

# ARTLURKER

A MIAMI BASED CONTEMPORARY ART NEWSLETTER / BLOG

## Miami artist Bhakti Baxter in Le Salon Des Beaux-Bains

This week Miami artist Bhakti Baxter joins ARTLURKER in Le Salon Des Beaux-Bains.



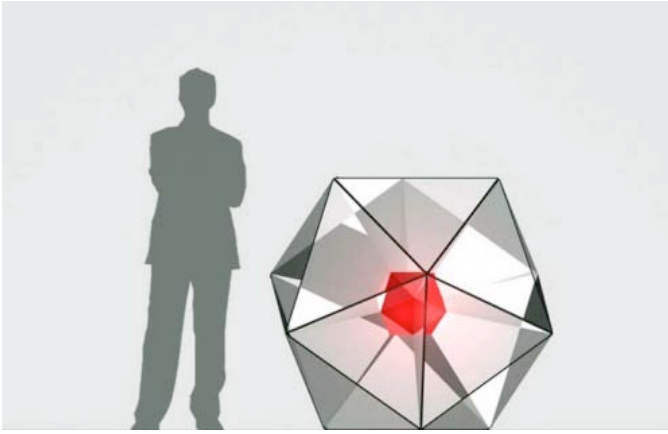
*"Sisyphus and Friends"* (2008) Oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

Baxter has been a staple of the Miami art community all of his life. From early beginnings as a vivacious street artist he is represented today by not one, but two major internationally acclaimed galleries. With solo shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art (North Miami), Fredric Snitzer Gallery (Miami), and Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin (Paris), safely beneath his belt, he is happily one of the few artists in Miami who can focus entirely on his practice.



*"Dome of the Rock (Red)"* (2008) Oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

Despite continual development his work demonstrates a consistent interest in art, architecture, natural systems, religious rituals, life, death, infinity and divinity. These concerns are suggestive of an individual who is not only fascinated by the world around him but also assured enough with his place in it to comment with dexterity on whatever aspect of its multifaceted nature appeals to his sensibilities.



"Untitled (Icosahedron)" (2008) Mixed media, Dimensions variable

But what of his routine? Surely he is able shed some light for the rest of us on what it takes to manage your day to a successful end. Or maybe not, maybe his winning formula is a secret; closely guarded in a private realm behind latch, bolt and key, or perhaps, more appropriately, veiled by a mysterious cloud of steam.

Hello, Bhakti.  
Hello.

Let's talk about showers and baths, in fact probably one or the other, which do you prefer?  
I like to have the option of both but given that I don't have a bath at the moment I just take showers.  
Are you a lazy bather?  
Lazy Bather?

What I mean is are you the type of bather who would typically spend as much or as little time as possible in the act?  
When I take a bath, it's usually for a long time. It's more than just cleaning the body and moreover it's therapeutic. But I take showers and they usually last as long as it takes to clean the body, which could be anywhere between 5-20 minutes.

Depending on what you've been doing immediately prior to entering into the bathing rituals...  
Yes. But not when it comes to taking a bath...

Which you don't have the option to do right now...  
I only have the option at my mom's house and that's sort of nice because if I feel like I need to take a bath I probably need to talk to my mom and eat some home cooked food.

How long have you been without a bath as an independent young man?  
It's been off and on. I had a bath when we had 'the house' then when they were destroying 'the house' I watched the crane operator (claw crane) raise the bath in the air then crush it just to show off to everyone how powerful he was.

Jesus.  
That was the last bathtub I had.

My, my. Have you found that you miss having a bath within easy reach?  
Not really. Again, the bath tub is more sought out when I am feeling ill or in need of just some sort of therapy but I have been feeling quite good lately and haven't had the need to lay in a bath and maybe it's the fact we have the ocean and I get some of my embryonic flash-back needs there.

So you haven't felt that you have been particularly rushed, generally, or that your work has been affected by not having the access to your own chamber of submersion these days?  
I don't think the two have anything to do with each other. I have felt rushed but given that I have felt rushed, maybe its better to just take a shower. I have however been bugging a friend who has a deprivation tank to reassemble it and I feel like it's a similar need to that of a bath.

So like our previous 'Salon De Beaux-Bainer,' hygiene is not a primary concern for you so far as bathing (in a bathtub) is concerned. Do you feel at all that showers can be as therapeutic? Or is there something about lying down that is quintessentially meditative?  
Showers are not as therapeutic. Showers are efficient ways of cleaning the body, and the water is constantly renewed where as in the bath tub you are laying in all the muck, although some people take a shower before taking a bath. I take a bath and then shower.

In terms of it being a therapeutic or meditative process, do you not agree that the stillness of the water – its stagnation- is contrary to disciplines such as Taoism which favor the constant flow of motion for maximum mental and physical benefit?  
I see the question that you are posing but I find that there are things in Taoism that would favor stillness versus motion for mental and physical well being.

Very good. When taking a shower, are you ever afraid of falling over?  
Sometimes.

*Has that fleeting concern ever prompted you to buy a sticky bathtub floor mat or sit down, or do you have a beveled surface to the floor of your shower stall? It is a stall right?*

There are small tiles with a rough finish that give me the grip that I need so stay on my toes. But this brings up a more important issue which I feel is pertinent to this interview and that is that in taking a shower you become fully aware of the body. It's the body cleaning the body (with the body such as fats in soap as explored by artist Janine Antoni) and a mental retirement. During the day my head is in the clouds doing this or that and I often-times forget about the body. I'll be slouching over or driving with my head forward and I have to constantly remember that I am not just the mind, but also the body. The shower helps me remember this and realize the body as an integral part of myself.

*Where as in a bathtub or a sensory deprivation chamber you escape the body and revel again in the mind?*  
Yes.

*It's interesting that both mental and physical release, regardless of whether you are releasing the mind from the body, or the body from the mind, or even the mind from itself, are equally relaxing. There would appear to be no one universal reality in terms of a state of relaxation that can be objectively observed by all spectators. That the reality of relaxation is subjective and therefore conditional upon human reception of it, yet at the same time vague and lucid.*

I feel like the only objective relaxation that was experienced by everybody happened in the womb. I don't think there can be anything more relaxing than that.

*And yet at that time, we had nothing as a basis of comparison. However, the intuitive memory of that time enables us, commonly, to appreciate similar states for what they are. Are you saying then that bathing, as I had assumed, really might have nothing to do with the production of work and peoples mental state tub by tub, shower by shower, but could however be a unifying force in the world, a common ground that with the right spin could be a catalyst for world peace?*

Sure, why not, but to go back to what you started saying, the comparison that we had was immediate upon birth and it was such a shocking entry that the previous state of being was heavily contrasted by the new reality, hence the screaming and the crying and the discomfort. Thankfully resting on mother bosoms is somewhat of a compromise

*Yes, not so not quite "happy birthday" but rather, 'pushed into the world weeping day'!*

*Would you say then that we are all essentially hermetic and jilted by the harsh reality of reality – do you sleep late by any chance?*

I don't think we are hermetic, even in the womb we are inside someone else so there has always been something greater or bigger than us that we rely on for nurturing and sustenance. But I love sleep. Even in post-birth when you're sleeping in your cave or whatever you need to breathe, you need the dark –or some people do – and in Miami you need AC. These are the post-birth umbilical chords.

*But we don't really NEED to bathe.*

We don't NEED to bathe, but this interview would have been very unpleasant otherwise.

And so on a dark rainy day somewhere on the upper eastside, pleasantly fragrant Miami based friends sheltered from the elements, sipped diluted apple juice and talked about life. The truth of relaxation – as they came to understand it – pertains not just to the individual but to all individuals and society as a whole and within that to anyone from any walk of life.

Baxter's bathing (shower stall or bathtub), although cherished, takes a back seat ride in his car of existence. While he enjoys (and more importantly appreciates) both disciplines for what they are, and can evidence his position with verbalizations which point to a considered aspect, Baxter is like the rest of us, as we are like everyone else – human. Whether we bathe or not, whether we live or die, whether we are rich or poor or successful or not the notions inherent with the practice of bathing and what they mean to us are not just trifling personal preferences but rather a 'vox populi' amounting to a understanding or comprehension that we are one and that for the good of use all we should relax and if possible not smell too much.

Nevertheless, in the hope of discovering a somewhat less melioristic aspect to Baxter's persona we followed him and found that although his 'angle' on life was still one which trod the righteous path of unity and solidarity he did have some pretty strange habits that certainly would not be welcomed in our parlor of powder and pinkness.

