Miami in Transformation during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Participatory Visual Culture Analysis

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Abstract

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt around the world, Miami, Florida is one example of the specific and unique ways in which this pandemic is experienced. Drawing on the concepts of visual culture analysis and disaster literature, this article analyses how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the everyday lives of people living in this subtropical American city. Specifically, this study draws on data collected from a digital participatory photography project implemented in July 2020, as the novel coronavirus began to rapidly spread. Through an inductive thematic analysis of participants' photographs and captions, we discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic transformed not only basic daily needs but also lead to recognition of privilege and an awareness of the needs and vulnerabilities of others. While many of the complexities illustrated in this study are left unresolved, the photos and captions are useful examples of how visual depictions can be used to inform and realign the ways in which people interpret and respond to global public health crises.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Miami, Visual Culture, participatory photography methods, epidemics, coronavirus and economic insecurity

Miami – The Capital of Latin America

Miami is nestled between the Everglades – a grassy wetland area – and the Atlantic Ocean. It is composed of several eclectic neighbourhoods, including Little Haiti, Little Havana, Historic Overtown, and the island of Miami Beach. In popular culture and tourist brochures, Miami is often characterized by its sandy beaches, chic restaurants, nightclubs, and neon lights. The city is also known for its rich cultural, linguistic, and culinary heritage brought about by an aggregation of full-time residents, many of whom are first generation migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean (Portes & Armony, 2018), as well as its part-time residents – escaping northern American winters – known as "snowbirds" (Coates et al., 2002), and tourists of various national and international backgrounds (Park et al., 2006; Day et al., 2013). Architecturally, the environment ranges from dense high-rises to laidback residential and recreational areas – some of which closely resemble iconic Caribbean getaways – and a host of historical sites attributed to Native American populations and different waves of Caribbean, Latin American, and European migration. It is not uncommon, for example, to visit areas where the dominant language is not English, and where one is virtually transported from one's imagining of the United States into a Copa Cabana bar, a Cuban Cafe, a Port-au-Prince restaurant, or a French-Canadian ice cream parlour.

While this unique demographic which supports a complex economic make-up has led to a 21% population growth rate over the last decade (Elliot et al., 2017), it also presents challenges when confronted with devastating catastrophes, such as hurricanes and wave surges, that periodically halt economic stability and growth (Schuman, 2013; Gaffney & Eeckely, 2020). The warm weather and tropical climate also make Miami a desirable real estate market for international investors, creating an economic and housing inequality – and associated vulnerability – comparable to New York (Evans et al., 2014; McPherson, 2017). Also, tourism-dependent economies, like those present in Miami, rely on the ability to rapidly assess both physical damage and damage to the tourism industry in order to foster economic and social recovery (Schumann, 2013). While the city has been able to quickly bounce back following temporary disasters like hurricanes, the impact of prolonged social distancing and safer-at-home orders required to combat the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has created a deep and long-term impact that the city has only begun to assess (Gaffney & Eeckely, 2020). As pandemics and health epidemics are becoming more common (Bedford et al., 2019), it is important to critically analyse and assess the impacts that these events have on the people and places that experience them. Thus, this article investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed everyday life for people living and residing in Miami, Florida.

Visual Cultures in Disasters, Epidemics and Pandemics

Over the past decade the use of visual methods has received increased attention and importance in both community and academic settings. The exponential growth in visual representations of daily life and experiences on online platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have advanced visual materials into contemporary culture, while visual research methods use visual materials (photographs, videos, drawings, etc.) in social science research and empirical inquiry to understand different phenomena and experiences, or to answer a research question (Grady, 2008; Mitchell, 2011; Pauwels, 2011; Rose, 2014). The use of visual methods has been adopted by a range of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, education, and public policy (Pink, 2003; Wiles et al., 2011; Rose, 2014) and has been the focus of a wide variety of journals and handbooks (Stanczak, 2007; Mitchell, 2011; Margolis & Pauwels, 2011; Emmison et al., 2012; Pink, 2021). The emerging popularity of visual methods stems from the multidimensional aspects they bring to qualitative research, such as eliciting underlining emotions that are difficult to communicate, and visually exposing intangible facets of cultural life (Lorenz & Bettira, 2009). The practice of understanding visual materials as being embedded within shared social, cultural, and situational experiences is known as visual culture research (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009; Evans & Hall, 1999; Mirzoeff, 2009). Thus, not all visual methodology is considered visual culture research; it is how the researcher analyses visual data that determines this distinction (Rose, 2014). It is precisely because visual culture can highlight shared experiences that makes this approach an important tool in understanding complex social problems like disasters, epidemics and pandemics.

Visual culture research has been used to understand the contexts shaping depictions of many different crisis events[1] including the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Cooter & Stein, 2010), plagues (Lynteris, 2018), earthquakes (Weisenfeld, 2012), terrorist attacks (Stubblefield, 2014) and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Callender et al., 2020). Within these analyses, visual culture is typically examined from an historical anthropological perspective using pre-existing visual materials such as public health posters or famous photographs (see Cooter & Stein, 2010). While important, these conversations are often analysed from expert opinions of events, leaving out community understandings and framing of these events. This experiential aspect is critical because disasters have a "totalizing" effect meaning disasters can impact and change almost every aspect of society and culture, requiring a reordering and reprioritization of social relationships and everyday needs (Das & Singh, 1995;

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[1] Disasters and crisis events are used interchangeably in this article. Disasters is a broader term used to identify any event that causes major physical damage and/or loss of life (Oliver-Smith, 1996). Epidemics and pandemics are specific to diseases that spread throughout communities (epidemics) and then globally (pandemics) (Harrison, 2016).

Sahlins, 2017) and the construction of new ways of life (Oliver-Smith, 1996; Kelly et al., 2019).

While the COVID-19 pandemic is still unfolding in Miami and across the world, much emerging research highlights the multifaceted and complex ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected social and cultural environments. The transboundary nature of the pandemic has required unprecedented responses that have impacted several aspects of daily life, including international travel (Wilson & Chen, 2020), social gatherings (Imber-Black, 2020), schooling (Azevedo et al., 2020), people's interaction with the local and global economy (Ibn-Mohammed et al., 2021; Stubbs et al. 2021; Ozili & Arun, 2020), and mortality and health outcomes (Cullen et al., 2020; Yoo & Managi, 2020). In Miami, many people are dependent on the tourism industry, and the proportion of vulnerable populations is high, including an aging population, immigrants who lack documentation, and an elevated concentration of persons living with HIV/AIDS). Daily life during the pandemic has also been impacted by shifting regulations, confusion or uncertainty about the future, and shortages of critical supplies.[2] The complex nature of COVID-19 highlights a need to examine these complexities by drawing upon the visual culture of the pandemic to uncover not only individual experiences but also underlining transformations to life and culture within Miami. While exploring pandemics through visual culture is a growing area of research (see Cooter & Stein, 2010; Davis, 2013; Engelmann, 2018), it is still uncommon to find analyses that incorporate a wide range of visual perspectives from the everyday experiences of residents living through disaster events. Therefore, the goal of this research project has been to provide an opportunity for research participants (called artist-participants[3]) to describe their own interpretations of the pandemic. This adds participant perspectives that are common in other participatory visual research projects but are often missing in visual research on global epidemics/pandemics.

Adapting the PhotoVoice Methodology

At the onset of the pandemic, when social distancing guidelines were in full effect, our research team decided to build an online platform/virtual gallery for people to share photos and descriptions of their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated health and safety protocols. The platform-gallery, named GREETINGS COVIDIANS, was envisioned as an adaptation of PhotoVoice – a participatory visual research method in which community members use photography, discussions, and

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[2] Previous studies on Miami highlighted the short-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic including endemic inequities within the hospitality and tourism sectors (Nissen & Russo, 2007); limitations to healthcare access among various groups, including people who are undocumented (Saint-Jean & Crandall, 2005; Portes et al., 2012); and in addition, HIV positivity rates that are disproportionately higher than the national average (Harkness et al., 2020).
[3] This is a term used to acknowledge that the participants in this project were artists, though they may not have identified as "professional artists" because it may not have been their main source of income.

captions to analyse their daily realities and advocate for public dialogue and social/policy changes (Wang & Burris, 1997). In order to adhere to social distancing guidelines, and to make the opportunity to participate in the project available to anyone and everyone residing in Miami, we decided to forego photography and critical analysis workshops that are usually present in PhotoVoice projects (e.g., Graham et al., 2013; Padilla et al., 2019; Vertovec, 2020; Witkowski et al., 2020, 2021). Instead, we gathered photographs and captions through an online call for submissions that we then uploaded into a 'living' gallery with the hope that the online forum would encourage critical thought and potential discussions based around what viewers saw in the gallery and shared with their immediate social circles.[4]

In the submission call, participants were asked to submit a photo, title, and caption that described their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The call was intentionally left open – there was no thematic focus, apart from COVID-19 in general – which allowed participants to guide the direction and focus of the broader research project. We encouraged people to look through their digital albums and submit photos they had already taken, and which they thought were interesting to share with other people around the world, or to think about something they wanted to share and then take an interesting photo and match it with a caption in order to convey that message.[5]

Although some images in the gallery may have also been used on social media platforms by participants, this adapted PhotoVoice method is different from methodologies that focus on social media analysis (e.g., Social Media Monitoring). Social media analysis is rarely participatory in the sense that participants' photographic posts are most often spontaneous and not always directed towards critical thinking (Graffigna & Riva, 2015). As such, our project's submission instructions offered guidance on critical reflections:

> The photo and caption should describe how COVID-19 has impacted your life. There are several ways to do this! For example: how has COVID-19 impacted your public or personal life? Your social encounters? Or maybe the pandemic has reshaped your way of thinking or problem-solving approaches. Let us know in your captions and get as creative as you like! (text from Call for Submissions, July 10, 2020)

Therefore, our goals were to create a public forum based in diverse perspectives and critical analysis. We wanted to create a cathartic experience by allowing artist-participants a place to critically reflect, process, and view the changes happening not

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[4] The call was sent via email to faculty, staff, students, and alumni from roughly 120 different departments, research institutions, and administrative offices of a Florida-based university. The email encouraged recipients to forward the call to family and friends regardless of if those individuals lived in Miami.
[5] For ethical purposes, no photographs that included illegal activity or children were included in the gallery.

only in their daily lives but also other people's lives during COVID-19. Some of the participants chose to direct their submissions towards celebrating essential workers, for instance construction labourers or food delivery drivers, and first responders such as nurses and other healthcare workers; while others chose to document transformations in their own lives.[6] Overall, as a growing, 'living' gallery and online platform, we hoped that this would empower the broader community to make their own interpretations and amplify their unique perceptions of the ongoing global pandemic and the nuanced ways in which it was personally impacting their lives.[7]

For the purpose of this publication, the gallery's photographs, captions, and descriptions were analysed using inductive thematic coding stemming from two analytic frameworks: cultural theme analysis (Spradley, 2016; Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and textual analysis (Hughes, 2007). These analytic frameworks allowed the research team to identify gallery-wide themes. This initial approach also helped the research team limit the scope to photographs taken in Miami – since there were other submissions taken in other places in the world – without fully detaching them from the broader project.[8] As a result, we could compare which photographs spoke to issues that were particular to Miami or to Miami as a tropical destination; thereby allowing us to examine how COVID-19 played out differently in a tropical location shaped by unique (tourism) economies as well as environmental circumstances that may have better prepared local residents considering their previous experiences associated with natural disasters like hurricanes.[9]

Transformations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Three themes emerged that described how the artist-participants lives where transformed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first theme – "*From stay-at-home orders to financial and housing equality*" – identified how participants' interpretations of the use of public and private space transformed during the pandemic. Their contributions highlighted not only the emptiness that many experienced due to social

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[6] Please visit https://www.greetingscovidians.net/gallery to see all the photo/caption contributions.

[7] At the time of this publication, there were 74 submissions in the gallery. The artist-participants who took part in the project as a whole were between ages 18 to 82 years old. Twenty-six percent (*n*=19) identified as male, 58% (*n*=43) identified as female, and 16% (*n*=12) chose not to self-identify. There was also a significant distribution of racial/ethnic identities. Twenty-nine percent identified as white/Caucasian, 23% identified as Latino or Hispanic, 12% identified as Black/African American or Asian, and 35% decided not to identify their race/ethnicity. Most participants only submitted one photo, though there were five individuals who submitted two photos.

[8] We were able to identify which photos were taken in Miami based on the zip codes the artist-participants included as part of the submission process.

[9] To further our understandings of COVID-19 we drew from Critical Visual Methodology (CVM) (Rose 2016). To move from individual images to broader themes and narratives, we worked under the impression that, although visual images are culturally and socially constructed, they ultimately produce their "own effects" (Rose, 2016, p. 22). As such, images should first be analyzed as stand-alone examples of cultural expressions, and then considered within a broader spectrum of social, cultural, and historical influences.

distancing requirements but also the inequalities that exist in the housing market in Miami. The second theme – "*From personal protection to social statements*" – examined how everyday habits and behaviours, for instance, wearing personal protective equipment, were adopted to protect not only oneself but also other people in the community. This theme also highlighted how some participants used mask-wearing to make social statements. The third theme – "*From food services to food insecurity*" – revealed different scenarios of empowerment, whether it be through people producing their own food, to reflections on personal privilege. In the sections below, we examine these themes by analysing sample photographs and captions from the GREETINGS COVIDIANS gallery. For the sake of brevity, we do not include the full caption description with each photo.

### Theme 1: From Stay-at-Home Orders to Financial and Housing Equality

One of the most notable features of pre-pandemic Miami were the crowded sands of South Beach. When the pandemic hit Miami in early March 2020, the beaches were packed with college students from around the U.S. looking to participate in the yearly tradition of partying on the beach (Roberts, 2020). After COVID-19 began to spread throughout the area, leaders in Miami restricted access to beaches, restaurants and bars, preventing outdoor restaurants and party promoters from using foot traffic from beaches to lure in tourists – and virtually halting the all-day, all-night party atmosphere of Miami (Suarez, 2020). In an op-ed in the *New York Times*, the Mayor of Miami confirmed that he had contracted COVID-19 and would be taking the crisis seriously, stating: "This is not the time to shop for nonessentials, visit friends, attend parties, or work out at the gym. While this may seem inconvenient in the short term, it can make all the difference in the long run" (Suarez, 2020, p. 6).

The exodus of people from these popular tourist attractions conveyed the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic to Miami residents. Figure 1 shows three photographs from the gallery that visually depict the way places within Miami transformed. In the top figure, Danny Beard[10] captured the novelty of this experience, providing the following description: "Empty beaches in Miami are far from normal." This was echoed by artist-participant PJ, who described the lack of traffic in the photo on the bottom left of Figure 1, stating: "Miami is a busy city, and traffic is part and parcel of our daily lives. COVID-19 changed it for a couple of months." While the first two photos within Figure 1 depicted the transformation of Miami as empty and devoid of the people that once visited these busy areas, the bottom right photo compared this transformation to a dangerous and hazardous situation. The anonymous artist-participant captioned this photo: "A synthetic yellow ribbon tied around a palm. Often, caution tape blocks off evidence of homicide, or prevents entry into hazardous construction sites. Today, the

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[10] Within this article, we use the "artist name." This was an optional field on the submission form and may or may not be their given name. If an artist-participant's name was not provided, we identify the photo as anonymous.

caution tape was out of place. We are witnessing an absence, the visibility of a not-yet-future event which can be prevented."

Figure 1. *The Transformation of places in Miami*
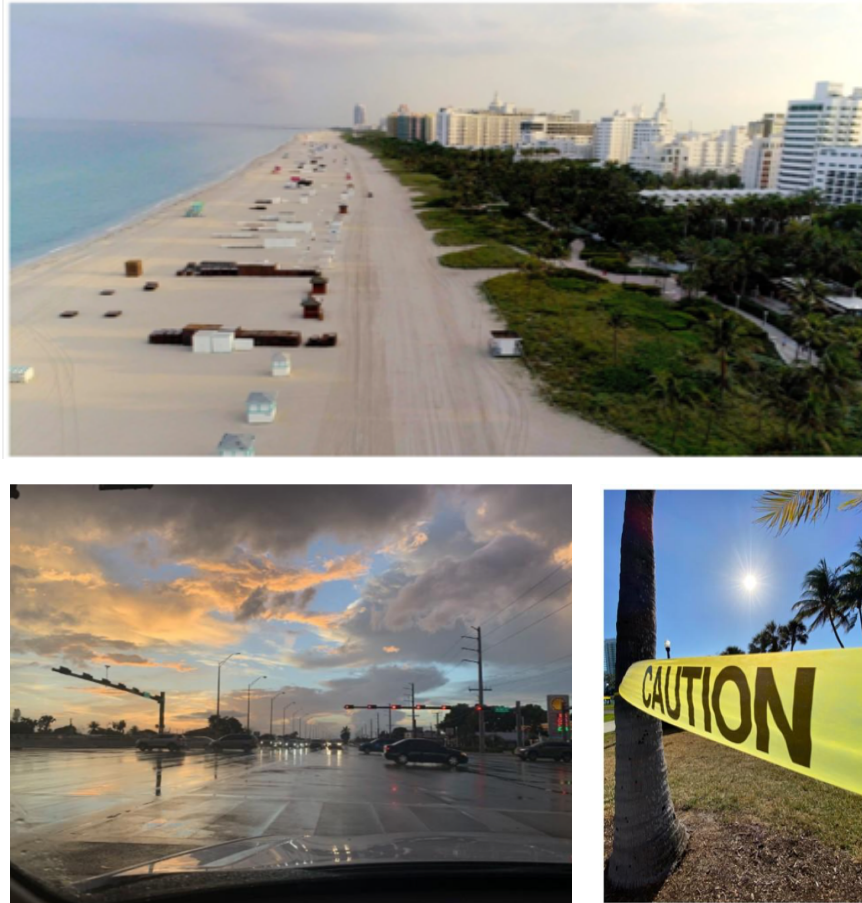
Top centre: *South Beach Closed, April 2020* by Danny Beard*.* Bottom left: *Empty Roads* by PJ. Bottom right: *Vigils on Zombie Island,* anonymous*.*

Within these pictures, the artists juxtaposed a beautiful sunny day (iconic of Miami) with emptiness and uncertainty about the future. These photos depict areas that used to be busy, open and welcoming to all. Following the pandemic, these places were blocked-off, inaccessible, and even considered potentially dangerous. The caution tape blocking off access to these public areas was notably "out-of-place" and "far from normal." It signified much more than lack of access; it signified a loss of income and security for the people who rely on these places for their livelihood.

Similar to other places around the world, the people of Miami spent a considerable amount of time indoors during the pandemic; quarantining at home in order to prevent the spread of the virus. This is not necessarily new to Miami residents who must often comply with stay-at-home orders during hurricanes. However, the stay-at-home

orders issued by the Governor (Executive Order #2020-91) during the height of the pandemic lasted longer than similar orders for natural disasters. The residents in Miami Beach had an even longer local "safer-at-home" order starting on March 23, 2020 and lasting until May 15, 2020 (Miami Beach, 2020). The extended time at home highlighted the awareness of pre-existing vulnerabilities in affordable housing. These vulnerabilities are highlighted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Inequalities Existing in the Miami Housing Market*
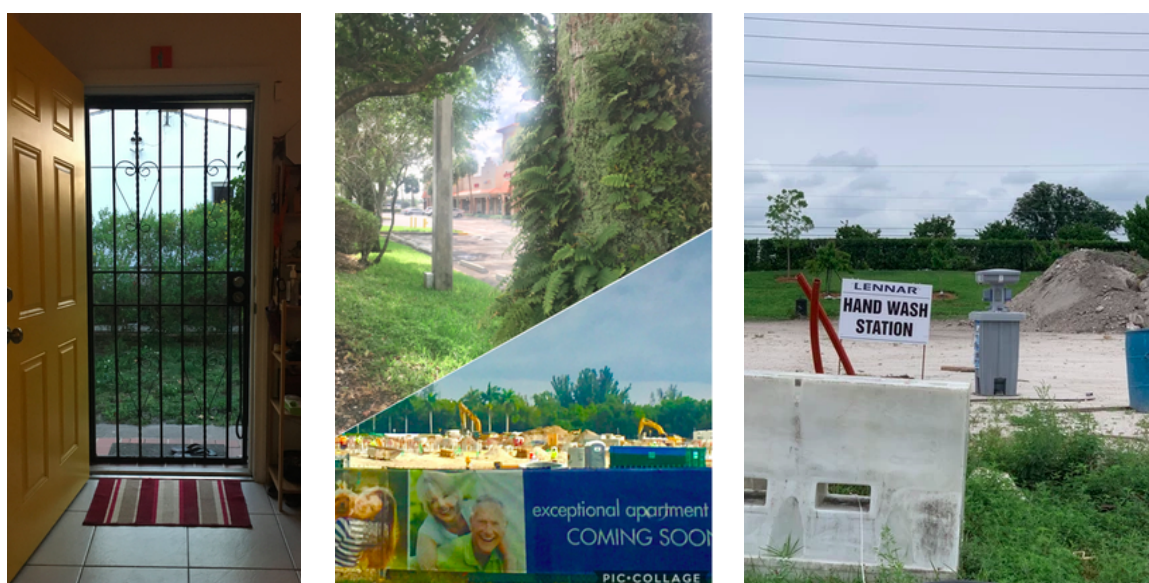
Left: *Don't close the door,* anonymous. Centre: *DON'T SHOP! But let's be prepared to apartment hut across the street,* anonymous. Right: *The new construction site normal* by Michaela Moura-Kocoglu.

The left photo in Figure 2 was titled, *Don't close the door,* and depicts an open door with a closed security bar screen. The anonymous artist-participant provided the following caption:

> A clean comfortable place to rest feels vital and the division between the inside and outside necessary. But, finding solace in the boundary makes me question my empathy and compassion, especially when there are so many people who lack the same luxuries. Shutting the screen is ok but don't close the door.

While surrounded by beautiful year-round weather, Miami is labelled one of the "nation's most unaffordable large [cities]" with 57% of residents spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs, a standard benchmark for affordability (Murray et al., 2020, p. 6). While most of the artist-participants represented in this article had certain privileges – such as smartphones with data plans, or digital cameras and computers

– it was notable that many recognized their privilege and used their photos to empathize and draw attention to the vulnerabilities of others.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government issued the closure of businesses, including bars and dine-in options at restaurants. Owners were encouraged to allow their employees to work from home. However, many workers in the tourism industry – especially those who worked in bars and hotels, or on cruise lines – were laid off. While able to stay-at-home, they had concerns for making ends meet for paying rent or making payments on a home that was already unaffordable. Alternatively, construction businesses (as well as other industries) were deemed essential and continued to operate throughout the pandemic. While this allowed many workers to continue to receive wages, it also put them at greater risk of contracting the coronavirus. The artist-participant of the centre photo in Figure 2 highlighted this point in the photo's caption: "Division of Labor: consumers are prioritized…while some sectors of the labor market e.g., construction workers cannot. They must keep working on 'exceptional luxury apartments." Playing off the notion of the division of labour, this artist-participant drew attention to some of the inequalities experienced in the Miami housing market. The priority for safety and health was reserved for those who could afford to live in "luxury" apartments rather than the labourers who build such apartments. This underscores not only a class divide but an ethnic divide as well.

Michaela Moura-Kocoglu*, the artist-participant of the right-hand photo in Figure 2, highlighted the vulnerability of these construction workers. Michaela gave the following description to her photo:

> "Wash your hands" has become the mantra during this pandemic. Essential workers are the most vulnerable being disproportionately exposed to the risk of infection, and that includes construction workers. The majority of construction workers are Latino and Hispanics in South Florida, a population that is already at higher risk. Whether hand wash stations at construction sites will provide sufficient mitigation of risks, though, remains to be seen.

Theme 2: From Personal Protection to Social Statements

One of the most iconic elements of the pandemic — the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) in non-medical settings — was a major transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the GREETINGS COVIDIANS gallery, PPE is textually or visually present in 39% of the entries. These submissions highlight resilience and determination among residents, as well as challenges and anxieties that are unique to

mask-wearing in tropical (hot and humid) environments like Miami. Additionally, along with the absence of a national or even a statewide mask mandate, leaders in Miami promoted local mask mandates with varying degrees of enforcement (Carter, 2020). Confusion over the benefit of masks and the politicization of pandemic responses have also polarized mask wearing, which is increasingly associated with additional social and political meanings. In the gallery, artist-participants largely characterized the practice as a burdensome, yet indispensable, response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, they engaged medical mask imagery in ways that functioned as a 'call to action' for unity, safety and compassion

Figure 3 shows three pictures from the gallery that depicted the ways that PPE transformed life in Miami. The photo on the top shows an anonymous artist-participant staring into the camera while sporting a yellow face mask. The artist-participant's sombre expression is juxtaposed with a picturesque view of a South Florida canal. The tension in the image is further articulated by its title – *Quarantine Sunset* – a choice that highlights the bittersweet consequences of isolating in a tropical environment; a beautiful view one cannot go forth and enjoy. The caption for the image asserts that "wearing a mask is the new normal," and by extension, that the need to protect oneself (or parts of oneself) from one's surroundings has been normalized. Evident in the masks presented in this and other images throughout the gallery, is the way in which daily mask-wearing in non-medical settings, encapsulates transformations to ways of life. Although the length or permanence of such transformations is unclear, artist-participants largely chronicle mask-wearing and other changes as a 'new normal.'

The photo by Tina Love on the bottom left, depicts a person with a mask and fogged glasses. The caption proclaims: "Wearing mask and glasses during COVID is definitely the most annoying thing. We will never get used to it!" The image is a reminder that wearing a mask outside of a clinical setting – while common in areas with poor air quality or previous experience of respiratory epidemics – is foreign to South Florida in comparison to other localities (Cherrie et al., 2018). Physical discomfort due to heat and humidity may be exacerbated in the summer months when Miami's temperature averages 32-35° Celsius (89-95° Fahrenheit). However, artist-participants who communicated such issues promptly concluded their remarks with commitments that promoted wearing masks or asked others to do so. Tina Love, for example, closed the caption by stating: "But hey, at least we're protecting ourselves and those around us."

Figure 3. The Transformation of Habits and the Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Top: *Quarantine Sunset, March 2020*, anonymous. Bottom left: *You never get used to it* by Tina Love. Bottom right: *El Beso Sano (The Healthy Kiss)* by Valentizabal.

The photo on the bottom right of Figure 3 depicts a couple in embrace whose intimacy is undeterred by their 'new normal.' The caption reads:

> This image is of my parents having a kiss while waiting to get into a garden in Homestead. My parents have been married for 30 years and, despite their hardships during the pandemic, are extremely successful at communicating openly and finding the light in each other. Their love and support have kept me grounded for the past few months.

The photographer, whose option for a black-white filter accentuates the tropical palm foliage behind the couple, underscores the role of support and stability in overcoming the pandemic. While the masks function as both a barrier against the coronavirus and a symbol of COVID-19, the tenderness in their pose evokes resilience rather than restraint. Within the gallery, masks were not only transforming peoples' lives but were becoming a symbol for promoting collective good.

Figure 4. *Social Statements on Wearing Masks*
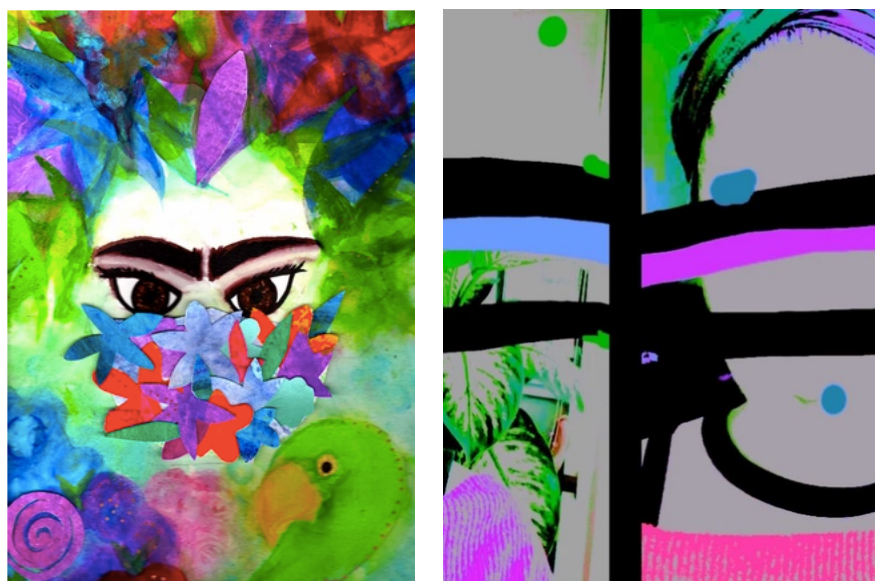
Left: *Wear a Mask: It's a Beautiful Thing to Do* by Aiza Perez-Prado.
Right: *The Uncovering/The Melting* by Liz Mariani אורית מייקל with.

In the left photo in Figure 4, artist-participant Aiza Perez-Prado depicts a carnivalesque, mixed-media rendition of mask wearing. In the piece, a pair of eyes loom above a decoupaged mask amidst a carnival flurry of colourful shapes. A wide-eyed green bird is tucked in the corner, reminding viewers of South Florida and the tropics. The work illustrates the nuanced meanings of masks in material culture, from a medical necessity to a beautiful accessory, while its title urges viewers to "Wear a Mask: It's a Beautiful Thing to Do." This piece is representative of other GREETINGS COVIDIANS submissions in which mask imagery and poetry combine Miami aesthetics – such as tropical foliage and the Art Deco colours – with activism.

In the photo on the right-hand side in Figure 4, artist-participant Liz Mariani אורית מייקל ties a digitally manipulated portrait with an ode to ensure that covering ourselves from the coronavirus does not overshadow the need to uncover unresolved issues:

> We should be wearing masks. But it's not just about covering. It's the Uncovering that's really moving this shift…. It's time to heal, to turn. To

open our eyes. To look where our emotional and spiritual muscles say it's impossible to look – because of our privileged and/or conditioned atrophy. This is hard. It's time to listen. to feel. to connect. to work. All the energies that have gone into misogyny, murder, colonialism, patriarchy, war, jails. All preserving pathways to death. These took planning and strategy.

The call to action proposed by Mariani is echoed by broader social events that have transpired alongside COVID-19. First, for many Miami residents and others across the U.S., the pandemic has underscored long standing racial inequalities. COVID-19 has also unfolded amidst the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement and parallel initiatives, such as Indigenous Lives Matter and Mothers Against Police Brutality. Political divisions on these issues have merged with pandemic responses. Anti-mask riots, for example, overlap with anti-social justice rhetoric, thus contributing to the politicization of supporting or foregoing public mask-wearing as intricate forms of political statements.

Theme 3: From Food Services to Food Insecurities

The way that people in Miami accessed food was another major transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the gallery, references to food are textually or visually presented in 10 entries. Submissions highlighted creativity and flexibility in the way people accessed food. When artist-participants decided to make or grow their own food, it was often presented as an act of empowerment — providing for their basic needs while limiting exposure to the virus. When artist-participants sought to purchase food either by using delivery services or visiting the grocery store, these photos were often accompanied by captions that highlighted their gratitude and/or privilege to have the means to use these services.

A large portion of the photos in the GREETINGS COVIDIANS gallery were submitted between July and August 2020. During this time, Miami was moving through Phase 1 reopening (25%-50% capacity in restaurants; bars closed) to Phase 2 (50% capacity in restaurants; bars open for seated service) (Re-Open Florida Task Force, 2020; Florida Health, 2021). Although restaurants and dine-in options were beginning to re-open with stipulations during this time,[11] local and state restrictions were still in place that limited access to these services. Throughout the pandemic, there were supply-chain delays, restaurant closures, and changing procedures at grocery stores and for public transportation systems. Stresses endured throughout these transformations, and fears of contracting the coronavirus may have been further exacerbated by previous trauma, such as hurricane-related food shortages or former economic

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[11] Miami-Dade county moved through Phase 2 at a much slower pace than the rest of the state.

hardship. Thus, the following photos speak not only to how artist-participants were responding to changes in food acquisition – how Miami residents had to get creative and utilize alternative means for accessing food during the COVID-19 pandemic – but also to broader anxieties and vulnerabilities.

Figure 5. Food production and delivery transformations during COVID-19

Top: *Symbolic Sustenance*, anonymous. Bottom left: *Reuse me until I break,* anonymous. Bottom right: *Viral Risk versus emotional resilience*, anonymous.

The photo on the top centre in Figure 5 shows two handmade loaves of bread. For the artist-participant who submitted this photo, the bread represented "symbolic sustenance." The artist-participant explained: "I began to bake bread. It seemed like the simplest thing I could do to feed my family. In the aftermath of Hurricane María in Puerto Rico I remember being constantly concerned about food. For some reason

baking during the quarantine made me feel less precarious." In the aftermath of a hurricane, stores and restaurants are usually closed for a period-of-time to assess damages and begin the recovery process, or because of local power outages. Thus, people impacted by these natural disasters must often prepare their own food out of necessity. This not only satisfies their physiological needs but can also serves as a coping mechanism to deal with the mental stress of loss and being confined to one place (Losada-Baltar et al., 2020). The artist-participant who made the loaves of bread therefore utilizes those loaves to compare their early pandemic experiences with those experienced in the aftermath of a hurricane.

The photo on the bottom left of Figure 5 shows packaged food sitting next to a bottle of alcohol. The anonymous artist-participant states: "We rarely consider the mental health effects of seeing catastrophe in our every move. Viral risks need to be balanced with self-care and techniques for emotional resilience." Both photos – the top centre and the bottom left – depict different coping mechanisms used to adapt to the challenges of living through a pandemic. These photos show that food (and beverage) is not only a necessary part of survival, but a way to bring comfort.

The photo on the bottom right of Figure 5 shows groceries sitting on the steps outside of an artist-participant's house. This artist-participant described food delivery as a form of survival as well as a symbol of privilege, stating: "Survival in self-quarantine can divide us into economies of privilege and service. Invisible hands deliver life-sustaining goods to the homes of the privileged. But how do we use these privileges without breaking those who provide them?" They also use this space to give thanks to the "invisible hands [who] deliver [those goods]," revealing but one more way the artist-participants of the GREETINGS COVIDIANS project realized their positionality in relation to the people who were doing the necessary, albeit often unappreciated, tasks to maintain society.

While the artist-participants within this project generally did not experience food insecurity – a possible correlation with the ability to participate (i.e., submit photos) in this project – they did acknowledge the prevalence of this vulnerability during COVID-19, with some artist-participants even documenting their experiences helping others access food. Figure 6 depicts examples of these experiences.

The photo on the left of Figure 6 shows three people loading food into the trunk of a car. In its caption, artist-participant Nickolai describes the process of distributing food to Miami residents who had lost their jobs during COVID-19. Similar food distribution lines could be seen throughout the city at various locations.

Figure 6. *Volunteering and Giving Back during COVID-19*
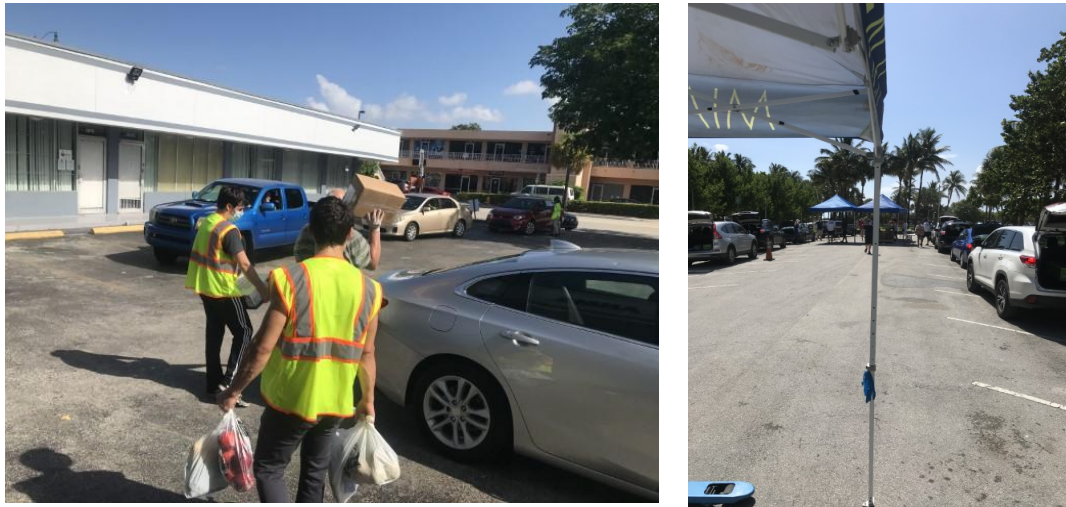
Left: *Windows Up, Trunks Open,* by Nickolai. Right: *Undeveloped America,* by Sarah Sassen.

The photo on the right of Figure 6 was submitted by Sarah Sassen who narrates her experiences volunteering at another food distribution site, saying, "I volunteered every Saturday at the park together with many others and have seen so much love, caring and gratefulness from others. It breaks my heart to see others like this but it warms my heart to see how compassionate people are." Volunteering in the aftermath of a crisis is nothing new in Miami. There are many instances of residents and institutions coming together to fulfil social needs in the aftermath of hurricanes and other natural disasters (see Ahmed & Maurana, 2000). The novelty of this documented experience is the willingness to give-back in the midst of an ongoing crisis event while danger and the potential risk of infection are still present.

Next Steps and Future Outlook

This article takes a visual culture approach to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the everyday lives of people living and residing in Miami, Florida. Using an adapted PhotoVoice methodology, we found three emergent themes that describe the impact of the pandemic on Miami residents. *From stay-at-home orders to financial and housing equality* portrayed the initial shock of the stay-at-home and social distancing requirements that transformed busy tourist attractions to empty and isolated places. This theme highlighted the physical and social transformation of Miami – especially the absence of people – but also the transformation of economic security, for instance, loss of jobs and furloughed workers, that compounds an already unaffordable market. *From personal protection to social statements* depicted the transformation of everyday behaviours to include the wearing of non-medical masks. While the behaviour of wearing a mask was a transformation in itself, the material

representation of the mask also transformed into a symbol of social action combating anti-mask movements and promoting the safety of others. *From food services to food insecurity* depicted the ways in which access to food was transformed during the pandemic.

Similar to other scholars who have described a re-shifting of priorities in the aftermath of disasters (e.g., Oliver-Smith, 1996; Faas & Barrios, 2015), we found that all three of these themes speak to a need to secure basic needs — housing and economic security (theme 1), physical and medical safety (theme 2), and food (theme 3). Present within these themes (particularly theme 3) was also the use of social memory, particularly the knowledge and experience of past disaster events such as tropical storms and hurricanes, to create resilience and cope with the current pandemic (Colten & Giancarlo, 2011). While individual resilience and coping mechanisms were present within the photo gallery, traditional community-level recovery and resilience mechanisms were challenged. Typically, tourist-dependent economies look to quickly repair their image in the aftermath of a disaster in order to begin receiving tourists again and return to normal business operations (Schumann, 2013; Mair et al., 2014). This quick turn-around was not possible in the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging studies have suggested that the uncertainty of when and if people can return to normal life can cause a sense of hopelessness and potentially negative societal behaviours (Usher et al., 2020). Instead of seeing this hopelessness portrayed in the photos submitted during the early onset of the pandemic, we saw a general concern for the wellbeing of others and a desire to use this disaster to transform systematic issues. In the words of one artist-participant (not pictured in this article):

> "We all want to go back to 'normal.' I really do not…The ruthless and unnecessary poverty in a society where abundance is normal, is not normal. The millions of lives destroyed due to the institutionally racists history of this country is not normal." (Anonymous)

While emerging reports on COVID-19 depicted young adults as reckless and willing to sacrifice the lives of others to party in Miami (Nagata, 2020; Roberts, 2020), our gallery depicted an awareness of economic privilege and a desire to use submitted photos and captions to create social change. While the gallery is not representative of the views or diversity of all people residing in Miami during COVID-19, it does present an alternative image to the one receiving attention within popular media, which plays on the negative outcomes of the pandemic.

While this project sheds light on the nuanced experienced of those living through a pandemic, more research is needed on the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the everyday life of people residing in Miami. This study was limited in that recruitment

efforts initially targeted students, staff, and alumni at a Florida-based university. As recruitment for more participant-artists expands – and as other researchers contribute to the growing body of studies on COVID-19 – additional perspectives will come to light. Thus far, it is evident that most artist-participants used the GREETINGS COVIDIANS platform to draw awareness to underlying systematic issues in Florida, and to reflect on the perspectives of those experiencing housing, food, and economic insecurity. Given that university populations are not immune from such vulnerabilities, we are still analysing participant-artist responses while partnering with community organizations, including housing providers and support programs for persons living with HIV-AIDS. The goal of such partnerships, and of continuing our call for submissions, is to assess additional perspectives from Miami-based residents and to unravel the complex responses to an ongoing pandemic. Miami, as a tropical microcosm of diverse cultures, contributes to our understanding of COVID-19 experiences from several vantage points: systemic consequences of labour and social inequity typically associated with highly sought-out vacation environments, mask-wearing in hot and humid climates, and the resilience and vulnerabilities of residents who have experienced and overcome previous crisis events wrought by tropical environments. Future research should address gaps in knowledge and build on this research project to determine both short-term and long-term impacts on the social and cultural experiences of those living through a global pandemic.

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