

Early release interview with Mette Tommerup of Tommerup Projects about the new Public Art Projects: Sky of the First Water and Ocean Contour, 2022 in Miami, FL

November 2023



Sky of the First Water, 2022

Engraved aluminum with Kynar metal coating, 147' wide X 36' high X 3" deep

Platform 3750, Coconut Grove, FL.

Photo by Pedro Wazzan

The first anniversary of Mette Tommerup's new Art in Public Places Mural at Platform 3750 in Coconut Grove is Thursday, Nov. 9, 2023. At present time, the project is not closed out completely and she is currently completing a group of paintings for the interior CAHSD office in mural building located at 3750 S. Dixie Highway.

An opening event of the mural is planned for early next year. Here, Tommerup talks about what went into creating her largest work to date an exterior mural in Coconut Grove, FL and her commission at PortMiami, a 185' wide site specific painting.



Ocean Contour, 2022

***Acrylic paint on raw canvas, 180' wide X 8' 5" high X 1 ½-inch deep
PortMiami, Terminal F, Carnival Cruise Line.***

Photo by Zack Balber

Alistair Chase: The exterior mural was your first large commission and it's in the same neighborhood where you have lived for 20 years in Coconut Grove. You must have found that to have been a great opportunity to add to the visual fabric of your own neighborhood and that you've left your mark in some respects and a legacy as an artist there.

Mette Tommerup: Yes, it is a great honor and humbling to have been given this opportunity. I love my neighborhood and am especially intrigued by the original Bahamian settlers and the vibrant history of the West Grove before the 1920s. For those reasons, the mural is an homage to the original Bahamian settlers of the Grove.



Platform 3750 site visit near completion.

Alistair Chase: It's a complex process from proposal to close-out when realizing a public art project and often involving many experts. Let's talk about your first time visiting the site.

Mette Tommerup: When I first visited the site for a kickoff meeting with my Art in Public Places project manager, Stefania Barigelli, before the building was erected, I immediately appreciated our contact, Doug Phillips from Cornerstone Group, the owner representative in this public/private venture. Doug was proactive in ensuring the mural project lined up perfectly with the coordinates of the simultaneous construction that was happening in constructing the building itself. It was truly a pleasure to work with Doug. He had vast experience helping us in the long run for us to avoid spending time on unnecessary approaches.



From left, Doug Phillips, Cornerstone Group, artist Mette Tommerup, Abel Norcisa, Cornerstone Group. Photo by Karli Evans.

Alistair Chase: Tell me a little bit about the fabrication process for the mural? You decided to do your own fabrication. Why?

Mette Tommerup: I envisioned a project that looked handcrafted and not digitized. I knew we would get more value and could deliver the larger scale so I decided to do the fabrication in-house. I enjoy the physical aspect of creating the work myself and superior control it allows me.



Drawing out the design by hand before engraving on the 30 x 30" aluminum plates.

Alistair Chase: There is engraving on the mural plates. How were they done?

Mette Tommerup: The key was finding a shop and a dear friend helped me find a share in a fabrication shop in Hialeah. It's a great place on the railroad tracks surrounded by auto repair shops. We were able to do all the engraving outside plate by plate. The shop has a forklift which was instrumental. My team and I carried the 376 plates – 7000 pounds of aluminum countless times. I have two artist assistants on my team, Patrick Oleson and Dani Maya, both who have painting degrees. It was important to have consistent and beautiful line-work and the team was very dedicated to the greater vision of the piece. The Art in Public Places projects allowed me to establish a great team and workshop.



Fabrication crew engraves mural plates in Hialeah.

Alistair Chase: Did you cut out all the shapes by hand too?

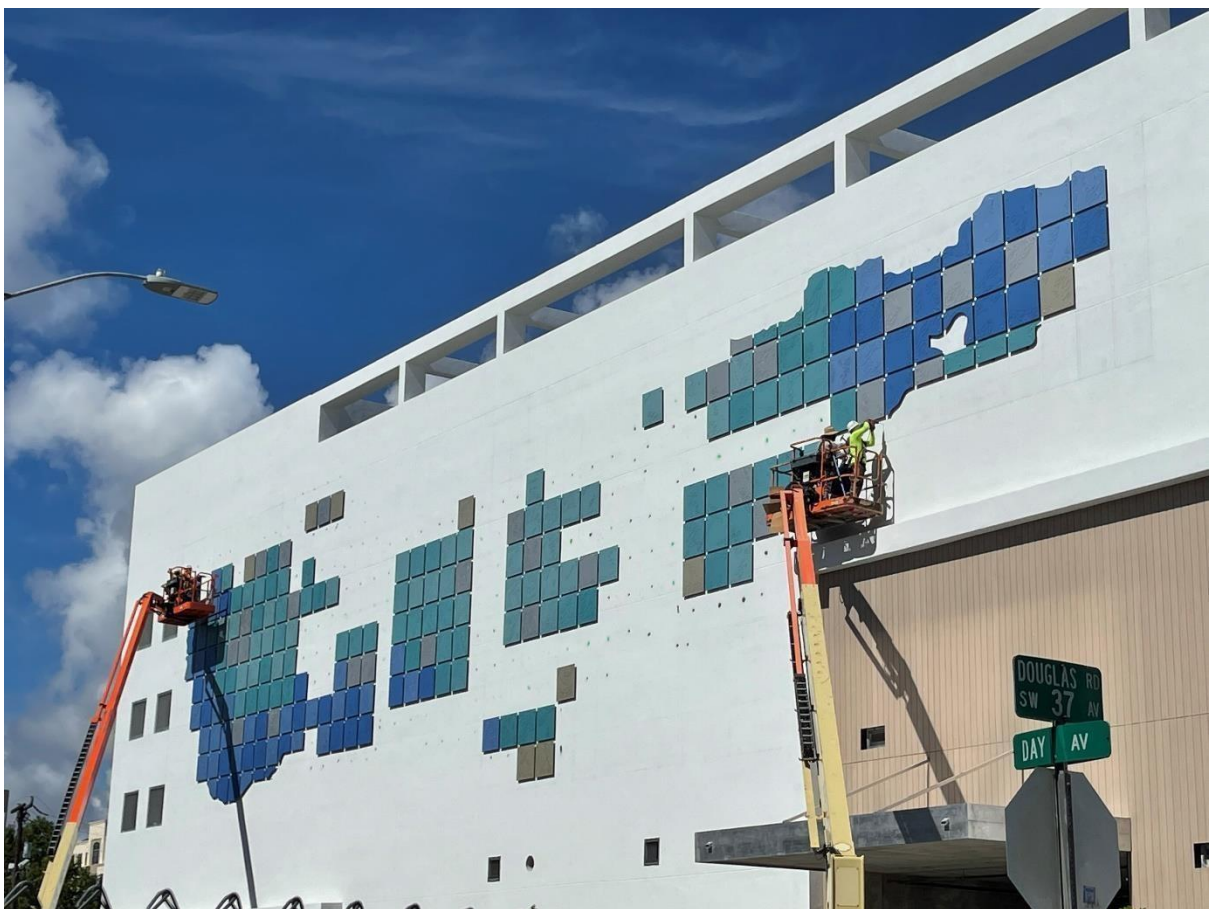
Mette Tommerup: No, luckily not. In the sweltering August heat with no air conditioning, that might have put us over the edge. Advanced Waterjet in Ft. Lauderdale handled that for us. Eric and his team did a great job cutting all the enormous puzzle pieces of the 2,100 square foot mural saving our team a tremendous amount of work.



Kynar metal coatings developed by PTF Industrial Coatings.

Alistair Chase: Let's talk about the plates themselves. Can you talk about the colors on the plates? They look reflective ?

Mette Tommerup: One of the biggest challenges for the project was finding a durable, beautiful and natural looking metal coating. Not until I found Jerry Cabrera and his team at PTF Industrial Coatings could I breathe a sigh of relief. Their Kynar paint had the desired longevity and they were so accommodating and supportive of the project. When I had met the team and visited their impressive facility in Hialeah, I knew I was in the best of hands and that the project would be approved for actual fabrication. The paint is lightly reflective, achieved with mica which is like Mother of Pearl.



The installation guide by Patricia Aguilar called for regular, center plates to be installed first.

Photo by Karli Evans.

Alistair Chase: Is there a downside to doing your own fabrication?

Mette Tommerup: The permit process can be quite challenging. Many fabricators will give an artist a package deal that includes fabrication,

permitting and installation. This comes with a big price tag but I have to confess the permit process was a stressful time. The installation team was ready but we still did not have the final stamp of approval from the building department. I was honestly afraid that the installation crew, who were onsite with all their lifts would not be available, if I could not provide the approved stamped drawings and permits. It was during these times that the expertise of Patricia Aguilar on my team, Ivette and Mario at Eastern Engineering and Mario at Pons Estimating, not to forget Art in Public Places own Stefania Barigelli really impressed me. I have to say it was a big moment when we were given the green light on Halloween 2022. Both my project managers for the mural were of profound assistance, Alex Perez and Stefania Barigelli and for that I am very grateful.



**Building Department for final approval of mural projects.
Ana Meza, Stefania Barigelli, Art in Public Places; Mario Morales, Eastern Engineering, and
Mario Pons, Pons Estimating.**

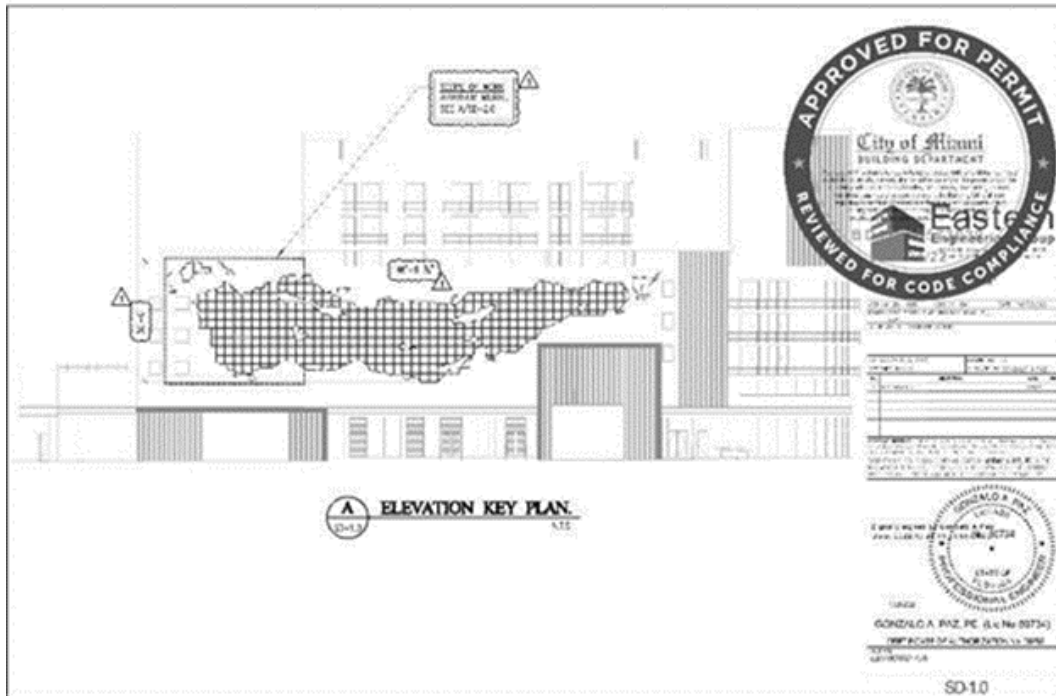
Alistair Chase: Who was in charge of installing the mural?

Mette Tommerup: I was able to hire the same installation team, Lotspeich Company, that was already onsite for other specialty projects. Tyler Ecker from Lotspeich matched us with a stellar crew of 6 to 10 people led by Angel. The installation took around 2 weeks and the plates were installed according to various categories, central square pieces, peripheral shapes and free floating island shapes. Angel and his installation team would start every day at 7 a.m. Since my home is very close by, it was easy for me to be part of the entire process. And I really learned from them. The team was experienced, great personalities and lovely. We had a great camaraderie and I miss them. I need to get another project just so I can work with them again. I am blessed to happily say I feel the same way of all the subcontractors I had the pleasure of working with.



Installation Crew from Lotspeich Company, Inc. Photo by Karli Evans.

Alistair Chase: It sounds like there would be elaborate administrative and technical aspects of doing a project such as this. How did you handle that?



**Shop drawings approved for permit, a big milestone.
Shop drawings by Ivette Valdes, Eastern Engineering Group.**

Mette Tommerup: I heavily relied on my team member, Patricia Aguilar to develop the architectural and design documents. And there were countless with many revisions. Patricia is an architect by trade and is trained and literate in advanced design software, construction terminology and a certified project manager herself. I know Patricia enjoyed tapping into her creative side. She was dedicated to the proposal application process and created beautiful renderings. We spent most weekends together for over a year! There were many tedious tasks along the way such as having to place the 1600 individual bolt holes in the plates according to calculations from Eastern Engineering and the 3D scan of the facade from Constructpoint so that Advanced Waterjet could cut them for us. Patricia's motto is "Even if I don't know how to do it, I will know how to do it." Luckily, I'm a good administrator myself.



*Patricia Aguilar, designer and Mette Tommerup, artist in the studio
Photo by Karli Evans.*

Alistair Chase: You had another large project from Art in Public Places at the same time. Tell me about that project at PortMiami.

Mette Tommerup: “Ocean Contour” at PortMiami is a dream project and a 185’ wide site-specific painting. Here my signature canvases, made of raw canvas and acrylic paint could be stretched for a long continuous wall. This project was much harder and much more labor intensive than expected. Even assembling the massive stretchers was a big undertaking in itself but creating the actual work turned out to be difficult on this scale. The paintings were each 14’w x 8’5” and

they were heavy since they are double stretched with a second layer for durability in a public space. It became a sort of dance for my assistants for continuously move the paintings around the space.



*Individual painting for Ocean Contour, one out of fourteen paintings.
Photo by Karli Evans.*

Alistair Chase: You had two massive projects happening at the same time?

Mette Tommerup: When I got the go ahead to install at PortMiami simultaneously with the mural at Platform 3750, it was intense. What are the chances that both installations would overlap after 18 months of design fabrication? Construction sites keep changing and access points change so it was to our great relief that the paintings could pass by the door with 1" to spare. My amazing Art In Public Places project manager for this project was Pablo Rincon. Pablo was such a pleasure to work with. His sense of humor, sharp wit and thorough planning was always spot on. We were a great team!

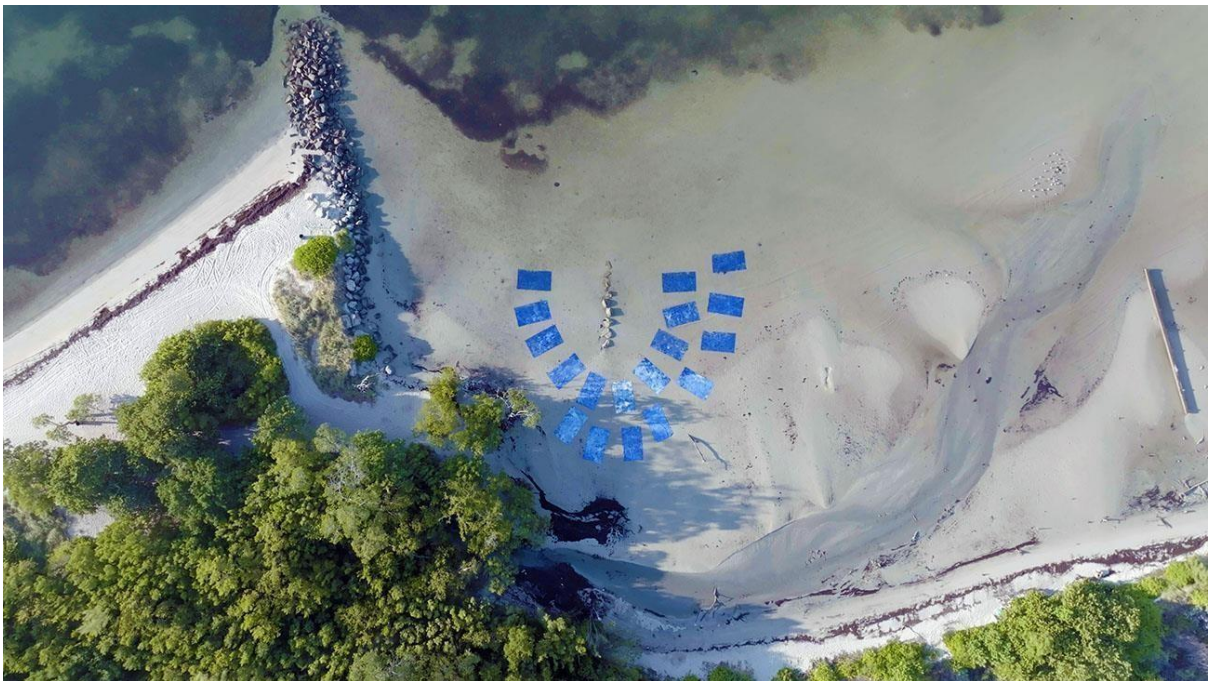


View from the second floor of Ocean Contour at PortMiami. Photo by Zack Balber.

Alistair Chase: We've talked a lot about fabrication and the nuts and bolts of things. Can you tell me what your work is about?

Mette Tommerup: My canvases are typically connected to an element of nature such as the sea, the sky or the earth. Made outdoors, they

try to capture forces in nature that are intricate and vast at the same time. Is it an imprint of nature? My work can offer an escape, like trying to make sense of cloud formations or hopefully instill a sense of wonder of the intricate phenomenons in nature. Often, I use performance or activations, sometimes interactive with an audience that presents the idea of lingering between the material and immaterial. The heavens and earth and the space in between.



Ocean Contour performance, 2022, on Virginia Key, Miami. Photo by Pedro Wazzan.

Alistair Chase: Let's talk specifically about the two works because there is much to take in.

Mette Tommerup: The mural "Sky of the First Water" at first glance looks like an island formation but then the coloration is that of water close to the coast. In these shallow waters, one can easily see the ripples of the seabed but also the silhouette of a swimming female figure appears. I like to think of her as Yemaya, considered the Ocean Mother Goddess, an Afro-Caribbean religion. In this case, Yemaya watches over as the protector of women and families, which connect

to the CAHSD (Community Action and Human Service Department) that helps so many in our community.

At PortMiami, the long blue painting, “Ocean Contour,” also picks up on the idea of the sun hitting the ocean and casting light on the seabed. There’s a story connected to this piece about small seascape oil paintings trapped in a tower by the sea that find a way of becoming one with the ocean and return in a pure form of only raw canvas and pigment: “Instead of being a depiction of the scene they were now the scene itself.” I’ve been inspired by the work of the late 60s and early 70s where artists tried to reset what art was and how it was made.



Sky of the First Water, 2022. Mural changes color depending on the time of day.

Photo by Pedro Wazzan.



Ocean Contour performance, 2022, Virginia Key, Miami.

Alistair Chase: What do you hope these works contribute to the quality of lives of those who see them?

Mette Tommerup: Ultimately, I hope the viewer gets an unexpected escape. I am a huge fan of Art in Public Places and especially how it makes art accessible to all, especially to the young audience. My aim is to empower and inspire audiences from all walks of life. I like the viewer to pause and get lost and maybe even wonder for a moment how or why this work exists?



*Sky of the First Water, 2022, Platform 3750, Douglas Road and Day Avenue, Coconut Grove.
Photo by Karli Evans.*

Alistair Chase: You call your team Tommerup Projects. What is Tommerup Projects?

Mette Tommerup: Tommerup Projects is a nod of appreciation to the team effort and mix of skills and expertise it takes to create public art. My core team is Patricia Aguilar, designer, Patrick Oleson and Dani Maya, both artists and fabricators/ preparators. Robert Chambers, artist and fabrication expert. I also like to think my extended team includes the wonderful photographers, Pedro Wazzan and Diana Espin, Zack Balber and Richard Novak, and Karli Evans whom I all appreciate greatly.

We also take pride in helping artists with approved commissions realize their dream projects as consultants and with project management. Right now I'm assisting Vickie Pierre with a fabulous piece. Stay tuned!



Documenting work with photographer and videographer, Pedro Wazzan.

Photo by Pedro Wazzan.

Alistair Chase: So what's next? Do you have any other news or projects on the horizon?

Mette Tommerup: I'm very happy to share that I'm now on the board of Locust Projects as the artist representative. My own show at Locust Projects in 2020 "Made by Dusk" was an instrumental stepping stone for me to understand an effective use of scale especially helpful for use in creating Public Art Projects.

I'm grateful to Lorie Mertes, executive director at Locust Projects for her support and trust of me as an artist and continuously impressed at her tireless help in creating an experimental platform for emerging artists.



Made by Dusk, 2020, Locust Projects, Miami, FL. Photo by Zack Balber.

On the horizon I'm looking forward to joining an art residency, CAMPO AIR in a small village population around 200, in Uruguay for the month of October 2024. I can't wait to do interactive projects with the local community there.



What Stars Are They, 2023. Ongoing performance series, a tribute to Hanne Tommerup. Photo by Pedro Wazzan.

Projects Courtesy of Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural
Affairs,
Art in Public Places Trust

Special thanks to Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs,
Art in Public Places Team:

Amanda Sanfilippo, Curator and Artist Manager
Stefania Barigelli, Construction Projects Manager
Alex Peraza, Construction Projects Manager
Pablo Rincon, Construction Projects Manager
Ana Meza, Construction Projects Manager
Bianca Gonzales, Program Coordinator
Patricia Romeu, Chief
Michael Spring, Department Director

Project Groups:

PTF Industrial Coatings
Eastern Engineering
Lotspeich
Cornerstone Group
Current Builders
Kobi Karb
Pons Estimating
Constructpoint
Advanced Waterjet
Hilti
Rex Art Supplies
Jerry's Arterama/ Golden Paint

Tommerup Projects Team:

Mette Tommerup, Lead Artist

Patricia Aguilar, Designer

Robert Chambers, Artist

Patrick Oleson, Artist

Dani Maya, Artist

Kevin Christie, Artist

Yasell Torres, Assistant

Photographers:

Pedro Wazzan and Diana Espin

Zack Balber and Richard Novak

Karli Evans