

BAZAAR

Sangster, Ella. "Warhol, Haring, Basquiat: Hota's Pop Masters on the Gold Coast." *Harper's Bazaar Australia*, Feb. 2023, <https://harpersbazaar.com.au/hota-gold-coast-pop-masters-art-exhibition/>.

The “universe of pop” arrives on the Gold Coast

IN ITS INFANCY, Pop Art was nothing if not divisive. Now, some 50 years on, it is perhaps art’s most egalitarian movement.

In 1966, Pop Art theorist Lucy Lippard wrote of legendary artist Andy Warhol, “[his] films and his art mean either nothing or a great deal. The choice is the viewer’s.” Lippard may as well have been speaking for the entire Pop movement, which remained controversial for its elevation of the everyday to the status of high art. More than half a decade since the genre hit the mainstream, it appears viewers have settled on the latter — pop means a great deal. Further, its masters, Warhol, along with Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, remain some of the most significant figures in art’s post-modern landscape.

Today, one of the most legendary collections of Pop Art in the world belongs to New York’s Mugar Family. Worth an estimated \$5 billion, the Mugar Collection boasts over 800 Warhols, as well works from Basquiat, Haring, Katherine Bernhardt, Kwesi Botchway, George Condo, Damien Hirst, Kaws, Joel Mesler, Richard Prince, Tom Sachs, Julian Schnabel, Mickalene Thomas and Tom Wesselmann.

So, how an iconic capsule of Pop Art ended up on the Gold Coast is anyone’s guess — even the curators of Home of the Arts (HOTA), still find it hard to grasp. In fact, when director, Tracy Cooper-Lavery cold-called her contact for the family back in 2018, the gallery didn’t even exist yet. Nonetheless, six years, a pandemic and a lot of hard work later, HOTA now stands as a colourful ornament in the skyline of Surfer’s Paradise, the proud temporary home of some of the most significant artworks in the world.

The exhibition, aptly dubbed Pop Masters: Art from the Mugar Collection, New York, is evidence that Pop Art never becomes redundant, with an ability to transcend contexts of time and location.

“This collection has some multitudes to draw from, explains HOTA curator, Bradley Vincent. “So we started looking more broadly, to try and tell a story that said, ‘Hey, this is a moment. This is how Pop Art started. This is Warhol, who most of us know, in some way. And then let’s look at what the legacy of that is.’ And so we’ve built this kind of universe of pop.”

Pop Masters traces the ups, downs, intimacies and intricacies of art and popular culture across the past six decades, proving that nothing much has changed, but at the same time, so has everything.

Throughout the exhibition, the works remain in conversation with each other. From the obvious; an image of John F. Kennedy in Wesselmann’s Great American Nude #21 (1961), metres from

Warhol's harrowing *Sixteen Jackies* (1964), which depicts the former First Lady's stages of emotion throughout that fateful trip to Dallas, to the inferred; Basquiat's *Procession* (1986) hung adjacent to Botchway's monochromatic yellow *Divine Protesting* (2020), which both serve as harrowing commentary on the mistreatment of Black people globally, 36 years apart. The final work is *Banana*, one of the five NFTs produced by Warhol around 1985 (yes, you read that year correctly), which was stored on a floppy disk and forgotten about until the 2020s.

The fact that such a significant collection has made its way to the Gold Coast — bypassing Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane — for an exhibition may seem somewhat confusing. It's not as if the formerly sleepy surf city has a reputation as one of Australia's great artistic hubs, after all. However, take a walk down the esplanade and backstreets of Surfer's Paradise and the nearby presence of the Pop masters' works begins to make sense.

The lifeguard towers, '70s-style restaurants and surf shops share a palette of punchy pastels and bright colours with the works of Kaws, Thomas and Haring. The cheery banter of the city's locals reflects the tongue-in-cheek nature of Koons' *Monkeys (Ladder)* (2003) and Bernhardt's *Giant Jungle Office* (2017). The relationship between Mesler's Pool Party and the beachside city is self-explanatory. What's more, the black and white photographs of a sunbleached Gold Coast in the 1960s, '70s and '80s depicted in Graham Burstow's book *Flesh* — which is sold in the gallery's gift shop — recalls the intimacy of Warhol's iconic silkscreen portraits of Sylvester Stallone, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Haring and Juan Debose.

In addition to hoping to bolster the Gold Coast's art scene, through the exhibition, Vincent explains, " We also wanted to demonstrate that Pop Art is really accessible. It's also really encouraging and you walk through that show and you feel like art should be everything and anything... It's by the people for the people." He adds, "and it's so exciting to bring an international show and to put it in conversation with Australian Art."

Above all, the exhibition highlights that from New York to the Gold Coast, the 1960s to now, Pop Art's ability to provoke and inspire endures.