

KnightBlog

ARTS

Jan 26, 2015

Knight Arts Challenge South Florida opens for entries

SHARE



Posted by **Fernando González**

Photo courtesy of The Screening Room.

More than 8,900 ideas. 241 projects. \$25 million. All since 2008.

The numbers of the Knight Arts Challenge in South Florida, which opens for entries today, provide an overview of the program — but they don't tell the full story.

There has been support for **pop-up artists' bookstores**, **preserving Haitian rara music**, developing the local film community, **bringing the**

Knight Arts Challenge
Apply Now
Deadline: Feb. 23, 2015

Everglades into the city with billboards, and bringing kids to jazz. The winning projects from seven annual challenges offer a richly detailed snapshot of a dynamic, multicultural community.

“What is very important to us is that we don’t tell the community what we are seeking; we ask the community what they are interested in,” says Dennis Scholl, vice president for arts at Knight Foundation. “That’s the beauty of the contest.”

**GET SOUTH FLORIDA KNIGHT ARTS
CHALLENGE UPDATES**

your email here please

Subscribe

It is a simple process. The challenge, which closes Feb. 23, has only three rules: The idea must be about the arts; the project must take place in or benefit South Florida; and the grant recipients must find funds to match Knight’s commitment.

“On a broader level, we want to make art general in South Florida,” says Scholl. “To make it so, every day, wherever you go, whatever you do, you have an encounter with art.”

The result has been an ever-broadening territory for the challenge – both across artistic disciplines and across the region.

“One of the most important parts of the challenge is the level of engagement we’ve been able to achieve,” says Scholl. The contest is “being embraced by many, many more neighborhoods in South Florida. You can see that by the geographic distribution of the winners. Just in the past couple of years we’ve had winners in Fort Lauderdale, Opa-locka, Hialeah, Homestead and Key West. And the geographic distribution has changed dramatically as the community has become more comfortable with the challenge – and seen the effects of the challenge.”

Meanwhile, the range of winners reflects Knight Foundation's approach of nurturing a broad-based cultural community.

Scholl says that "the anchor institutions are important; they serve thousands of people in our community. But we also want people to have grass-roots experiences. And that's the two-prong strategy we are using with the contest: Support anchor institutions and also encourage this organic bubbling up from the grass roots."

Such support extends well beyond providing funding.

Francisco Tardío, director of Miami's **Centro Cultural Español** (Spanish Cultural Center), says, "It's not just a matter of money. Winning the challenge allows you to think differently and, in our case, consolidate a project."

A multiple Arts Challenge winner, the Spanish Cultural Center's **Microteatro**, which features short plays in shipping-containers-turned-theater rooms, used the support to "not only find better talent and have other events around the performances, such as concerts, but also turn what was originally a temporary project, just two seasons of three months each for one year, into a year-round event. [The grants] gave Microteatro time to find its audience and then, expand it. It's been two years with shows every weekend, and now we want to add more English language plays and reach a broader, English-speaking audience."

Another aspect of winning the challenge is that "It's not just 'Here's the money; go do your thing,'" says Anna Pietraszko, executive director of the **Miami Music Project**, an orchestral program for kids that uses music as an instrument for social change and a repeat Arts Challenge winner. "And then what happens when the money runs out?"

"Knight Foundation has been great in that it grows with you," says Pietraszko. "It's very strategic and gives you very constructive feedback. We've been able to get a lot of resources beyond the funding that has helped us be very strategic about how we grow."

And, she says there are other aspects to the grants. The most recent award for a **Teaching Artists Training Program** has a twofold impact, she notes, as “we put professional musicians into classrooms in the most disadvantaged communities in Miami. ... We need to give them the resources to face the challenges in the classrooms. We are not just about music but social transformation through music.” But the program also means supporting local musicians. “This year we have about 30 musicians teaching with us and we are proud of supporting local artists. We want them to stay here, in Miami.”

In fact, Chris Cook, executive director of **Cannonball Miami** Inc., notes that the ripple effect of the challenge “is huge,” as it not only addresses artistic ideas but also the type of real-life issues that shape and define a city.

Founded as LegalArt to provide free legal services to artists in 2003, the organization evolved and became Cannonball, an arts organization, in 2012.

“But our longtime narrative as an organization has always been artist-centric, and observing what artists need, starting with the very first Arts Challenge grant that we received in 2008 which enabled us to launch a residency program,” he says. “Now, that came at a time of the recession. Rents were skyrocketing. Artists were being kicked out of their studios and needed places to live and work, and this allowed us to respond to that.”

“All this makes for healthier arts ecology in the city,” says Cook. “And, in the end, keeping artists in town makes Miami a more vibrant community.”

Scholl concurs.

“Chris makes a great point,” he says. “What they are doing by providing spaces for artists or what the Pérez [Art Museum Miami] is doing by providing income opportunities for working artists by having them teach school children — that’s an art ecosystem. That’s what Knight is trying for. We are building a network of opportunities.”

***Fernando González** is a Miami-based arts and culture writer.*

Knight Arts Challenge South Florida events

The Knight Arts Challenge runs through Feb. 23. Learn more at the Knight Arts Challenge kickoff party happening from 6 to 8:30 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 27, at Gramps, 176 NW 24th St., Miami, or attend a community Q&A. To apply visit knightarts.org.

The Community Q&As schedule is below.

- 7 p.m., Feb 2: [ArtSouth](#) at the South Miami Community Center, 5800 SW 66th St., South Miami
- 7 p.m., Feb. 3: [The Projects at FATVillage](#), 523 NW First Ave., Fort Lauderdale
- 7 p.m., Feb. 4: [Cannonball](#), 1035 N. Miami Ave., No. 300, Downtown Miami
- 7 p.m., Feb. 5: [African Heritage Cultural Arts Center](#), 6161 NW 22nd Ave., Miami
- 11 a.m., Feb. 6: [Custom House Museum](#), 281 Front St., Key West, park at the Westin

The Community Q&As will be cohosted by ArtSouth, city of South Miami, African Heritage Cultural Arts Center, Miami-Dade County, Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, Key West Art and Historical Society, the Westin Key West Resort & Marina, Florida Keys Council of the Arts, Cannonball, FatVillage and Broward Cultural Division.

For updates, follow [#knightarts](#) and [@knightfdn](#) on Twitter, [@knightfdn](#) on Instagram and [Knight Foundation](#) on Facebook.

[Back to top](#) ^

FOCUS AREAS:

Fostering the Arts

COMMUNITIES:

[Miami](#)



PREVIOUS POST

Knight Arts Challenge South Florida opens for entries

NEXT POST

Invitational 8UP Dance Competition shows off the best



Comments