

ALTARTPROJECTS



Profiles: Bhakti Baxter

Life can be a series of connections or missed chances, depending on the paths you take. Sometimes it feels like you are on a roll and one meaningful event leads to another, such is the case with how I met **Bhakti Baxter**. It was approximately 6 months ago when I began my interview with **Douglas Hoekzema** at his studio in the **Little River Arts District** that I was introduced to his studio-mate Bhakti Baxter. There I was able to see a wide array of Bhakti's work, demonstrating his many talents. His charisma & no holds barred attitude sparked my interest to learn more about him and share it with you. In the past several months, my encounters with Bhakti have proven that he is the type of person that follows a path connecting him from one exciting adventure to another, always with a smile on his face.

Steve: Can you tell me about the dome project?

Bhakti: It's an original **Buckminster Fuller** Geodesic Fly's Eye Dome (24' in diameter) and it was built in 1978 by Buckminster Fuller. It was restored to perfection and is being shown for its first time in history in its ideal state. I'm just proud to be part of the process of assembling and de-assembling this piece.

S: How did you get involved?

B: It turns out that they are assembling it directly in front of my studio and the landlord of my studio is the new owner of this incredible object. They knew that I love Bucky, so they asked me if I'd be interested in working on the project and if I could get a team together and I said of course. I gathered some friends that I knew appreciate his work as much as I do.

S: Cool. So this is your studio, I thought your studio was up on 71rst?

B: That's true, this is a shared space that we've had for almost 7 or 8 years, and it will no longer be our studio starting the beginning of next year. So this is actually the last show we will have here, and to prepare for the show we've demolished walls and invited artists to participate in an exhibition. Again the studio is directly in front of this dome so that has already had an influence on what artists are deciding to create and present during Basel 2011.



Inside the Bucky Dome

S: Is the exhibition going to be related to the Bucky exhibit at all?

B: Yes and no, people are informed by 2 things. Number 1 that it's the last show that this space will ever see, the last anything this space will ever see because presumably it will be torn down. Then number 2, yeah **Buckminster Fuller**, how can you ignore it? It's this incredible white orb on a grass lot and people can't friggin' believe it. They pass by and have to ask, "What the hell is that?" So the artists that know about him are just that much more excited to be showing alongside of something as phenomenal as the Bucky Dome. So of course it influences them, but in no way is the show designed to be about Buckminster Fuller. The artists are welcome to respond to these factors and there's no curation, it's just: These are the circumstances, what are you gonna do?

S: How many artists are involved?

B: There's a big group of artists, I'd say maybe 15 confirmed. Some of them have a history with this space, they've worked here, in the shop, and they've occupied some of the space for a period of time. Others haven't, others are completely new and have seen the space for the first time, so I feel like it's a nice combination.

S: What is the space called? I don't think I've ever been here before.

B: It's called a lot of things; some people refer to it as the House Studio, because we used to have a space called The House. Other people call it American Donut, because that's what it says on the front door. But I just call it **3825**, which is the number of the building. So I think that might be the name of the show.

S: When are you guys going to have the show? When's the opening night and how long does it run?

B: Opening night is November 27th and it runs throughout the week of Basel so I figure by the 3rd or 4th we'll start tearing it down, or maybe just let it ride but we'll be open for like a week starting the 27th.



Adam and Bhakti working on the Bucky Dome

S: Great. Back to the dome again, is that the way it's supposed to be displayed- outdoors?

B: Absolutely, Buckminster Fuller thought about ways of sending a portable shelter to remote areas in a very short amount of time, very little money and with basic instructions that people can assemble it –say in the middle of the desert and have a shelter for a short period of time. These were some of his concerns so the design is guided, not only by natural

mimickery but by practical efficiency and economic constraints. And yet it's so beautiful, it's absolutely breathtaking. It's a revolution to everything around it, everything around it is square and in a box and this thing just screams out. It feels like somebody puffed air into a tiny ball from the sea and it exploded out into this. It's very alive, it's awesome.

S: Was the Epcot dome designed by him?

B: Well, any dome takes a direct knowledge from what Bucky explored and investigated in his lifetime, he was the pioneer of this kind of work. But architecture goes way back and if you look at early Islamic domes and their geometry, these concepts are nothing new. The way that he has interpreted these geometric forms did spin a sort of new generation of thinking in terms of again- efficiency, beauty, and economics.

S: I hadn't heard of him until Doug mentioned he was working on this with you.

B: A lot of people haven't heard of him, then you're presented to somebody that has and their eyes light up and they are like, "O my god". Then you tell them- and a *Dymaxion Car* is going to be there and they flip. But most people are like – "a dy what?" The guy is bad ass. I'd say he's more of a humanitarian than an architect. At the end of the day, he was a man that wanted to make the world a better place. He coined the term- Spaceship Earth. His notion was that these nationalistic ideas being completely fucked up, because he was like, "we are all on this one planet, forget the idea of nations, we are all here together, this is our home." Right there if you can understand that, that's the end of war in a way. We have to work together, there's no other place to go, and we're all breathing the same air and dealing with the same problems. He saw that and it was very simple for him to see that, he worked for the United Nations and wanted other nations to speak to the United States and negotiate on humanitarian terms. The Russians even loved the guy. He was the only guy the Russians would hang out with because they felt this guy isn't a box, he's a sphere. Bucky is the man. **Critical Path** is a book I've been reading, even before I learned I'd be working on this

project. It's basically his life story that he wrote at the end of his life, it's an incredible book.

S: What was that event you put on at **Tomorrowland**, *Darcy's Law*, all about? I mean I know what you did because I witnessed it but what was it all inspired by?

B: Well *Darcy's Law* is an actual law of Hydro geological forces; it's the way water behaves in a porous substance, such as the earth. The way that canyons are formed; the way that mountains and rivers and these branching shapes and systems take place. There is actually this law where they have these variable formulas for x amount force, that's not even important. What interests me was that they were reoccurring on multiple scales in the observable universe. It was happening at my show Nina's at *Rompelotas*, both on the wallpaper piece and on the small stamp. So I wanted that to happen at **Tomorrowland**, it was all about those 4 hours- 8-12. Whoever was there during those 4 hours got a piece that was made while they were there. So again grabbing the same technique of squishing a viscous fluid between 2 planes, peeling it back to get this branching effect of *Darcy's Law* – stamping it and then giving it away, where the person would take it off the wall and sign their name in the place where the piece was. In a way the piece to me is about them, trying to follow the paths that they mimic in *Darcy's Law*, even just getting there on a Sunday night; all these little branching pathways that made it there, and then branch back out into the world. I saw that again on this macro-micro level, here's this tiny little stamp but it's also a record of you being here tonight.

S: So we left something behind and took something with us – our signatures.

B: I see what you mean, in a way you acknowledged you. You were forced to write your name on the wall, so now it's not the artwork on the wall it's your name. To me that was a way of saying it's about you. It's not about me; I'm not here to do a performance with some skilled choreography, lighting, and theatrics. It was more like: you made it out on Sunday night and here you go, and this happened while you were there.

S: What were you doing with the projector?

B: That was a way to reinforce viscous fingering pattern, which is another way of calling *Darcy's Law*. What you do is you have 2 sheets of clear plexi on an overhead projector and you put some glycerin or something thick in there and screw a tiny hole in the top one and then you connect a copper tube through the top one that you could blow through. When you blow through it, the air pushes through the viscous fluid in a circular-coral like fashion and radiates outward and branches as a fractal, depending on the force of your breath. So it's another way of showing that phenomenon. But for me, I got it from old 60's psychedelic concerts where that's what they lit up their stages with. They were messing with gels and fluids and pushing it with the rhythm of the music. That ties right back into these patterns, because psychedelic art is all about fractals. I was trying to repeat that where I can find the observable *Darcy's Law* in all of these different moments of our time. I don't think it was very explicit, some people left. I still have pieces for the people that left. There were people that took

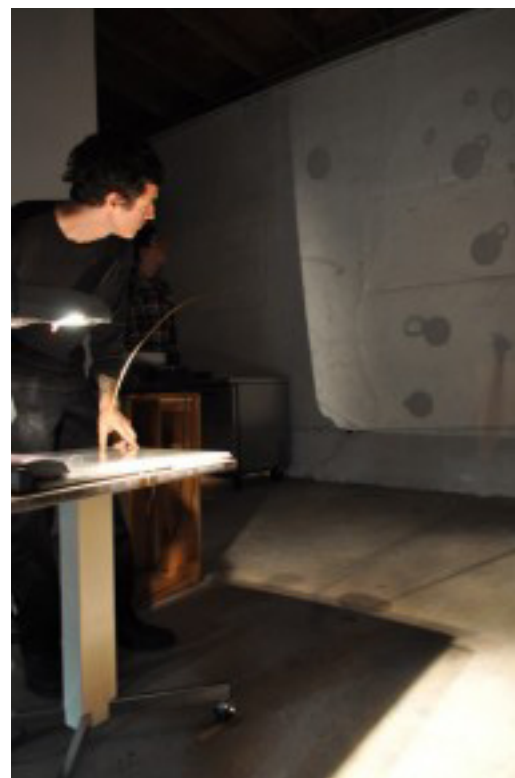
pictures like yourself and I could see o this guy didn't wait till I got him a piece, he left because he thought I was being a jackass or something. But I've got a piece for him.

S: Haa, cool so are you going to deliver them?

B: I've been calling them, tracking em down. But I've got them in my car in case I see them; I'll stop them on the side of the road and just give it to them.

S: What else have you got going on for **Basel**?

B: I also have a hard cover book called **XYZ** that was recently published and I look forward to giving them to strangers that come from out of town that may help further my career in other lands far away from Miami.



Psychedelic Projector

S: Do you have any targets for that?

B: No targets, I like the magic of meeting people during Basel, it's my favorite part. Meeting artists, curators, gallerists, and weird collectors and everything in between. It's a good journey, it's a fun adventure.

S: Are there any other exhibits or music you're looking forward to seeing?

B: We just saw **Tinariwen**, which was amazing, this band from Mali that was phenomenal. That just happened; it's one of the major gems I've been looking forward to. The people who didn't see this concert missed out so hard. Again they are another band that is huge in one part of the world but in another people may say, "Who the hell are these people?" They are amazing, they bring it and they have a real magic from the dessert and it controls the space as soon as they start to finish, they are a force. They are real generous, they came out to hang out with the audience when they were finished and took pictures with all the ladies.

S: Nice. How long have you been living and working here in Miami in the art scene?

B: I've lived in Miami my whole life and I started showing my work seriously in 1997, 98'. So what's that been 13, 14 years?

S: You work in so many different ways, what's your favorite medium?



Making Prints at Darcy's Law

B: I don't have a favorite medium, I like being able to express myself in different ways. If the process is guiding is the medium then it's determined by the process and not the medium, so it changes. It's always in flux; I like to be surprised sometimes in doing an experiment to see with what I could work with that was not a conventional option.

S: So is that a goal of yours when you're working to use something new to yourself and to everyone else?

B: Not to use something new but to use it in a different way. I guess the simple way of describing it would be the order or the arrangement of the composition, sort of like a song or like a pattern or a rhythm set in space that it intrigues and asks the question, "*Why is this interesting?*" Because if it's just based on technique or skill or solely on material, like if it's gold because everybody

likes gold so you'll get a reaction. But if it's really a pile of shit that looks awesome and you ask: "*Why is this amazing?*" That's more interesting than painting a pretty portrait of a pretty woman. So it's not so much what I'm working with but how I'm working with what I'm working with.

S: I see what you mean. It's interesting you related the process to making music, is music a big part of your life?

B: I think music is the highest art form in life, and if I would have known that when I was kid I probably would have stuck to that. I still play music, I have a drum set, a bass, a clarinet, I have a few guitars, so I'm surrounded by instruments and I play them, but I'm not a musician. Not at all, but music is so important because it's so abstract, it's so hard to define it in a way that you could the visual arts because it exists in space. There are standards and there are rules, and whole theories on music; but it still happens in time and in ways that we're not really responsible for like authors. I feel like music and art make us do what it wants us to do and in turn we're describing a larger picture of culture or society. We're not really creating that, we are just interpreting and articulating that experience.

S: Wow, I never thought of it that way but it's true, well put. What about your background, I know your family is from Argentina, how does your heritage influence you as a person or an artist?

B: As a person, I consider myself Latin. So even though I may look like a gringo or a European, at heart I'm just another Latin guy. And what does that mean? It just means I've got a little more sauce. It's definitely a part of who I am, but I don't consider myself Argentinean. I

consider myself a person from Miami, which is not even really the United States, it's its own Bermuda Triangle/ warped zone. But yeah Miami, Argentina, it doesn't matter. I'm starting to care less about titles and identity codes and ways of presenting yourself to other people. I just want to be another human being and I think Bucky is somebody that's been reminding me about the importance of being kind and a human being, the best human being you can be, which is a lot to ask.

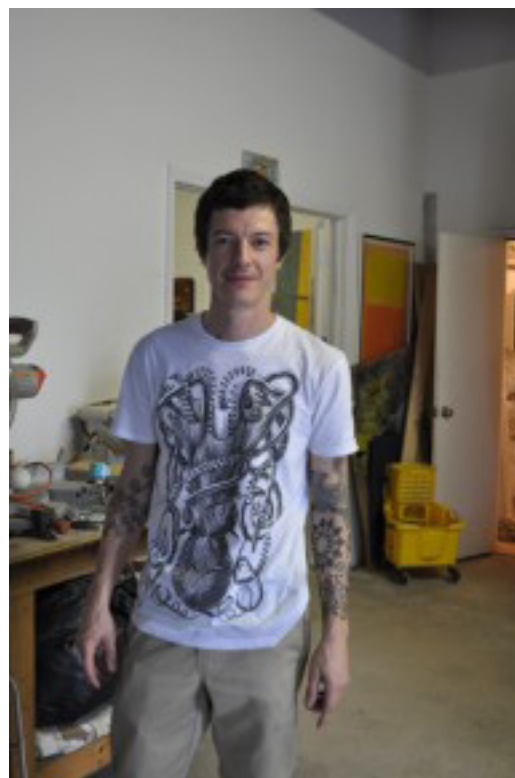
S: I hear you. Do you ever travel back to Argentina to see family?

B: Yeah, all the time, Argentina's the shit! The country side- Mendoza Cordova. But my family is from Buenos Aires, time flies when I go there. I'm there for 2 weeks and it feels like 3 days. So many friends, family members, places to go, and concerts that just spring up out of nowhere, cute little coffee shops. It's still an intense city, you can't be an idiot and walk down the streets, you've got to be on your tippy toes really sharp. But it's a cool place.

S: What's next for you for the new year, any new projects or music?

B: That's the thing, music, I want to make more music and I really don't know how. I have to figure out how to make more music. Moving has been good, it's been me going through all my crap and throwing shit away and keeping certain things. I found out that my record collection has been an important addition to my understanding of culture. So I want to do something with all of that, I'm not sure what. Next year is a pretty open book, there's a few things on the horizon but I don't like to talk about things that I'm not 100% about, but I'm looking forward to a lot of new directions again, another fork in the road. I work with a gallery in Rome, right now I have something with *Federica Schiavo* She has some pictures of my work, I also work with **Nina Johnson** at *Gallery Diet* in Miami, she's the one that's published this *book*. She's been a wonderful supporter of my work. The book actually has an ISBN number, I'm a little bummed that to me it seems a little pricey, I'd like it to be 5 bucks but it's

like 37. It's still a nice book it's hard cover, 120 page book. There's three different texts by different authors, I have an introduction by **Hugh Stockton**, an essay by **Gean Moreno**, and an interview with **Geir Heraldseth** from Norway. So there is a really diverse group of people that contributed to the book, I feel that that gives it a lot of strength. There's a discussion and the essay sort of brings it into context of art history and understanding where this fits in the history of making objects and processes and what's really at hand is it the object or is it the process and the experience that it brings us to better understanding what we're dealing with.



In the Studio

S: I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me, is there anything else you want to say?

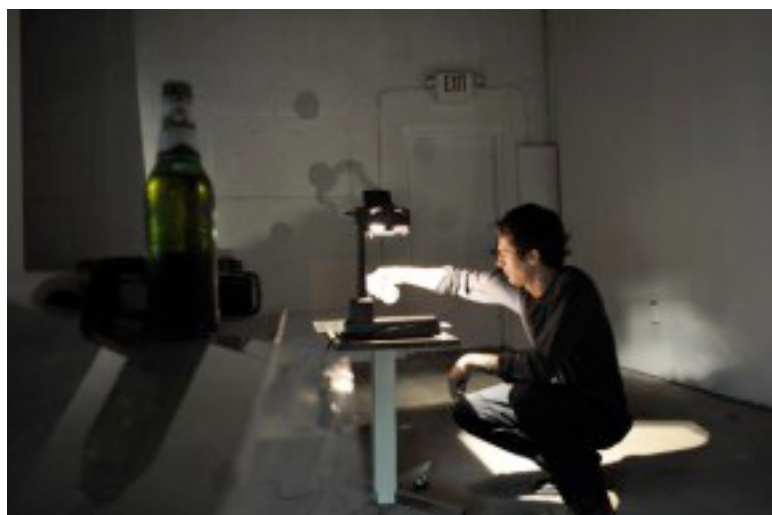
B: I don't know if I made any sense but I hope that people consider that art is not just something to look at or something to walk around but something that will help them to understand the irrational aspects of life in a more poetic and intuitive way. Art allows us to think in ways that logic, reason, and sciences don't really believe is very serious. I feel like art is that room in that space where things can be anything and $1 + 1 = 3$ and you can make a song with some people you just met and that's ok. So I hope art starts to do that, art becomes a way to break stagnate patterns of thought.

S: That's a great finale, thanks again.

B: Thank you Steve



Darcy's Law Event



Darcy's Law