

When Art Basel Went Virtual, Artist Alexandre Arrechea Hit the Beach

The Cuban artist found inspiration in a classic Ernest Hemingway story for a new site-specific installation, one of the few IRL experiences at the annual Miami Art Week.

BY NEIL VAZQUEZ — DEC 2, 2020



The annual art fair known as [Art Basel Miami Beach](#) has gone mostly digital this year, with galleries directing their patrons to virtual showrooms instead of their usual booths at the Miami Beach Convention Center or the parties they throw to drum up sales and buzz, minus a [few notorious exceptions](#).

But one local collector has found a way to stage a monumental public art installation that is both safe, and delivers on its cultural promise.

On Sunday, [Alan Faena](#), the showman proprietor of the hotel complex that bears his name, unveiled a site-specific commission called “Dreaming with Lions” by the Cuban artist Alexandre Arrechea. It is inspired by one of Ernest Hemingway's most beloved stories, [The Old Man and the Sea](#), a Pulitzer Prize winner that was famously written during the author's time living in Havana in the 1940s and 1950s.



An aerial view of Alexandre Arrechea's new work, "Dreaming with Lions" at the Faena Miami Hotel.

UASHOT AERIAL FILMWORKS

For the past eight years, Faena has kicked off Miami Art Week—the umbrella term for the fetes and events surrounding Art Basel Miami Beach—with a big splashy jamboree on the beach. Needless to say, this year was different.

The coronavirus pandemic also cancelled the satellite fairs that run in conjunction to the flagship, like Untitled, Pulse, and Scope. The patrons and connoisseurs from abroad are missing, along with the coterie of international gallerists, publicists, and media that typically accompany them. Instead, galleries have opted to meet buyers where they live, in resort locations like the [Hamptons](#) and [Palm Beach](#).

The artist found himself reading voraciously during quarantine, and took comfort in Hemingway's aging hero, Santiago, and his tenacity to break a dry spell and catch an elusive marlin.

"I have always been attracted by the connection between man and nature," Arrechea told *T&C*. "The texts in the installation are from Santiago's soliloquy while at sea, battling with the sharks. My intention is to connect his resilience and strength of spirit to inspire in these times."

It's a message that resonates for those of us who live in the area, which has felt the brunt of the shutdown's economic impact. With tourism depressed, the city's lifeblood—cruise lines, hotels, and restaurants—is cut off from its normal flow of sun-starved travelers seeking refuge from the cold.



Alexandre Arrechea and Alan Faena.
ORIOL TARRIDAS

Faena, festooned in his signature white duds, tried to find a silver lining in the past year, despite the fact that his hotel was shuttered until it re-opened in late fall.

“The installation is a living monument to the sheer force of the human spirit,” he said. “Reflecting on the many challenges we’ve faced, ‘Dreaming with Lions’ celebrates our resilience and our strength as a community.”

It’s a hard sell for anyone to pitch, but somehow the man in the gaucho hat came close.

Arrechea's work is on view until Sunday.