

# The Art Bridge

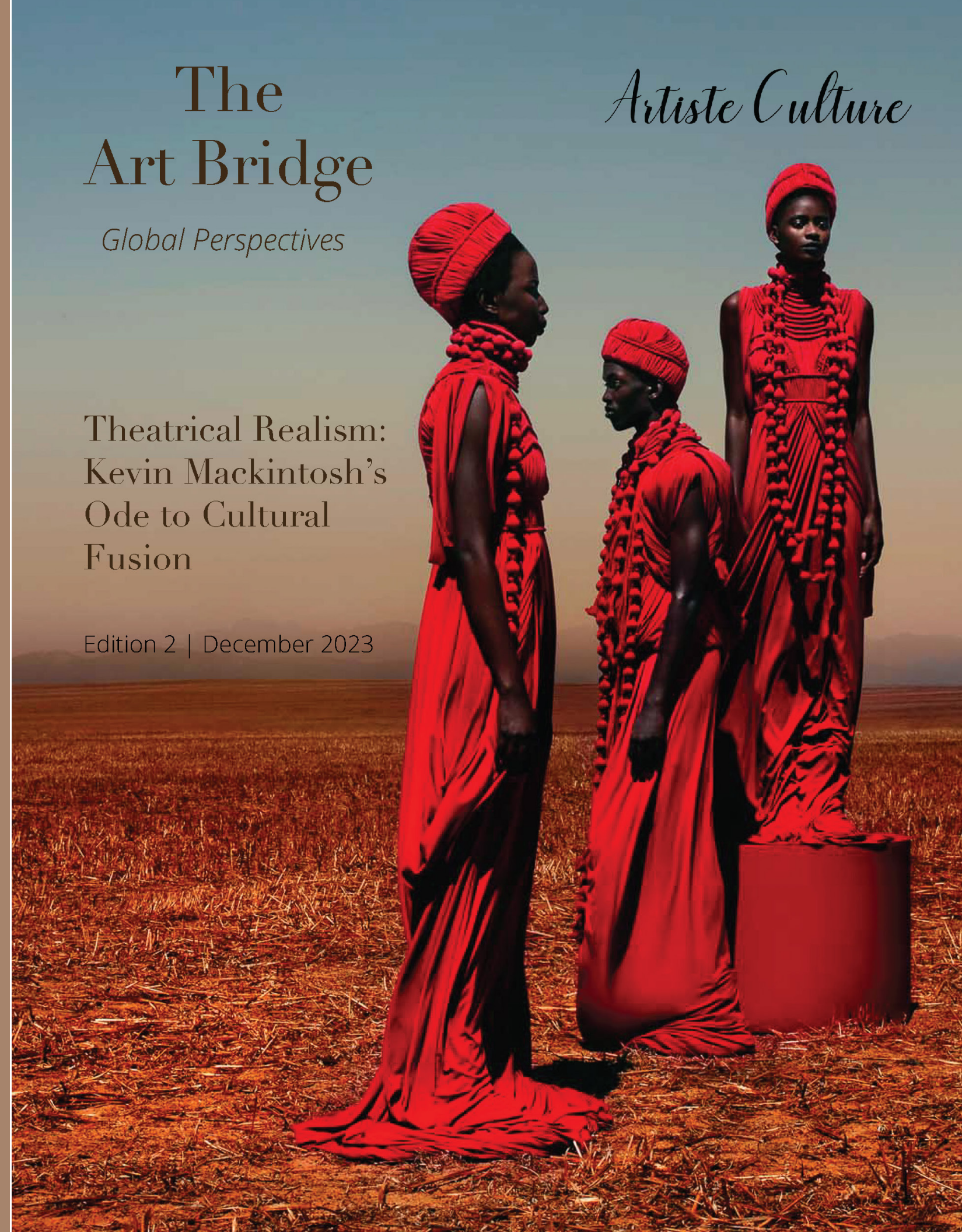
*Global Perspectives*

Theatrical Realism:  
Kevin Mackintosh's  
Ode to Cultural  
Fusion

Edition 2 | December 2023

*Artiste Culture*

THE  
BETSY  
SOUTHBEACH







*Lesley Goldwasser, Owner of The Betsy Hotel*

## Miami-Based Curator, Sophie Blachet, Talked With Collector, Curator and Betsy Hotel's Co-Owner, Lesley Goldwasser About Her Life as a Collector, Curator and Philanthropist

You are a Managing Partner at Greensledge, but your deep interest and love point to photography. At the Betsy Hotel, clients can see a large and diverse photography collection: Andy Sweet, Hassan Hajjaj, Tamary Kudita, and Robin Hill, to name a few. For you, what makes photography so unique? What interests you most in photography?

Photography has its own life force. It draws you into an experience as though you are there. And yet you are seeing the image through someone else's lens, in a way you could never capture or perceive it on your own. While a great photograph can be measured theoretically, by analysing artistic parameters such as line, light, shape, composition, and the like, I prefer not to dwell on critical elements like that and simply focus on an image's impact. Not to mention the important practical implications of photography for purposes of communication – of ideas, experiences, and historical realities. In my opinion, there is no other art form quite like it, and so I'm pleased to be able to share my love of photography with The Betsy's global guests.

When have you started collecting art? I noticed that you have mostly photography. Do you also show/collect other mediums?

It's true that in the last few years, I have begun to focus on photography, however, I've been a keen admirer of art and artists for my entire life – truly. Growing up in Zimbabwe, I had the chance to see artisans creating work with their hands with skills passed down for generations which is why we own a large collection of traditional carved Zimbabwean sculpture that makes it home at The Betsy. In the early 1990's I collected a series of works by an emerging painter, Arvie Smith, He was then a student in the graduate program at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, and is now a nationally recognised painter known for work that deals with the complex history of social and racial injustice that plagues our world; we expect to do an exhibition of his work from this collection, sometime next year.

The exhibitions program at The Betsy is focused on photography, mostly because I felt this was an underrepresented genre. Our venues are nontraditional because they are visited by patrons for varying purposes – true that some coming to see art, and yet many others are visiting for corporate or personal special events. We have found, though, that showing exemplary artwork where it's not expected benefits both the artists and the patrons. I love seeing guests being drawn in by the art, as they pause for a moment, unexpectedly. I feel like the pieces are little treasures scattered around the hotel ready to be discovered.

Aside from being an educated collector, you are also a curator. How do you work when it comes to curating a show?

While my formal education is in business, I spent my youth exploring the arts in many domains – including dance, music, and visual art. These early years as an avocational student of the arts led into adulthood as I have become more senior in my business career, I have a little more time to pursue my love of art in myriad forms, formats, and genres. For example, I love music, of all genres and I've seen 150 different operas in the last 30 years.

In the visual arts, I've explored photography rigorously, learning about different practices, historical legacies and perspectives and growing a network of like-minded appreciators who share this exploration. Finding neglected and emerging artists doing great work is thrilling, and it's a privilege to give them a platform. It's equally exciting to feature an established photographer who wants to break out of the traditional gallery or museum setting to explore being part of The Betsy Hotel's exhibition program, where patrons and artists discover each other unexpectedly.

We are seeing more and more initiatives favouring arts in the Miami Metro. As a strong supporter of arts, what do you think of how Art Basel Miami Beach has given a little help to shape the arts ecosystem in Miami?

Big box events like Art Basel Miami Beach (ABMB) draw attention to their dedicated locations. The fair's launch, in 2002, marked a significant moment for global art markets, and worldwide creatives - including Miami-based makers. What it did most was amplify the importance of the arts and artists as an economic force. Yet it also signalled local social entrepreneurs, artist reps, and gallerists to imagine satellite programming that could benefit from the presence of ABMB patrons, already in town and interested in seeing what the local art scene was doing. While I am not a credentialed social scientist, I have noticed anecdotally that early December in Miami and Miami Beach has become the time and place for art in the world. Everyone converges seeking an aesthetic experience – and (for some) a splendid piece of art to purchase. And I think most of us interested in elevating artists and the arts would agree that this is a good thing.

With your family, you own and operate the Betsy Hotel in South Beach. This luxury hotel is known for its community-based philanthropy: photography, music, and poetry. Why this philanthropic work is so essential for you and your family?

Our philanthropy program has been flourishing in Miami for 15 years and it's just part of our DNA, as a business and as a family. Initiatives include direct services to artists through exhibitions and performance opportunities, and a unique artist residency program that has provided respite to over 1000 creatives in the last 12 years. In addition, we are the programming home to three non-profit organisations, and an active partner to more than 30 others in every calendar year. With our children, we also founded and provided leadership for a youth service organisation in Zimbabwe.

We believe that a small business has the capacity to 'make a difference' in the world. The non-profit community and those needing services are depending on us – and so we're deeply committed to continuing this work. And we invite others to work with us.

Continuing with your philanthropic mission, you are on the board of the Zara Center in Zimbabwe. Can you tell us more about this centre?

My daughter Rachael brought the concept for Zara's Center to us on her 12th birthday, having travelled to/from Zimbabwe every summer of her life to visit her grandparents. Noticing the plight of children, she led the charge in our family to raise seed funds and together we started an afterschool feeding and education initiative that celebrates its 15th birthday this year. I've been serving as International Board Chair since its inception with many other family members involved. We have just broken ground on a new physical plant for Zara's Center designed by the Chicago-based architectural firm, Kreuck and Sexton, as a philanthropic gift. We have exciting plans for new initiatives at the new Center – from agriculture to technology – to ensure that our kids will have the tools to become tomorrow's leaders in Zimbabwe and beyond. You can learn more about it at [zarascenter.org](http://zarascenter.org)

How do art programs help the children at the Zara Center?

The arts are essential in the healthy development of children, and so our curriculum includes the arts. We offer a serious art education program as well as music, theatre, bead-making, sewing, dancing, marimba making/playing, and (if you will) the art of good old-fashioned play. In the arts education arena, we partner with a wonderful organisation in South Africa, LALELA, that trains our staff annually and provides a rigorous content-valid curriculum. We've actually found that children who engage in Zara's arts programs are more at ease and more willing to connect with each other and the world.

Finally, do you have any advice for art lovers visiting Miami Beach on what they must see – besides, of course, the exhibition at the Betsy? – to make the most of their visit?

The Betsy is front and centre to Art Basel Miami Beach – with the convention centre just a few blocks away and so many other major arts institutions with major shows close by as well. Right in front of Betsy, beachfront, are several satellite fairs that are 'must see', as are the pop-ups on Lincoln Road. I will be going to see as many shows as I can during Art Basel Miami Beach 2023, and I urge others to do the same.