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Miami's Cannonball launches effort to improve discourse over art and artists

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Mathias Stich

Gean Moreno, Cannonball artistic director

In many ways, Miami's art scene is thriving — it has artists, galleries, major art fairs, a new museum, top art collectors and collections, art walks that draw hundreds of people.

But for all those exciting elements, many in the artistic community say the city still lacks an ephemeral but crucial piece needed to take Miami to the next level as a cultural center — an educated, smart and globally connected discussion about what's happening and what matters in the visual arts.

“If you have art without discourse it's like making work in a vacuum,” says artist Leyden

Rodriguez, one of the founders and directors of the artist-run exhibition space [Dimensions Variable](#). “It's like leaving it in your studio and saying, ‘Why doesn't anybody know what I do?’ You have this entire system of display and production revolving around contemplation. Art is by its nature discursive.”

Now Cannonball, a small, innovative arts center in downtown Miami, is launching a program organizers hope will fill in that space. It's called R.A.D. (Research, Art, Dialogue), a high-level alternative school in cutting-edge artistic concepts to be taught by well-known artists, writers, curators and thinkers from around the world. Though aimed at artists, graduate students, curators and other arts professionals, [R.A.D.](#) will be open to anyone who would like to join.

The program starts with three short intensive seminars this fall, then expands to a slate of longer courses in the spring. [Enrollment](#) (which ends Monday) is limited to 10 full-time and 10 auditing students who take just a single class. The costs are modest — \$50 for a seminar or to audit a class, \$250 for a semester; organizers hope to soon make the school free of charge.

Cannonball executive director Chris Cook says many in the arts community here share Rodriguez's concern. “A lot of artists and arts professionals here complain about the lack of arts discourse,” Cook says. “There's a certain amount of in-depth conversation and understanding that's lacking.”

That deficiency has multiple consequences. Among them is a feeling among artists that they need to leave Miami for a cultural capital like New York, Berlin or even L.A. to stay current in an idea-driven art world. Not only is their ability to appeal to taste-making galleries, critics and

collectors at stake, but an equally important sense that people care about and understand what they're doing — that their art, and art in general, matters.

"You can retain artists here who are interested in a commercial career," says Gean Moreno, a longtime Miami artist who will be running R.A.D. as Cannonball's artistic director. "But there's another kind of artist whose incentive isn't market success — who make the art scene robust and push institutions to be cutting edge."

Jesus Fuenmayor, director and curator of the [CIFO](#) Foundation, a downtown nonprofit organization focused on Latin American artists, says an effort like R.A.D. offers an important alternative to galleries, art fairs and other venues centered on selling themselves or their artists. "We need space to think, to be able to discuss ... what are the most important cultural issues in this city," says Fuenmayor, who is on R.A.D.'s advisory board. "Where what you're saying is not just to promote or negate what someone is doing, but something that makes other people think."

The program's advisers range from Miami figures like Fuenmayor and Emily Mello, deputy director for education at PAMM; to people heading experimental arts programs in Mexico City, Cuba, Brazil and Berlin; to professors at the University of Miami and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Part of the philosophy behind R.A.D., Cook and Moreno say, is to go beyond traditional lectures to find teachers who will stage projects, conversations or participatory experiences. In October, [Jose Falconi](#), a writer, curator and researcher at Harvard University, will lead a discussion of art and ethics, including a controversial [project](#) for which an artist interviewed a professional assassin. In November, Austrian artist [Rainer Ganahl](#) will organize something he calls "[Strange Teaching](#)," a free form gathering and exploration of the city.

Cannonball's leaders hope their school will deepen the interest and the energy already surrounding the art scene here.

"There's a rumble in the city," Moreno says. "Everyone wants this."

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