

Knight Blog

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Knight Arts Challenge winner Cannonball propels artists and a broad mix of ideas

Feb. 24, 2015, 10:06 a.m., Posted by Juan Carlos Pérez-Duthie

Executive director of Cannonball, Christopher Cook.
Photo by Tatiana Hernandez.

In a four-story, 1924 industrial building in downtown Miami, creative ideas are being developed and launched. That's only fitting, since this renovated former warehouse is the home of Cannonball.

The name alludes to one of the word's meanings as "a jump in the water with the arms holding the knees tight against the chest." And that is what Cannonball has done: Dive into the South Florida arts scene with a major splash.

From its foundation in 2003 as LegalArt, whose original purpose was to provide free legal services and professional development programs to emerging artists—something it still does with its LegalLink initiative—Cannonball has grown into a full-fledged arts organization; it supports innovative art creation and those who make it happen, and fosters educational opportunities to engage in a dialogue with the community (there is a classroom in the building where courses and seminars are held as part of a non-traditional study program called r.a.d, for research.art.dialogue).

With support from Knight Foundation in the first Knight Arts Challenge, Cannonball transitioned from a nomadic existence to its current headquarters, and developed a series of initiatives that significantly expanded its role within the local arts community and beyond.

"Our budget consists of multiple revenue streams, and of course grants and foundation support is one of them. We also rely on earned income and individual donors," explains Christopher Cook, Cannonball's executive director. "Thanks to Knight Foundation, we were able to launch the WaveMaker Grants."

Making waves

The WaveMaker Grants, which debuted in fall 2014, fund artists in Miami-Dade County to propel out-of-the-box creations and projects. The program, a 2014 Knight Arts Challenge winner, is part of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts Regional Regranting Program.

"There are nine organizations across the country that sort of administer this regranting program, and we were actually the first in the Southeast to have one of these programs," says Ashley Ford, communications and operations manager for Cannonball, which awarded \$100,000 through the program on Feb. 13.



“We gave away 15 grants for artist-driven, experimental projects and endeavors in Miami Dade County,” Ford says. “They are kind of off-the-radar, away from traditional funding sources, things that are a little bit quirkier.”

A tenet of the program, Ford emphasizes, is that the projects have to be available to the public in some way, from a publication that can be distributed to the community, to an art exhibit, to a film, to a performance and more.

The artists have one year to execute their projects, which are divided into three different categories: new works (those that will be created during a year); long-haul projects (existing projects that should be coming to completion or a program that is in place but is being expanded); and research and development / implementation projects (which require substantial planning and have a year to complete that task).

“The advantage of small nonprofits like Cannonball being able to redistribute funds from larger funding agencies is for us to basically fund projects that perhaps skew outside traditional funding streams,” says Cook, who’s been at the helm of Cannonball for the past three years and was instrumental in revamping and expanding its core mission.

“It’s a mechanism that allows money to make its way to support projects that otherwise most likely would not transpire.”

A home for artists under the sun

The WaveMaker Grants are just the latest way in which Cannonball responds to the needs of artists. Its long-standing pillar has been the Residency Program, which is open to local, national and international artists, curators and others.

Supported by major grants, with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) recently announcing that Cannonball is one of 919 nonprofit organizations nationwide to receive an NEA Art Works grant for 2015 (Cannonball’s second NEA grant), those chosen for the residency receive time, space and other support to carry out their work and engage with the community.

The Residency Program “was actually helped in its launch by the Knight Arts Challenge grant that we received in 2008,” says Cook. “It officially opened in the fall of 2010, and it has two parallel components. One for local artists, where we offer them residences that are highly subsidized for 11-and-a-half months and they live in the building, and the other component is a visiting residency, where we have artists from all over the world being residents from one to three months. And these artists receive from travel stipends to monthly honoraria to project allowance budgets. They develop public programs and panel discussion and artists talks, etc.”

Cannonball hosts 15 to 18 visiting and three local residents per year, Cook says.

Molly Zuckerman-Hartung is one of those visiting artists. She first experienced Cannonball last year for 10 days, and is now back for a residency through the end of March. On Wednesday, the California-born painter, who operates mainly out of Chicago, held a public talk to discuss her art.

Gean Moreno, Cannonball’s artistic director, introduced Zuckerman-Hartung, who not only has developed a career as a renowned arts educator, teaching at Northwestern and Yale universities, but has exhibited with the Whitney Museum of American Art 2014 Biennial. Her work has also been featured, and sold, at Art Basel Miami Beach.

She has traveled extensively throughout the country, and this latest stop in Miami is a unique experience for her.

“I don’t know yet what it [Miami] is for me,” Zuckerman-Hartung says after her presentation. “I tend to hate veering at first, and then find out how it’s going to transform. And I am already feeling that. ‘What is this place? I don’t know!’ Which is a good sign for me. At Cannonball they have been really

kind, and generous, and helpful.”

All under one roof

On a local level, composer, performer, and improviser Matthew Evan Taylor began his residency in January. He is living in one of the six studios available on the Cannonball building’s third floor. The space has a minimalist, no-fuss ambience, with dark concrete floors and white walls. Residents share bathrooms and a communal kitchen in the center of the floor.

“It is still early in the residency, but the potential is really big,” Taylor says. “I have plans for future performances at Cannonball, once I conclude some of my commitments I made before starting the residency.”

The artist, a doctoral candidate at the University of Miami’s Frost School of Music, is the first composer/performer selected by Cannonball.

“I think Cannonball occupies a unique space within the arts community here in Miami,” he adds. “Their mission of support for artists will help drive the rise of the arts in South Florida.”

Which is what Executive Director Cook and all those who make Cannonball happen have envisioned for it.

“For Miami-Dade County, specifically, I think one of the real benefits is having a constant influx of creative, innovative minds coming into the city on a regular basis and having a platform for those people to think about, engage, and to do work about this place. About Miami. About South Florida,” says Cook. “And for people here on the ground, to interact and learn from the visiting residents who are coming in. That exchange is very critical.”

To learn more about the Knight Arts Challenge, visit knightarts.org.

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