

Inspired by the arts

The Miami Herald Editorial
HeraldEd@MiamiHerald.com

Art collectors and tourists from around the world have made Miami Beach their destination of choice this week for the 10th anniversary of Art Basel Miami Beach, the sister event to the world-class art fair in Switzerland.

Over 46,000 attendees are expected to fill up the Miami Beach Convention Center, which will house 260 selectively chosen galleries from 31 countries. Visitors will undoubtedly indulge in posh restaurants and hotels during their stay, giving South Florida a much-needed economic boost.

Since its debut, Art Basel Miami Beach's expansion has done wonders for the local economy: Hotels have witnessed a 79 percent increase in revenue per room in the month of December, attendance has jumped 53 percent since the fair's first year and Greater Miami's international exposure as a growing, thriving arts community has been well documented by foreign journalists covering the event. This year's festivities promise to bring in more tourists and locals alike to the assorted shows throughout the region, from Wynwood to Little Havana.

But aside from the financial benefits for the local economy, South Floridians of all ages will also benefit from the cultural and artistic offerings. There's a civic value that goes beyond dollar signs, bringing cultural intangibles worth far more than, say, any of Picasso's most famous works.

Art Basel Miami Beach picks up where Miami Dade College's recent Miami Book Fair International left off: Both events revamp the city's image from party-hard headquarters to a bustling, international cultural hub.

Miami is represented in this year's Art Basel. Out of 260 galleries, three call Miami home: the David Castillo Gallery, Charest-Weinberg and the Fredric Snitzer Gallery. Art Basel Miami Beach's "satellite" art shows — art exhibitions that are planned within the same week of Art Basel to benefit from the influx of visitors — have something for everyone in the family to enjoy. The extravaganza combines film, conversation and discussion, performance art, music and fashion for a more-diverse event.

A third of the 46,000 expected attendees are locals. Many flock to Art Basel Miami Beach to peruse nearly priceless works of art, participate in the plethora of planned events or to people-watch. Whatever the reason, these patrons are contributing to the city, both through stimulating the economy and, more important, paying homage to the arts.

Research has shown that an interest in the arts, especially among teens and children,

leads to a greater investment in one's community and its civic life. A study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts found that readers and arts participants are more than twice as likely to volunteer in their communities. Children who are exposed to the arts are more likely to partake in civic activities during adulthood.

With Tallahassee whittling down Florida's investment in public schools and local districts struggling to protect arts programs from the chopping block, Art Basel Miami Beach offers a grand opportunity for young people to be inspired, to see the world beyond their neighborhood through the eyes of an artist, eventually shaping their own vision of the future.

As downtown Miami and its surrounding neighborhoods continue to be transformed with more arts offerings, a cultural movement is taking hold. And our children stand to benefit.

This weekend, families can take advantage of free art exhibits. Perhaps a classic painting or a modern display will spark a child's interest. Over time, their interest will transform Miami with a new generation that gets involved in our community — a true sign of a world-class city.