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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

This Abandoned Department Store Is Now a Thriving Art Venue

How one South Florida city turned a former Macy's into a blank canvas for up-and-coming artists

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With retailers closing their brick-and-mortar presences at record levels, it's not all doom and gloom. Culture Lab opened early this year inside a former Macy's in downtown West Palm Beach, Florida. Among the noteworthy installations in the 110,000-square-foot space are Jennifer Steincamp's Cultured, a digital-light installation comprising strands of pearls, and Stephen Vitiello's You Are the Magic, a sound-art installation, which fills the entire second floor. The former intimate apparel department is now the Find Your Way video installation by Andrew Deutsch, while the area of Macy's that used to sell luggage is now Soundtrack for the Luggage Chapel, featuring ambient lighting and comfortable seating. And just outside, Steed Taylor's Road Tattoo mural along Rosemary Avenue is the world's longest continuous street mural.

When Gopal Rajegowda—mastermind of the project and a SVP of the Related Companies, the New York-based real-estate firm—toured the space, he was “struck by the purity of the department store box,” he says. “We felt it was an installa-

tion of its own."

"We realized in this area there are major collectors and supporters of the arts," he adds. "Palm Beach is definitely going through many changes. Twenty or 30 years ago, it was retiree-focused, but now it attracts everyone from single millennials to young families. The great thing about art is that it applies to everyone. I just love the reaction from people who remember shopping at Macy's."

British artist Michael-Craig Martin's Palm Beach Parade, his first U.S. installation, covers Culture Hub's exterior with splashy hot-pink and turquoise hues. On December 1, all 12 works by Culture Lab's participating artists—unveiled over the past year—will culminate in a group show, "Assemblage: an Organically Grown Experience." Rajegowda hopes visitors to this year's Art Basel Miami Beach can be coaxed 70 miles north to West Palm Beach, which will debut its own art extravaganza this year, New Wave, just before Basel. A new high-speed rail service called Brightline launched between Palm Beach and Miami in May, making that trek a relative breeze.

"Arts and culture is the new anchor today, not department stores," says Rajegowda, who not long ago left New York City to live in West Palm Beach, noting the area's creative uptick as a main driver. Culture Hub's home is located in CityPlace, an upscale lifestyle district that opened in 2000. The center is home to the two-year-old Hilton West Palm Beach, where a 1,300-piece art collection includes a Talking Heads album design by Robert Rauschenberg, plus Tucker Robbins's Acacia Spheres and a monumental driftwood sculpture. And a four-level RH flagship, an 800,000-square-foot concept that combines retail, a rooftop restaurant, and coffee bar, opened just under a year ago. Admission to Culture Lab is free.