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## The Artists Who Waste Not Want Not

By Jason Foubberg

Paula Crown asked Theaster Gates to help her create a work to help others



TRANSPOSITION: Over Many Miles, 2014. Photo: © Vanessa Ruiz

You can count on the fingers of one hand the number of philanthropists who are also working artists represented by major New York galleries. Paula Crown is one. She and her husband James, an heir to the General Dynamics (a defence company) fortune, have poured their influence into large-scale public art projects, such as Jaume Plensa's Crown Fountain, 2004, in Chicago's Millennium Park, and a collaboration with the Aspen Art Museum on the ski slopes of Aspen, Colorado, starting in 2005. Paula Crown earned an MFA in painting and drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012, and her first outdoor sculpture installation was unveiled on Monday in Miami's Design District.

Crown asked the artist Theaster Gates and the architectural firm Studio Gang to help with the fabrication and the site plan respectively. Collaboration is essential to Crown's practice, which marries her active studio with social partnerships. She calls it her duty of citizenship.

TRANSPOSITION: Over Many Miles is a 3,240 sq. ft work, installed on a parcel at NE 1st Ave and NE 39th St. An outdoor flooring pattern composed of reclaimed wood, decorative crackled glass and artificial turf forms the basis of the interactive sculpture. As the title suggests, Crown's land art conflates several layers of globe-trotting, including reused Midwestern lumber and a floorplan derived from topography drawings made while the artist flew over South Africa's Drakensberg Mountains in a helicopter. The focal point is a wooden

sculpture; the bench's shape resembles the ripped edge of a spiral-bound sketchbook sheet, enlarged and reconstructed by Gates's studio.

When Crown contacted Gates about the commission, she knew that he would pay it forward, as he often does with his community rehabilitation projects on Chicago's South Side. Gates hired students from his Design Apprenticeship Program to assist in the sculpture's construction, with his studio handling the more complicated aspects. Eight students aged 14 to 21 were paid the minimum wage and learned core skills such as washing, sanding and sealing the found wood.

Miguel Aguilar, who manages the programme, says that it provides young adults with qualitative skills. "We speak to the students with a tonne of respect," he says. "We treat everything as a special art project, even if it's just cleaning the shop. Even wood cut-offs are considered; what is waste? What about formal composition?" One student who met Gates and Crown is now pondering a career in engineering. "You got a sense of their wheels turning," Aguilar says. "There are opportunities in the world that they weren't aware of."

Crown shares a perspective on reclaimed wood with Gates, who uses the material in many of his façades, sculptures and pieces of furniture. "The US is a throwaway society... there is beauty in something that has been loved," Crown says. The wood was sourced from a 125-year-old home in Wisconsin, which the artist was able to date by its nails. The sculpture brings dignity to the disused materials, she says.

The initial concept was to create a playground; the design is interactive, but the sense of play is open-ended. Asked how she expects people to behave on-site, Crown says that her sculpture is "womblike", and that visitors may experience the sensation of being hugged by the structure.

The temporary installation (until March 2015) will probably return to the Chicago neighbourhood where it was made—near the Washington Park Arts Incubator, another of Gates's flagship institutions—for long-term installation.

Gates says that his studio will not accept fabrication jobs from other artists; he considers Crown a friend, and she has supported his community projects for several years.

Crown, meanwhile, says she is driven by an "ABC" philosophy: art, business and community. Although she is happy to be alone in her studio, working on easel-sized paintings, her projects make the greatest impact when she mobilises both her philanthropic power and creative intentions, advancing a hybrid art practice on an architectural, entrepreneurial scale. "The power of the arts to change a neighbourhood is something I've signed up for," says Crown, who is finishing her term on President Obama's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

After the sculpture is removed, Jeanne Gang's Sweetbird South Residences tower will rise on the Miami site. Crown's first solo show is due to open at Marlborough Gallery in New York early next year.



Theaster Gates and Paula Crown examine part of the installation in the studio. Photo: Sara Pooley, courtesy Paula Crown and Theaster Gates Studio & the Design Apprenticeship Program