



Artists in Residence in Everglades

AIRIE Nest Gallery, Ernest F. Coe Visitor's Center, Everglades National Park, 40001
State Road 9336, Homestead, FL 33034



SCULPTOR ROBERT CHAMBERS SOLO EXHIBITION EXPLORE

EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

Rising Pollinator, Robert Chambers, 2018

SEREPENS: *Serenoa repens* OPENS NOVEMBER 18, 2018 in AIRIE NEST GALLERY

EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

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Homestead, FL – As a Fellow in the Artists in Residence in Everglades (AIRIE) program in early 2018, sculptor Robert Chambers focused on lands north of Lake Okeechobee in the headwaters of the Everglades. From this experience, he has created a new body of work combining elements such as biomimicry, 3D printing and principles of evolutionary biology to express the urgency of conserving the delicate relationships of natural phenomena and indigenous species that make up the Florida Everglades. Chambers' work is inspired by the *Serenoa repens*, the tenacious plant commonly known as the saw palmetto, a symbol of the Everglades' complex interplay of water flow, plant life, fire and weather. See Everglades project video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoB-KCs4QHc&feature=youtu.be>

With the support of an Art Works grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Chambers' solo exhibition *SEREPENS: Serenoa repens* opens at the AIRIE Nest Gallery in Everglades National Park on November 18, 2018, and will be on view through April 14, 2019. The gallery is located in the Ernest F. Coe

Visitor's Center at the southeastern entrance to the Everglades National Park, outside of Homestead, FL (40001 State Road 9336, Homestead, FL 33034.)

During his residency, AIRIE organized a trip for Chambers to visit Archbold Biological Station (ABS) where its director and lead scientist, Hilary Swain, captivated him with descriptions of the remarkable tenacity of the *Serenoa repens*, which can live upwards of 5,000 years, thanks to its expansive root system that Chambers sees as both a power source and liminal subterranean presence that verges on the alien. A model of this root system, created with cellulose fibers and 3D printing, stylized to look like a gigantic open-ended Celtic knot, will be the gallery centerpiece, surrounded by sculptures, drawings and scientific graphs, which refer to other parts of the plant and its ecology.

Robert Chambers calls *Serenoa repens* the rhinoceros horn of the Everglades. Saw palmetto is aggressively harvested, even poached, for its medicinal properties, which are believed by some to cure a range of ailments including prostate cancer, erectile dysfunction and low energy. Chambers sees a parallel between the saw palmetto, whose berries were used by the Mayans to access alternate spiritual consciousness, and the work of ethnopharmacologists Dennis McKenna and his brother Terence McKenna.

The scientific, artistic and myth-building aspects of Chambers' *SEREPENS* project draw attention to the plant and advocate for understanding its crucial role in the history of ethnobotany and Florida's ecology. **However, the project does more than advocate; it constitutes the launch of a multi-pronged campaign to reverse the *Serenoa repens* population's decline.** The plant has been used since Mayan times for medicinal and ritual purposes, and currently has a significant unregulated market as a supplement. As a crop, it can compete with sugar and vegetables currently being farmed in what was Florida native saw palmetto habitat.

Farming non-native plants requires farmers to use fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, which run off into Lake Okeechobee and contribute to a deadly phenomenon known as algae bloom. Switching from these non-native crops to saw palmetto would eliminate the introduction of these chemicals to Florida's hydrology and may increase the economic productivity of that land. The plant's root systems may decrease effects of drought on the water table as they form a protective mesh just beneath the ground, helping the arid soil retain nutrients and moisture. The structure and systems built into this resilient plant support diverse species and prevent or may even reverse erosion.

Chambers has created a series of sculptures representing stylized insects that pollinate the Saw Palmetto made of polylactic acid (PLA), a nontoxic filament resin made of sugar derived from starches found in foods, representing the plant's precious berries. Enlarged 200 times using a MakerBot Z18 3D printer, the translucent pieces appear to peel away from vertical scaffolding strands, revealing bright, futuristic creatures. These are complimented by large spherical objects referencing berries printed with Formlabs. 3D-printed topographical graphs are placed on wooden tables with milled concave surfaces created with computer-aided CNC design machines. Through the conduit of contemporary art, this technically impressive process is an effort to popularize research about the saw palmetto to create environmental awareness on many levels. Forged steel sculptures dot the floor of the exhibition, recalling the invasive vines and reptiles that threaten the Everglades.

Chambers designed and produced these sculptures with the collaboration of colleagues at Florida International University's (FIU) Robotics and Digital Fabrication Laboratory (RDF), a state-of-the-art facility with robotic arms, 3D scanners, laser cutters, programmable objects, and 3D printers, and the CARTA Innovation Lab at FIU's Miami Beach Urban Studios.

ROBERT CHAMBERS (Born Miami, FL 1958. Lives Miami, FL) is best known for his large-scale sculptures and installations, which bring together whimsy and humor with scientific, mechanical and industrial acumen. Chambers grew up immersed in scientific inquiry as the son of a cellular molecular physiologist who was on faculty at University of Miami's Marine School and the Marine Biology Lab at Woods Hole, MA, and as the grandson of the scientist responsible for inventing the micromanipulator for cell surgery. Chambers followed his mother, also a sculptor known for her metalwork, into the field of art. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO; Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL; Museum of Science and Industry, Tampa, FL; Tufts University, Medford, MA and *Sugabus* at The Laumier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO. Recent public art commissions include *Light Field*; an interactive 100' light wall and *Orbital 1 & 2*; 10 and 12 ton marble CNC sculptures at the South Dade Art Center. Exhibitions include: The American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY; MoMA PS1, New York, NY; Sculpture Center, New York, NY; Fabric Workshop Museum, Philadelphia, PA; Projektraum M54, Basel, Switzerland; The Kunst Raum Riehen Museum, Basel, Switzerland; Casa Tua e Casa Mia: The American Academy, Rome, Italy; Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, PA; Acadia Summer Arts Program, Mt. Desert Island, ME and for 2018, the Artists in Residence in the Everglades (AIRE). Robert Chambers earned a BFA from the University of Miami and an MA from New York University. He is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Florida International University, Miami. Chambers is also Visual Arts National Selection Panelist as well as the Visual Arts Co-Director at YoungArts Miami. Awards include the Nancy Graves Award, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, South Florida Cultural Consortium Visual and Media Fellowship, and the USA Nimoy Fellowship. He is represented by Emerson Dorsch, Miami.

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE IN EVERGLADES

Exhibitions and programs presented by Artists in Residence in Everglades, AIRIE Inc., draw upon the creative voices of AIRIE Fellows to advocate for the appreciation and preservation of this subtropical wilderness. Since 2001, AIRIE has brought over 150 artists, writers, composers and choreographers to Everglades National Park for month-long residencies. Through the residency, exhibitions and outreach programs, both in the Park and at partnering institutions throughout South Florida, AIRIE has become a leading voice for the arts and ecology of the region. With the support of a 2017 Knight Arts Challenge Grant, AIRIE transformed a former conference room in the Everglades National Park's main visitor center, into a stunning exhibition space. The interdisciplinary contemporary art exhibitions presented there connect the ecology and cultural history of the Everglades and highlight art and science collaborations. The Ernest F. Coe Visitor's Center receives over 250,000 visitors from around the world, giving AIRIE exhibitions international exposure. AIRIE Nest Gallery ensures that visitors' first impression of the Everglades is through an artistic lens.

Artists in Residence in Everglades, Inc. is supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners of Miami-Dade County, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Council on Arts and Culture and the State of Florida, and the Florida Humanities Council. Artists in Residence in Everglades, Inc. is an Official Partner of the Everglades National Park.