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Corktown gallery Reyes Finn is latest arts exhibit working in Detroit

Ryan Patrick Hooper, Special to the Detroit Free Press Published 6:00 a.m. ET March 14, 2019 | Updated 2:11 p.m. ET March



Bridget Finn, left, and Terese Reyes are the new owners and directors of the Reyes Finn gallery in Corktown. They pose outside of their new space on Trumbull in Corktown Monday, March 4, 2019. (Photo: Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press)

Contemporary art gallery Reyes Finn won't just be the new kid on the block in Detroit's Corktown neighborhood.

When it opens the doors on its first exhibition on Friday night, it will join a physical migration and cultural movement of arts-focused businesses and institutions from Oakland County turning their focus south of 8 Mile.

One case study is David Klein Gallery. Based in Birmingham, the decades-old gallery kept its Birmingham address focused on the 20th Century but added a downtown Detroit location in 2015 focused on contemporary art made mostly by living artists. It was a lifelong dream for owner Klein, who opened his eponymous gallery after dropping out of law school at the age of 23.

That same year, the Cranbrook Art Museum started thinking beyond its physical walls. The museum located in Bloomfield Hills ventured into Detroit with the help of grants only available to programs working within city limits and benefiting Detroiters, sparking the idea of a slew of live performances from artist Nick Cave — a Cranbrook graduate who currently lives in Chicago.

And after a two-year run, the former Reyes Projects gallery at 100 S. Old Woodward Avenue in downtown Birmingham will permanently close. The 4,600-square-foot location hosted over a dozen shows during that time.

Now operating under the banner of Reyes Finn, its move to Detroit will also help partners Terese Reyes and Bridget Finn shed over \$20,000 a month in rent.

Exchanging prime real estate at the intersection of Maple Road and Old Woodward Avenue in the heart of ritzy Birmingham, Reyes Finn will gain an address with more cultural cache to the art world at only a quarter of the cost — \$4,500-a-month for roughly the same square footage.

Formerly home to Casa Maria Family Services, the new location at 1500 Trumbull Avenue will integrate the character of its former tenant — the basketball court and crown moldings are staying — into the design of the gallery. With 24-foot ceilings and large windows welcoming an abundance of natural light, Reyes Finn's new location is equipped to display large-scale sculptural works and paintings.

Opening on Friday and running through May 11, its first show will present a trio of New York-based artists working in colorful, abstract styles. Entitled "Senior Coconut," the group exhibition includes new works from Eddie Martinez, Gerasimos Floratos and Rafael Delacruz.

Reyes and Finn had both spent time working in New York's bustling art scene before partnering once back in Michigan.

It will no doubt influence their approach to running a gallery in Detroit, says Finn.

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“When you talk to artists, they get this mental picture of a space in Detroit,” says Finn during a walk through the new space. “The artists are downtown. The people that we want to have a dialogue with” are in Detroit.

After 12 years in New York, Finn left her job as a director of gallery Mitchell-Innes & Nash’s contemporary programming to partner with Reyes on the former Birmingham space.

It was a return home the Grosse Pointe Woods native didn’t quite expect.

“I thought I was going to be a lifer, but I love it here and I missed it here,” says Finn. “But I never really thought that I’d be able to do what I do well here. It was really an interesting proposal.”

Hailing from Los Angeles and working as an art dealer and gallerist in New York, Reyes found herself emotionally bound to Michigan after moving here to be closer to family in a time of need.

Her aunt — photographer and philanthropic force Julia Reyes Taubman — was sick with cancer.

“My aunt was getting surgery. It ended up being worse than we thought,” says Reyes, who was previously working at NY contemporary gallery Marlborough Contemporary.

“I left New York. I quit my job. I came to Michigan.”

In January of 2018, Taubman passed away from cancer at the age of 50 in her Bloomfield Hills home.

“Every day I’m thankful because I got to spend so much time with her,” says Reyes. “She was my guiding light in life.”

As a founder of the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD), Taubman also acted as a guide for Reyes as she opened her first gallery. (Reyes also currently sits on MOCAD’s board of directors.)

“I’ve always wanted to open up a gallery. As I got more acclimated to Detroit, I realized that it could be a perfect place,” says Reyes. “The area really needed something different. Eyes needed to be opened to new and emerging artists that I loved and wanted people to see.”

The pairing has already garnered coverage in national outlets and a spot exhibiting at the Independent Art Fair in New York City — an invite-only affair where Reyes Finn was the sole Detroit representative among galleries from Paris, London, Los Angeles and elsewhere.

At Independent, Reyes Finn exhibited work from Detroit-born artist Maya Stovall alongside work from James Benjamin Franklin and William Marcellus Armstrong — a duo of artists who came to the state to study at Cranbrook and ended up staying put after graduating.

“We have excelled in bringing artists who are based in Detroit to art fairs outside of Detroit,” says Finn. “Artists who are here — who have been working the long haul, who have been chipping away at their own practice — need visibility outside of the city.”



Bridget Finn and Terese Reyes are the new owners of the Reyes Finn gallery at 1500 Trumbull in Corktown photographed Monday, March 4, 2019. (Photo: Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press)

Finn says the duo behind the new gallery are aware of the conversations around outsiders exploiting Detroit’s homegrown arts scene — “we’re hyper aware of these sensitivities because she’s originally from L.A.; I’m originally from the suburbs” — but says there’s a balance to be struck.

“It is exciting to be able to introduce (Detroit artists’) work to institutions, collectors, curators — that’s important,” says Finn. “That’s a huge part of this. It doesn’t mean the reverse isn’t also true. We’re really excited to bring artists that are based elsewhere to Detroit.”

In November, Reyes Finn will host a new body of work from Nikita Gale — an artist with an anthropology degree currently based in Los Angeles who blends that background into sound and sculptural pieces focused on specific social and political histories.

“When we saw Nikita’s work, there are so many points that she focuses on in her own practice — the suggestion of music; the presence of sound or the removal of it; the idea of architecture and construction material — that’s so relevant here in Detroit, but she hasn’t been here,” says Finn.

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Gallery owner David Klein says Reyes Finn is helping build an art pipeline that flows to Detroit from the rest of the world but also exports the artistic goods made here.

“It’s bringing some New York to Detroit and they’re bringing some Detroit to New York,” says Klein. “There’s an audience that’s out there in this country that’s interested in what’s being made in Detroit and what’s being made in our galleries,” adds Klein. “As dealers and business people, we want to satisfy those interests.”

The gallery reps artists from around the country including native Detroiters like Mario Moore and Scott Hocking, who Klein says are drawing interest at major international art fairs like EXPO Chicago.



Scott Hocking’s exhibition, “Old,” was at the David Klein Gallery in Detroit in 2018. (Photo: Evan Gonzalez)

“It’s amazing how curious people were in his photographs,” says Klein. “Somebody like (Hocking) really reflects what’s going on in the city.”

Next year, Klein will celebrate 30 years of art dealing in metro Detroit. He says he’s watched the “cultural energy” shift from Detroit to Birmingham and back again over the years.

“If you wanted to buy art in my parents generation, you bought art in Detroit,” says Klein, recalling an era in the 1950s and 1960s that saw galleries populating the third floor of the Fisher Building and the Hudson’s department store displaying original works from abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning.

White flight saw the art galleries following suit, creating a crowded marketplace in Birmingham when Klein was 23-years-old and ready to set up shop.

“When I opened in 1990, there were 25 galleries in Birmingham. It was the location to be,” remembers Klein. “Now there’s 2.5 galleries in Birmingham and all the energy has shifted downtown.”

Reyes, Finn and Klein all expressed initial fear that buyers in Birmingham wouldn’t make the trek to Detroit to purchase art.

But Klein says the move has only welcomed a new audience and new art collectors into the mix as interest and tourism increase foot traffic in downtown Detroit.

“We were concerned, ‘Would people from the suburbs visit in Detroit?’” says Klein. “That’s proven to be unfounded. People want to go downtown.”

It’s also helped fulfill a lifelong dream of Klein’s.

“I love art dealing history in Detroit — there’s a strong history there,” says Klein. “The fact that I could be part of that history? I never thought it would happen.”

For the Cranbrook Art Museum based in Bloomfield Hills, the motivation to move their focus downtown is partially spurred on by the rush of grant dollars flooding the Detroit arts scene.



Nick Cave’s performance series culminates with a performance called “Figure This: Detroit” presented by the Cranbrook Art Museum at the Detroit Masonic Temple Sunday, Oct. 4, 2015. Dancers from all of the three Dance Lab Performances make their way down the center aisle during the finale with Tunde Olaniran singing on stage as they move through the audience to the music. (Photo: Regina H. Boone, Detroit Free Press)

In 2014, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation awarded the museum \$150,000 for its “Nick Cave: Here Hear” project as part of the Knight Arts Challenge — a series of low-entry grants that require individuals, institutions and non-profit organizations awarded funds to match them within roughly a year of winning.

A requirement of the grant requires awardees to create programming that physically takes place in Detroit city limits or by directly benefiting its residents.

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"I'd say it's pretty pivotal" for the museum, says Andrew Blauvelt. Since 2015, he's served as the director of the Cranbrook Art Museum. "(The Knight Arts Challenge)" opens up a different set of possibilities for a museum to be engaged in a different community."

Since 2012, the Knight Foundation has invested \$52 million into the arts infrastructure of metro Detroit including a \$20-million investment spread across a host of cultural institutions that was announced in 2018. On Thursday, it opened the latest round of the challenge.

In total, the Cranbrook Art Museum has received \$285,000 in funding from the Knight Arts Challenge since 2014 for a trio of projects including \$75,000 for their most ambitious yet — the sprawling international exhibit "Landlord Colors" launching this June.

"We're looking at five different art scenes around the world since the late 1960s that have experienced some kind of social or economic precarity or upheaval," says Blauvelt. "There's been many, unfortunately, but we landed on five and those include Detroit — contemporary Detroit, but also featuring some artists from post-1967" after the rebellion.

"Landlord Colors" will feature more than 60 artists and, in addition to Detroit, explore the cultural climate of the Italian avant-garde during the 1960s-1980s; authoritarian-ruled South Korea of the 1970s; Cuba since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s to the present; and contemporary Greece since the financial crisis of 2008.

It'll be paired with "Material Detroit" — a sprawling series of public programs and performances around the city proper. It'll be produced in partnership with Laura Mott, a senior curator at the Cranbrook Art Museum; Taylor Renee Aldridge, the founder of arts criticism publication ARTS. BLACK; and Ryan Myers-Johnson, the founder of Sidewalk Festival.

"A big part of the show is looking at how materials may influence artistic innovation and creativity," says Blauvelt. "Some places like Detroit have an excess of material to use. Some places like Cuba have a scarcity of materials to use. That's one of the premises we wanted to talk about — the way the social landscape informs art making but do it in a way that's more artist-centric."

In addition to the Knight Arts Challenge-funded projects, the Cranbrook Art Museum has routinely partnered with downtown Detroit art gallery Library Street Collective and

real estate juggernaut Bedrock, who regularly underwrite large public art exhibits in buildings they own downtown.

In the past few years, the partnership has brought a retrospective Shepard Fairey exhibit to the museum as well as signage designed by acclaimed contemporary artist Ryan McGinness to a Tony Hawk-designed skate park in downtown Detroit. The most recent collaboration was "The Beach Detroit" — a traveling art exhibit designed by NY-based design firm Snarkitecture. (Snarkitecture partner and artist Daniel Arsham opened his own exhibition at the museum in conjunction with "The Beach Detroit.")

Jennifer Gilbert, the wife of Bedrock's Dan Gilbert, was named the Chair of the Cranbrook Academy of Art and Art Museum Board of Governors in 2017.

"We don't want to take our museum and put it downtown, but do we have to be bound by the walls here? Can we do projects elsewhere in the area?" asks Blauvelt, who also notes that there's an increasing amount of Cranbrook alumni staying in the area after graduating — a trend he didn't see when he was a student himself at Cranbrook in the 1980s.

"From the outside, the perspective on Detroit is that's it's a very interesting art scene," says Blauvelt, "so why wouldn't you want to be part of that?"

'Senior Coconut'

Group exhibition featuring Eddie Martinez, Gerasimos Floratos and Rafael Delacruz.

Opens Friday and runs through May 11

Reyes Finn

1500 Trumbull Ave, Detroit

<https://reyesfinn.com/gallery>