

Arts

A Fine Sense of Place

Two recent installation projects succeed where others have failed

By **Alfredo Triff** *Thursday, Dec 23 2004*

Not everyone knows that downtown Miami's Lummus Park (just west of I-95 near the Miami River) contains a long, low coral-rock building that served as slave quarters before the Civil War. The historic structure was later moved to its present location after the park, Miami's first, was created in 1909. This is where [William Keddell](#) and [Brook Dorsch](#) organized **Sites-Miami 2004**, with installations by 34 local artists.

When I visited the park exhibition on opening night, some people complained about the lack of visibility, but the existing light was, in fact, appropriate. [Michael Betancourt's](#) *Ghost*, a video projection of an actual enslaved female on a loose white sheet, benefited from the shadows. Lou Anne Colodny's huge photo of an old aborigine fixed on a coral wall (and lit from below) exuded a contained force.



Each installation presented a distinct engagement with the park. Robin Griffiths had a monumental bare tree trunk hanging by ropes and chains in between two massive trees. It looked like a tortured soul without limbs -- a strong reflection on our legacy of brutal slavery. To comment upon the human crisis in [Sudan's Darfur](#), [David Rohn](#) arranged a gathering of soiled and mutilated dolls on the park's grass, an open mass grave.

[Ralph Provisero's](#) formidable plank sculpture elicited elegance and drama and felt historic, though in a more abstract way. Likewise with [Robert Huff's](#) wooden water cistern. These pieces evoked a moment in time before the rise of technology. [Carlos de Villasante](#) set a playful mood with his iconic canvases that took the shape of a moving wheel, while [Rebecca Guarda's](#) spiral assemblage of

fluorescent traffic signals suggested some ancient, labyrinthine blueprint.

On a more humorous note, [Kyle Trowbridge](#) played with the idea of the manmade appliance vs. nature. He designed detailed operating instructions and placed them at the bottom of trees, as if they were eco-gadgets. [Alain Guerra](#) and Neraldo [de la Paz](#), who collaborate under the name Guerra de la Paz, assembled in a circle colorful headless mannequins holding hands, a strange kind of pre-Modern pastoral gesture.

In his seminal *Architecture of the City* (1966), [Aldo Rossi](#) elaborated the idea of "inventory and memory," a sort of metaphysical space "as if stumbling upon what was already there." OMNIART and Sites-Miami 2004 prompted me to consider a model for site-specific work: organic and solemn, yet without pretentious self-importance; striking a balance between subject matter and medium; and blessed with a bit of humor.

OMNIART January 7 from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., January 8 and 9 from noon to 6:00 p.m. Warehouse 1, corner of NE Second Avenue and Thirteenth Street, Miami; 305-576-2950, www.omniart-miami.com.

Sites-Miami 2004 Through January 16. Lummus Park, 404 NW Third St., Miami; 305-305-7012 (William Keddell).