



The Fortress building in Miami.

THE FORTRESS:

A look inside a local landmark in the Miami arts scene

By Sophie Annie Videment

As I walked into the no-window-no-sign Fortress—an icon in the Miami art scene—I came across people softly speaking, surrounded by wood crates which were being handled with care. Then, Kimberly Jones, Vice-President of the Fortress for almost 30 years, showed me the impressive storage system. Behind a metal grid was a storage system with metallic, oval-shaped units which were elevated from the first floor up to the top of the eight-story building. No names were on the units, just a code and strictly controlled access before the unit is made available for the client. What is stored in the units? Antiques, Picasso paintings, and Jeff Koons sculptures, waiting to be carefully moved back to their owners' homes, sent for exhibition at a museum, or just remaining in storage, protected and preserved. There was once a piece of the Berlin Wall, Andy Warhol's wig, and an 1844 General Tom Thumb's Miniature Carriage. Only the owners and some dedicated employees know exactly what art pieces are hidden in these suspended treasure boxes.

On the upper floors, again, behind metal grids are larger individual spaces of several sizes that clients use depending on their needs.

Who are The Fortress clients? They are mainly private collectors, galleries, and museums. Collecting is addictive, and when a collection grows, private homes might become too small to feature the whole collection. The Fortress is full-service and prepares, inventories, packs, moves, unpacks, and stores these high value items. Seasoned collectors understand the importance of selecting the right off-site facility as part of their overall strategy so that their art is properly taken care of, especially in South Florida with its unique climate and hurricane season. The value of these pieces might be sentimental or monetary; in both cases, the collector wants the people who take care of them to treat everything as a one-of-a-kind value. Just as its well kept treasures are timeless, so too is The Fortress a timeless institution. Founded almost 30 years ago in 1983, the first art storage facility in Miami

values long term relationships and consistency. Its employees have 100+ years of combined service at Fortress. "Our newest employee has three times more years of service at Fortress than some of our competitors have been in existence. Peace of mind is the most important asset you can offer a client," says Kim Jones. "Twenty years ago we helped a client move his Asian pieces and Venetian mirrors from New York City to his new home in Florida. Recently, we helped him move his pieces from his home, which had become too big, to a condo. He was pleasantly surprised to recognize the same people disassembling and reassembling the pieces as he did 20 years ago."

The Fortress also has facilities in Boston and New York. "We have many synergies between New York and Miami" says Mrs. Jones. "Many New Yorkers have a Florida home. Clients buy art at Christie's or in a gallery and they want us to handle the shipment to Miami."

The Fortress can handle secrets, too. Last November they had a phone call from a part time Florida resident who had secretly bought a huge painting (85 in. x 72 in.) as a Christmas present for his wife. They picked it up at the gallery, held it at the Fortress for a couple of weeks, and then delivered it to the house when the wife was not at home. The husband had provided them with a diagram of the bedroom to hang it in a specific place just for Christmas. Surprise!

What about Art Basel? Says Mrs. Jones, "One of our clients, who is an ArtNews Top 200 Collector, asked us to install a large selection of her collection at her newly renovated South Beach residence for the private party she had organized during Basel week. We had to coordinate and deliver the pieces that came from three different cities in Europe, and other pieces from New York and Miami."

In the Fortress, old masterpieces are stored next to pieces from Fernando Botero, Richard Prince, Anish Kapoor, and even coffins of the pharaohs. In March 2010, a 3,000-year-old Egyptian coffin was returned to Egypt after it was seized at a U.S. airport from a gallery owner who couldn't prove ownership. Customs officials began an investigation and found that the valuable piece dated to Egypt's 21st dynasty. The Egyptian coffin was stored at The Fortress for security, inspection, and photography while the experts finalized their plans for its return to Egypt.

To better summarize the services offered by The Fortress, let's listen to one of their clients: Mr Javier Mora. The prominent contemporary art collector on the international art scene started using the services of The Fortress ten years ago: "My use of their services has evolved over the years from small storage to full service. Miami's climate can be devastating for art works, and my insurance company had cancelled my policy because of the risks associated with the hurricane season. So, every six months now, The Fortress employees pick up my collection, store it in their temperature- and humidity-controlled facility, and reinstall it after the hurricane season. I really like working with them. Everything is smooth and easy. They are very good professionals who take good care of the works. The Fortress is unique in Miami." ■

For more information about The Fortress and its services, contact Kim Jones at 305-374-6161 or kjones@thefortress.com. You can visit them on the web at www.thefortress.com

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Kimberly Jones, Vice-President of Fortress Miami since 1983



Artworks on display in Fortress' viewing gallery