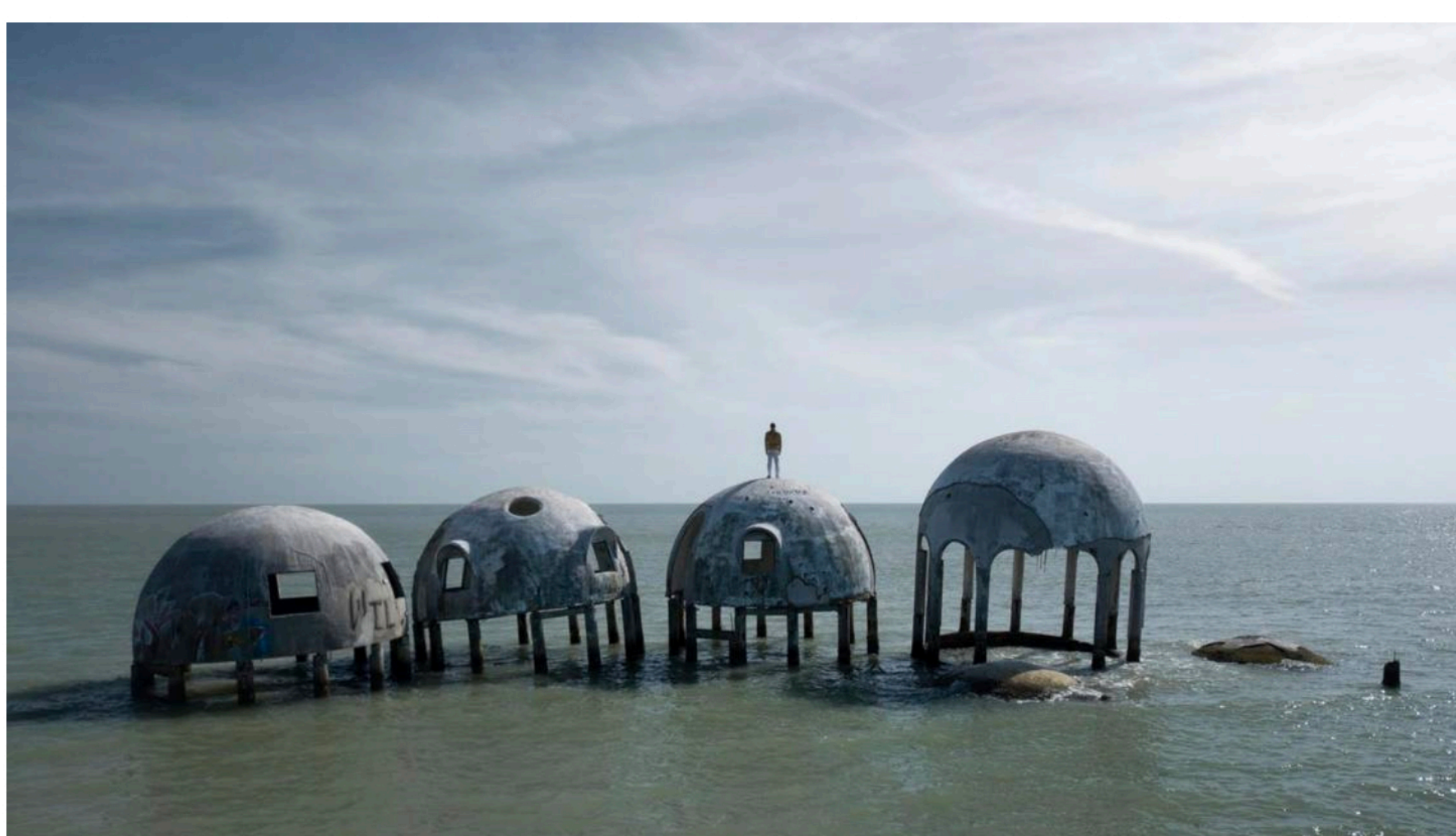


OP-ED

For artists and scientists, confronting climate change demands our urgent action / Opinion

BY OMBRETTA AGRÓ ANDRUFF

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British artist Simon Faithfull stands atop one of the almost-submerged structures of Dome House near Marco Island. ALEX MARKOW

This week, while the U.N. Climate Change Conference meets in Glasgow to discuss this global crisis, British artist Simon Faithfull's multimedia exhibition at the Atchugarry Foundation in Miami poetically explores sea-level rise through a regional focus.

When a cohort of scientists, climate activists and policy-makers, together, visit a contemporary art exhibition, the critical role that art and culture play in communicating challenges we face is made apparent.

Professor Michael Sukop, of Florida International University's Sea Level Rise Solutions Center, told me that Faithfull's powerful imagery highlighted the ability of symbolism to convey the urgency of those rising waters.

The rising waters from king tides are well-known to residents of Greater Miami — particularly those living in low-lying areas of Miami Beach and Shorecrest. The phenomenon results from an alignment of the Earth, moon and sun, and their combined gravitational pull.

NBC 6 meteorologist John Morales has explained that this year we are experiencing a lesser gravitational pull between the Earth and the moon that, along with weaker on-shore winds this season, have worked in our favor to limit flooding.

But we are far from being out of the woods or — more to the point — the flood zone. We have two more king tides yet to come: this week, Nov. 3-9 and the last one of 2021, anticipated in early December.

Nine years ago, when my husband and I moved from Manhattan to Miami Beach, I was at first amused by the rush bubbling up from the large storm drains without warning, watching as rising water transformed quaint Espanola Way into a canal with staggering speed. It sparked my desire to understand the exact cause and, more broadly, how the climate crisis impacts South Florida.

My love of the sea and all it supports, combined with my curatorial art practice, led to the founding of ARTSail, a nomadic creative platform to investigate climate change. Today, nearly a decade on, my initial amusement at king tides has long been supplanted by a sense of urgency and a determination to preserve the health and beauty of our precious waterways.

Now showing at the Atchugarry Foundation in Miami, Faithfull's exhibition of works created in response to his ARTSail residency in 2017-2018, takes the viewer on an aquatic journey. The show, titled "Fata Morgana" — "Mirage" — speaks forcefully to sea-level rise and consequential coastal flooding through irony and striking visual metaphors, using a series of films and photographs spanning the wetlands of Big Cypress to the Gulf of Mexico and across the Atlantic to the North and the Adriatic seas.

The arresting "Re-enactment for a Future Scenario #2: Cape Romano" combines film footage shot during the artist's visits to the remnants of the Dome House of Cape Romano, a once-luxurious villa, built in the late 1970s on a broad spit of land not far from Marco Island.

In 1992, Hurricane Andrew started the violent process that left the one-of-a-kind, custom-built home standing forlornly, and unceremoniously, in the sea. Faithfull animated found images of both the interior and exterior of the unique structure from the period during which it was habitable, juxtaposed against disquieting footage that captures the sea as it began the inevitable destruction of the Dome House. Visuals such as these resonated with the scientists, activists, and policy-makers.

The images of advancing waters are disturbingly similar to my now decade-long encounters with king tides. The speed with which the water consumes the land still leaves me awestruck. Notwithstanding our light brush so far this year, sunny-day flooding is becoming more extreme and widespread. We at ARTSail, with collaborators like Faithfull and the scientists, are doing all we can to add urgency to the crisis upon us. Imagery summoned by cultural producers can inspire viewers to do their part to meet the unprecedented challenges presented by the rising waters.

Notably, Art Week's welcome return to Miami with in-person fairs in just a few weeks happens to coincide with our final king tides of 2021. Might we escape nature's indignity when we once again invite the world of contemporary art back to our town?

With all that Art Week means to our community, we should hope that our run of good luck this season continues to hold. Still, we must confront the climate-change challenges that will remain once Art Week is over.

Ombretta Agró Andruff is executive director of ARTSail.

"Simon Faithfull: Fata Morgana" is on view through Nov. 6 at the Atchugarry Foundation, 5520 NE Fourth Ave. in Miami. Go to www.fundacionpabloatchugarrymiami.com or www.artsail.info for more information.