



Anastasia Samoylova: Floodzone

Anastasia Samoylova photographs Miami Beach's dissonant ecological reality



Words by Alif Ibrahim, Thursday 28 November 2019

Miami Beach, a strip of land filled with endless luxury beach resorts and white sand beaches located northeast of downtown Miami, is probably America's closest equivalent to a tropical paradise. Perhaps it's even better than a tropical paradise. The significant amount of art deco lush with pastel shades of pink along with its involvement with Art Basel means that it's not just a hedonistic centre of excellence – it's a cultural one too.

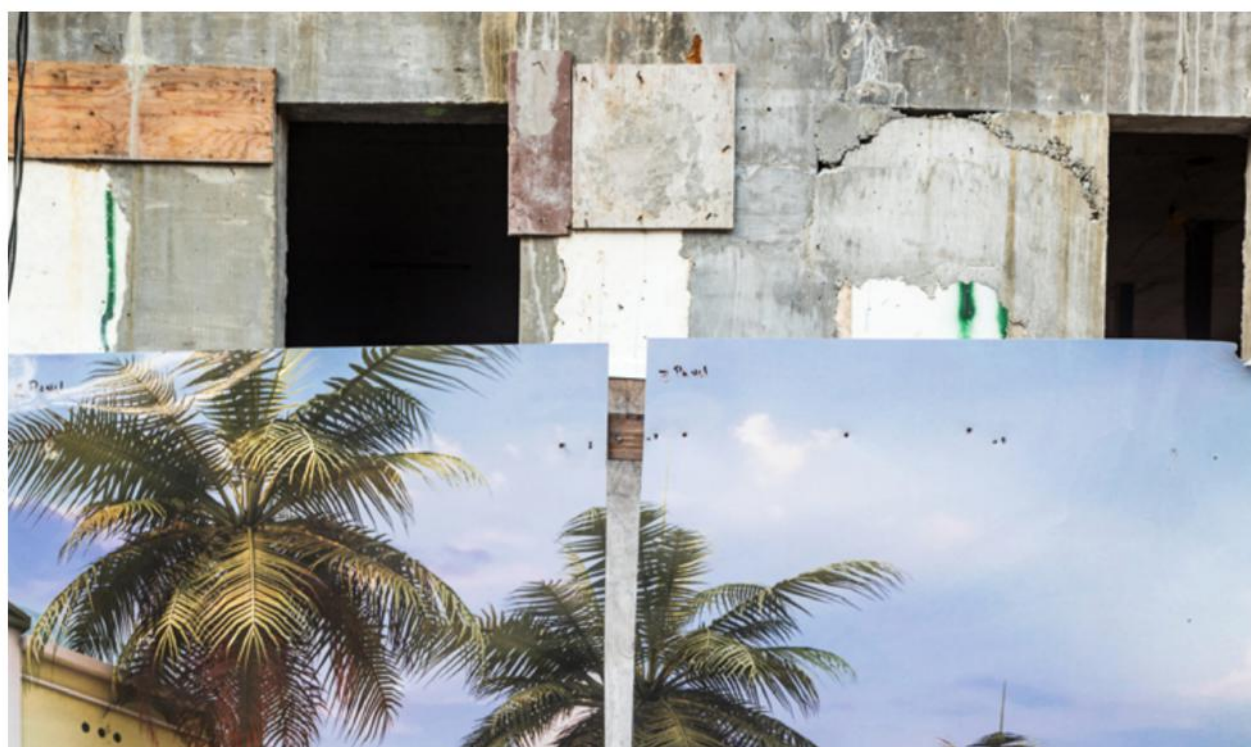
But underneath the surface, things seem more sinister, in what seems like a dissonance between the dreamy imagery of Miami Beach and what actually goes on in reality, the significance of

each visual element is uncannily related to the next. This dissonance marked the beginnings of photographer [Anastasia Samoylova's](#) project, *Floodzone*.

After growing up in Moscow, the Russian photographer moved to Florida via the American Midwest. "I stepped sideways into photography. While in Russia, I studied environmental design," Anastasia tells *It's Nice That*. "After I moved to Miami Beach, it was immediately clear that there was a profound dissonance between the public image of the place and the reality. The public image being the glossy tourist advertising, the iconography of paradise and the booming real estate market."

The reality, however, was much more grim. In the three years that she's lived there, Miami's had multiple hurricanes and routine flooding, even on sunny days with no rain. "The reality is rising waters and ever more frequent hurricanes," Anastasia says. In *Floodzone*, a recently published book by Steidl Books, the photographer captures the moments of crises constantly on the minds of those facing environmental destruction.

"There is definitely a mood I was trying to portray, which has to do with the psychological state of dread and anxiety felt by those living most acutely with the threat of climate change and rising sea levels," Anastasia explains. The photographs, shot in a speculative, wandering manner over a year, is Anastasia's way of capturing the less obvious way that this ecological crisis has manifested – and the contradictions that accompany it. Real estate investments have poured into areas that are considered high-risk zones, manatees appear in unexpected places, wary of the rising ocean temperature, and murals of the tourist paradise crack in the sweltering heat.





Anastasia Samoylova: Construction in South Beach, 2017
Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Caroline O'Brien

“I was a long way into what became *Floodzone* before I noticed I was photographing every kind of liquid apart from crashing hurricane waves,” she says. “Around three quarters of my images feature liquid in one form of another.” A result of her conscious decision not to explicitly photograph images of disaster or catastrophes: “We have enough of those,” she says on the matter.

A pattern of motifs, colours and imagery start to recur in her photographs. “Some of these have to do with taking the familiar colour palette of the area – the lush greens and pastels – then pushing them until they seem to undo their own pleasure. Pink attacked by mold. Yellow and ochre turning sour,” she says of her carefully chosen compositions.

These pastel colours of Miami’s art deco, she says, were originally all white when it was built in the 1930s. The pastels arrived later in the 1980s, starting with the white Freidman’s Bakery being painted pastel blue, pink and green. By some accounts, this was done to preserve Miami’s architectural history. By others, it was to overcome its reputation as another American drug and murder capital.

Either way, it is a way to rewrite its history by painting over its reality. Along with crumbling architecture meekly covered by awnings of its future state, along with the wilful ignorance of the real estate developers’ attitude to the current ecological issues, Anastasia’s project depicts a hyperreal city that refuses to face its reality.





Anastasia Samoylova: Road, 2018

Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Caroline O'Brien