



# CAN-187-Artificial Reef Catastrophe

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Reprinted 10/31/19



## Hannes Bend's 'Eclipse' Installation Opens Eyes to the Artificial Reef Catastrophe



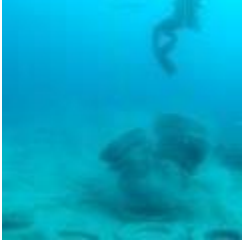
by [Inhabitat Staff](#)

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Step into Miami's [Charest-Weinberg](#) gallery sometime over the next few months and you will be over powered by the scent of deep ocean and nearly 100 decaying rubber tires. It's all part of Berlin-based artist [Hannes Bend](#)'s new installation aimed at attracting

attention to the artificial reef phenomenon, which has become an ecological catastrophe. Hit the jump to learn more about the "Eclipse" exhibit, and the environmental implications of the Osborne Reef.





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Back in 1972, a well-meaning nonprofit group came up with the idea of creating an [artificial reef](#) off the South Florida coast using two million old tires. The sunken rubber was supposed to lure game fish to the area and simultaneously [reduce toxic waste on shore](#). Reefs like these already existed in Indonesia, Malaysia, [Thailand](#), Africa, [Australia](#), and the Gulf of Mexico. None of them have been successful. Steel restraints holding the tires of the [Osborne Reef](#) together have rusted away. When tropical storms come the tires careen across the ocean floor destroying marine life and damaging natural coral reefs along the way. This ecological catastrophe has gone unnoticed by the critical human eye for decades. Berlin-based artist Hannes Bend is making waves in Florida by changing that.

Hannes has always been interested in the intersection of art and the environment, and recently developed a fascination with [artificially created tropical conditions](#). His work deals with topics such as sustainability and accessibility, as well as our relationship to nature. “My intention was to make something visible that is physically impossible for anyone to see.” Recreating the reef in a gallery makes for “intense, hidden art. The ocean is the biggest part of our planet and it is inaccessible for many people. This was a way to raise awareness about what is going on down there in general, but it speaks of itself in a broader way and on how our culture treats nature—how we’re trying to be superior.” *Eclipse* physically confronts its audience by bringing the tragedy of the underwater landscape indoors.

To make the exhibit a reality, Hannes met with environmental agencies to secure permits as well as companies that he thought might be able to support his effort with equipment and divers. “I talked to everyone. It was a lot of networking and a lot of research. A lot of getting information, convincing people and environmental offices. I found amazing support, eight divers all volunteered gear, time, and hard work.” It was an unpredictable day-to-day effort speaking with insurance companies about liabilities and permitting, and hoping for good weather.

Ultimately, the day of fishing for tires came, and with the help of those eight divers, Hannes hoisted nearly 100 tires. “It’s amazing how many divers there are and how many are really willing to donate their time. So many people are very helpful and very informative. It was nice to experience and get all the support. The diving community has very

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strong feelings [about the ocean](#) and is very engaged with [ocean conservancy] in general.” Not a diver himself, he helped by pulling heavy radials out of the ocean, sometimes five at a time. “There were tires everywhere, literally millions of them, and some were six feet deep in the sand. Very little fish life, very little growth on any of those tires.

After the tires were secured inside the boat, the Atlantis-like trash cemetery was relocated to the fourth floor of the [Charest-Weinberg Gallery](#) signifying the end of the circle of materialistic things of our affluent society. “The tires are a time monument also referring both to our transportation and waste management,” added Hannes in an email.

A powerful and emotional scene, *Eclipse* juxtaposes the dredged waste with film and photographs of a bright blue sky, shoreline, aquariums, and swimming pools blemished by industry. It is also a back-yard scenario where people can walk around the tires and play with them. The exhibit is open to the public through June 2nd.

The greatest detriment to the environment is caused when tropical storms dislodge the tires and push them around the ocean floor. Loose tires destroy marine life and damage natural coral reefs, often causing disease. While there have been [many recovery efforts](#), the reality is that it would be nearly impossible to dislodge and properly dispose of all those tires. One suggestion to minimize the environmental impact of this artificial reef would be to pour concrete over it. It sounds tragic, but Hannes and other experts agree that the monolith project of recovering the tires would demand too much energy, time, and money, and unless something is done, the reef will remain a blighted reminder of good intentions gone awry.

[+ Hannes Bend](#)

Images courtesy of [Matthew Hoelscher](#) and [Onajide Shabaka](#)

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