arrival of Art Basel.

watch it **your** way



In the digital age, movies screen where and when you want them

AURORA ARRUE/MIAMI HERALD ILLUSTRATION

BY RENE RODRIGUEZ
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Since its release on July 18, *The Dark Knight* has become a rarity among summer movie blockbusters: It has transcended hit status and become a pop-culture phenomenon, grossing more than \$700 million worldwide and luring viewers of every age into the multiplex, many more than once.

It may also be the last of its kind. Hollywood, like every other industry, is coming to grips with the far-ranging changes the Internet and digital media have wreaked on its long-standing business models. The Internet has forever changed the way we shop, date, stay in touch with each other and get our news. And it is also changing the way we view and think about movies.

"We are at a moment right now where this change that has been building for the last 10 years or so is exploding," says Mike McGuire, vice president of research for Gartner Media Industry Advisory Services. "At the heart of this change is that the consumer is in absolute control — if they want to be — of their media consumption experience."

•TURN TO MOVIES, 11M



CHRISTO



CANO



RAUSCHENBERG



HANSON'S SCULPTURE



YOUNG

Filling in the picture of Miami's early arts scene

ARTS, FROM 1M

she has unearthed, she'll draw on her experience as The Miami Herald's art critic from 1978 to her 1995 retirement, as well as her current consulting efforts for the Miami-Dade County Library's Vasari Project, an archive chronicling area art since 1945.

The program won't be a complete visual train wreck, though. Kohen has found a few bright spots amid the historical "butchering," including sharp programming from PBS station WPBT. And WTVJ partially managed to redeem itself with segments on Robert Rauschenberg's 1979 trip to Miami to design the cover of The Miami Herald's now-defunct Tropic magazine, as well as Christo and Jeanne-Claude's 1983 *Surrounded Islands*, for which the duo encircled 11 Biscayne Bay islands with 6.5 million square feet of hot-pink polypropylene.

Also to be screened: 1967 footage of University of Miami art students demonstrating over their work's being ignored by the curators at their school's Lowe Art Gallery ("Local has always been a four-letter word in Miami," Kohen quips); a 1981 look at the eerily lifelike sculptures of Duane Hanson; a 1985 chat with draftsman Pablo Cano, and a 1973 profile of Purvis Young, whose paintings then adorned the outside walls of abandoned buildings along Overtown's Goodbread Alley. The WTVJ interviewer's tone may be risible (meet "the Van Gogh of the ghetto"), but the early snapshot of Young is fascinating.

But the point of Kohen's presentation isn't just to wander down memory lane. It's also to remind the community that a rich art scene took root long before Art Basel Miami Beach established Miami's international reputation as the most vital U.S. art burg outside of New York and Los Angeles.

AFTER THE BOATLIFT

Ironically, for all their obsessive image-consciousness, our august city fathers



OVERLOOKED: University of Miami art students protest that their work is being ignored by curators at the Lowe Art Gallery in 1967.

didn't set Miami down its path towards art stardom. Rather, more recent Cuban-exile arrivals, particularly in the wake of the 1980 Mariel boatlift, first nudged Miami onto the international stage. "They came from a culture that thought it was OK to have a son who was an artist," Kohen explains. "In a Cuban family, if you had artistic talent, you were encouraged to pursue it. In an American family, if you had artistic talent, you were encouraged to become an orthopedist. That [Cuban] community got behind its own very early on."

In the ensuing wave of traveling museum shows and glowing press, as Cuban exiles such as the late Carlos Alfonzo and José Bedia grabbed the spotlight, 1980s and early-'90s Miami art became perceptually synonymous with Cuban-American art. Previous generations of talented Anglos were often erased from this vibrant new picture, instead remaining where they had always been — at local colleges and universities, quietly teaching.

"The whole idea of 'making it' as an artist was a very private thing," recalls sculptor Robert Thiele of his 1966 arrival in Miami to join the faculty at what was then Miami-Dade Community College, where he taught art for the next 30 years. At that time, Thiele says, Miami's art world began and ended at the campus grounds —

IF YOU GO

What: The Rewind/Fast-Forward Film & Video Festival presents *Invasion of the Historians: Art in Miami Before Art Basel* with Helen L. Kohen
When: 7 p.m. Thursday
Where: Miami-Dade Public Library, 101 W. Flagler St., Miami
Cost: Free
Info: 305-375-1505; www.wolfsonarchive.org

collectors who bought local work were virtually nonexistent. For artists like him, "The only option was to teach. Unless you wanted to starve to death. There was no support structure."

Indeed, though Thiele and fellow Miami-Dade professor Salvatore La Rosa were featured alongside each other in the 1975 Whitney Biennial, neither experienced the kind of career boost and sales boom that has greeted Miami's more recent Biennial picks — such as Hernan Bas, Dara Friedman, Mark Handforth or William Cordova, one of Thiele's students.

ON AN ISLAND

Of course, to illustrate those changes further, Thiele has only to look to his daughter, Kristen, an accomplished painter. Although she received a full scholarship to the University of Miami in 1986, she found the notion of a life in academia creatively stifling and dropped out after two years. She subsequently moved into a studio on Miami Beach's then artist-dotted Española Way and enjoyed the productive atmosphere, "but it didn't feel like any of it was reach-



WOLFGANG VOLZ

PRETTY IN PINK: Christo's *Surrounded Islands* was staged in Biscayne Bay in 1983.

ing beyond Miami," she says. "We were literally living on an island in every sense." Kristen moved north in 1992, eventually graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Yet when she returned to Miami in 2000, "I was shocked!" she says. "In Chicago it seemed like everyone was playing in a band. In Miami it seemed like everyone now was an artist!" The air was filled with more than paint-splattered pretensions; a homegrown, cross-ethnic market had finally emerged. "To be able to pay my rent from selling my own work was such a novelty," Kristen says. "It really made

me feel hopeful about Miami for the first time." Growing national notices, as well as her solo show in Basel, Switzerland, this past June would seem to confirm that sentiment.

Now the Miami art world has moved so far off campus that much of the excellent work of visual-art faculty and M.F.A. students at UM and Florida International University often is ignored while the crowds flock to Wynwood gallery shows. On a note of "We're still here!", UM's art department has even opened a Wynwood exhibition space. The school also administers and co-funds the Design District-based Art + Research — a "post-graduate" institu-

tion spearheaded by local developer and collector Craig Robins. Its 2009 launch is bound to further overshadow UM's M.F.A. program.

"The art scene has definitely passed on from the universities," Kohen agrees, but despite its greater public exposure and a corresponding swarm of TV cameras that serve up everything from charmingly giddy profiles on the Beach's Plum cable channel to Art Basel reports on CNN, she still finds a crucial intellectual component missing.

"Visual art is not entertainment," she insists. "It's philosophy."

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ARTS BRIEFS

Manhattan gets its own rock 'n' roll hall of fame



SETH WENIG/AP

ROCKING IT: Billy Joel and Mayor Michael Bloomberg at the press conference Wednesday announcing the hall of fame annex.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is coming to New York. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, joined by Billy Joel and Clive Davis, announced Wednesday that the Cleveland-based museum and hall of fame is opening an annex in downtown Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood. It will be the hall's first expansion outside Cleveland.

The 25,000-square-foot annex will house Bruce Springsteen's 1957 Chevy and will feature a number of exhibits.

Meanwhile, the Museum of the City of New York is opening an all-glass gallery that will include cold rooms to store the institution's valuable photographic negatives. The \$28-million pavilion

marks the first expansion since 1932 of the landmarked building on Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street. It is the first phase of a \$97-million modernization project expected to be completed in 2011.

The gallery opens to the public on Oct. 3 as the museum launches the show *Paris/New York: Design Fashion Culture 1925-1940*.

2 PRINCES AND A SPY

The producers of the latest James Bond movie say Prince William and Prince Harry will join Britain's most famous fictional spy on the red carpet at the London premiere on Oct. 29.

The event will raise funds for two military charities chosen by the princes. The movie, *Quantum of Solace*, is the 22nd installment in the Bond series. It will be released around the world beginning Oct. 31.

MARRIAGE PLAY

Norbert Leo Butz will play the husband to Elizabeth Marvel's wife in the world premiere of Michael Weller's play, *Fifty Words*, opening Sept. 28 at New York's Lucille Lortel Theatre.

The MCC Theater production, directed by Austin Pendleton, begins preview performances Sept. 10 for a run through Oct. 25. Butz portrays Adam, and Marvel is Jan, a couple whose lives change during one long night.

The actor was seen last season in David Ives' adaptation of Mark Twain's long-lost farce, *Is He Dead?* And he won a best-actor Tony Award in 2005 for his portrayal of an unrepentant con man in the musical *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. Marvel was seen last season in the revival on Broadway of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*.