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Live performance a big part of Miami Art Week

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Live performance has become an accepted and vital part of the art world's continuing expansion far beyond paintings on walls and sculptures in parks. And Miami Art Week includes a range of performance offerings that bring art to life in new ways.

The most dramatic, accessible and relevant to South Florida is *Holoscenes*, a giant aquarium on the plaza of Miami Dade College's downtown campus, with people inside going through the motions of daily life as water rises and falls around them. Presented by MDC Live Arts, which will also host discussions and events with the college's Earth Ethics Institute and other environmental groups, *Holoscenes* aims to bring sea-level rise to immediate, surreal life.

"It's taking the small patterns of our daily lives, that become our lives and how we spend our time, and put that in conversation with these longer-term patterns symbolized by water rising and falling," says [Lars Jan](#), the director and media artist who created *Holoscenes*. The piece will run six hours a day, Wednesday to Saturday.

Jan, 37, got the idea for *Holoscenes* about five years ago, as news of floods and extreme weather events became increasingly common. An image became stuck in his mind, of a man reading a newspaper in a transparent room that filled with water, which the man ignored, turning the pages until they disintegrated and the water covered him. For Jan, it was a metaphor for the way habit allowed people to ignore overwhelming changes.

"Obviously, it was about flooding and mundane behavior and myopia," he says. "But it also became about the hubris of adaptation, the double-edged nature of our beautiful capacity to adapt. But it's also dangerous, in the sense that now we're affecting the environment in a way we never have before."

Holoscenes, which premiered last year in Toronto, took several years to put together. Jan brought in architects and hydraulic and structural engineers to design and build the elevator-sized tank, which takes hours to fill. The four performers trained with a free diver to learn to hold their breath longer, as they dance or [go to bed](#) or [play guitar](#) while water fills their environment.

At one performance, Jan overheard two children arguing about *Holoscenes*, with one saying it was about dreaming and death, and the other about mermaids. Both are right, he says.

"There are ways to attach abstract ideas to reality, if you think it's life and death or mermaids," he says. "That may be a fanciful idea of people who evolved to live in water, but metaphorically it's something to think about in the real world."

Performance's capacity to bring abstract ideas to kinetic life is part of its allure for the art world. In the past half-dozen years, dance has become a prominent part of that mix, a refreshing change from more static, conceptual forms of performance art.

One prominent name in this hybrid realm of dance and art is [Ryan McNamara](#), who with musician Devonté Hynes has created *Dimensions*, a performance that is part of Pérez Art Museum Miami's celebration on

Thursday. McNamara, who started as a photographer and visual artist, became fascinated with dance approximately a decade ago.

“I was excited by the immediacy of it,” McNamara, 36, says from his home in Brooklyn. “The fact that you can’t know what’s going to happen keeps me excited, and it also drives me crazy.”

Now McNamara, who has no dance training, choreographs and stages performances for leading museums and galleries. For *Dimensions*, which is inspired by fantastical Miami sites such as Vizcaya and Coral Castle, he is working with eight dancers from Miami, New York and L.A. while eight musicians play Hynes’ score.

“I show things, and they refine them on their more virtuosic bodies,” McNamara says. “It reminds me of sculpture, but it’s more exciting because the sculpture can give you feedback.”

[Sculpture and dance unite in *Pore*](#) at Locust Projects, the adventurous nonprofit gallery in the Design District. Creators [Martha Friedman](#), a sculptor, and Silas Riener, a choreographer formerly with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, began working together in 2011 when she created a set for a Cunningham “Event” (a type of structured improvisation) that Riener was staging at Princeton University, where Friedman teaches.

(Cunningham was the revolutionary choreographer whose experiments with composer John Cage and a series of visual artists seems to be a touchstone for this new era of dance in the art world. One prominent partnership is choreographer [Jonah Bokaer](#), another former member of his troupe, and sculptor Daniel Arsham, one of Cunningham’s last collaborators.)

Friedman, who works with liquid rubber that she molds in different forms, was already fascinated with tactile materials, force and the contrast between stillness and movement. She found new inspiration in Riener.

“He has such control over his body; that makes it really interesting and exciting for me,” she says. “He became a kind of muse ... there’s a new part of my practice that I now get to explore that is performative and durational and choreographic.”

For *Pore*, Friedman created giant rubber backdrops with extensions that Riener uses as both costumes and props, draping, manipulating and interacting with them as the audience follows him through the gallery. The piece was inspired by the medieval concept of the body’s four “humors.” When Riener told her about George Balanchine’s *The Four Temperaments*, based on the same idea, Friedman added musical collages of that ballet’s Hindemith score.

[Riener, who with fellow ex-Cunningham dancer Rashaun Mitchell](#) has worked with other visual artists, says his collaboration with Friedman is particularly satisfying.

“The way Martha talks about sculpture in relation to an audience, or her sense of space or time passing, feels very similar to what I’m thinking about in choreography,” he says. “It’s difficult and virtuosic and strange and appeals to all of my desires, as well.”

This kind of expanded thinking and physicality is invigorating to the art scene, says Nicholas Baume, curator of Art Public, the show of site-specific installations and performances at Collins Park in Miami Beach, presented by Art Basel Miami Beach and the Bass Museum.

“The art world is inherently always looking for new ways to reinvent itself,” Baume says. “Performers in the dance world are being recognized and seen in a visual arts context.”

Some of that interest stems from dance and performance's ephemeral nature: While they're done by solid people in real time, once they're over, they're gone. While that contradiction is a familiar one, it is refreshing to an art world that is both intensely intellectual and commercial.

"In a way, dance is antithetical to the art market because the market is based on the exchange of objects and works of art as commodities," says Baume. "Part of the appeal is that when you witness it, you know it's a unique experience."

The Wednesday night opening of Art Public includes four performance pieces. In Chinese artist Yan Xing's *L'amour l'après midi*, young men in embroidered silks flirt with passersby. Xavier Cha's *supreme ultimate exercise* contrasts bodybuilders hoisting truck tires with the flowing movement of a tai chi practitioner. In Ryan Gander's *Ernest Hawker*, a fictional character, based on Gander, plays a drunken, washed-up artist. And Pope.L's *The Beautiful* features black men with skateboards on their backs who crawl onto a stage to sing *America the Beautiful*. All will pop up unannounced from among the crowd at the park.

"Performance ... like theater, is exaggerated," Pope.L said in an email. "It's made more extreme or strange to show the fears, flaws and silliness in what we do."