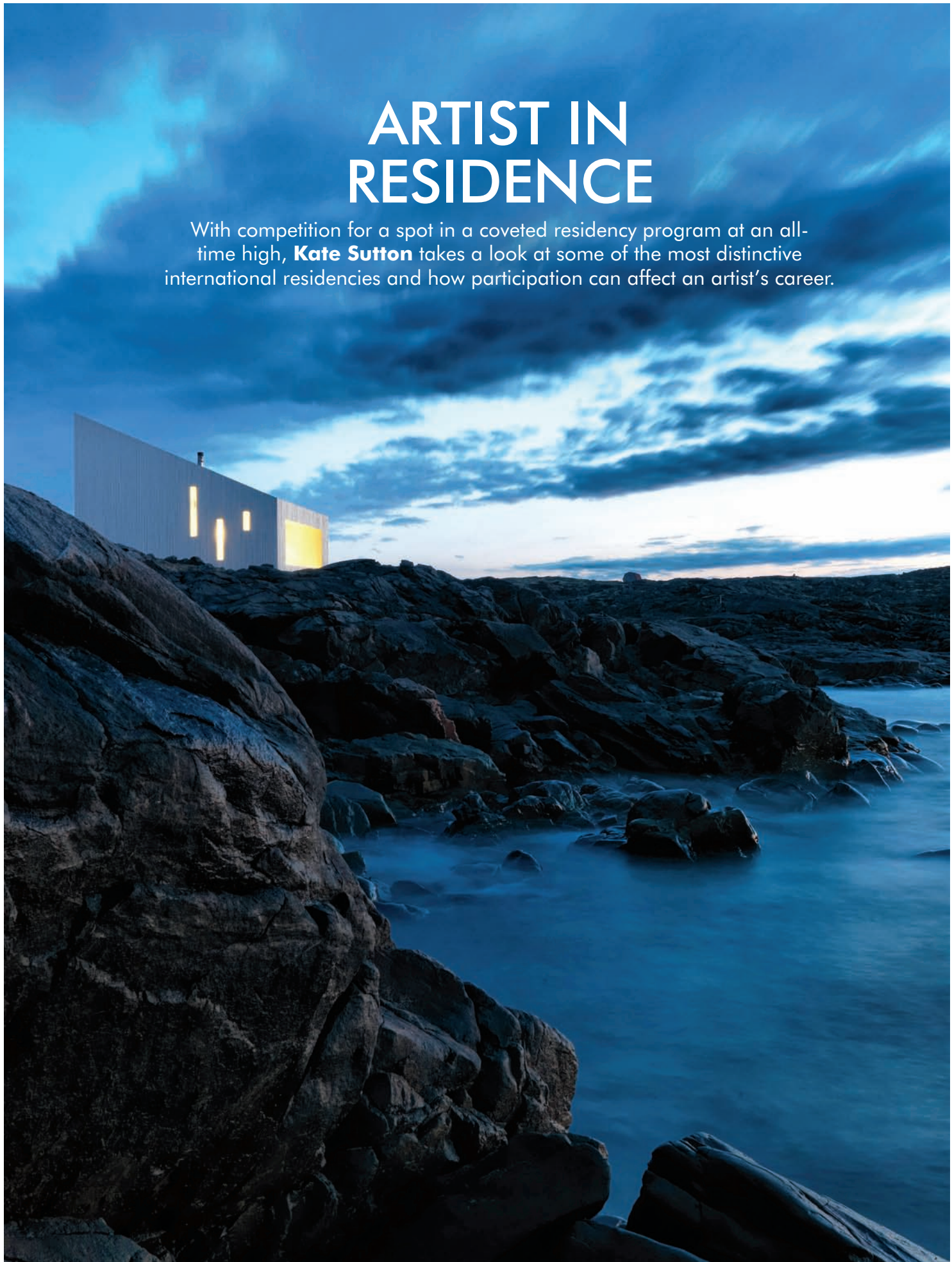


ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

With competition for a spot in a coveted residency program at an all-time high, **Kate Sutton** takes a look at some of the most distinctive international residencies and how participation can affect an artist's career.



**FROM
DETROIT TO
VILNIUS TO
BELGRADE,**

every couple of months another city is crowned “the New Berlin.” Often this title has little to do with the city’s art institutions or production facilities and everything to do with cheap rent. As any old “New Berlin” can tell us, the flip side of this attention is that once artists and institutions help regenerate a neighborhood, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to stay there. With astronomic rents driving creative professionals further and further from the center of cultural capitals like New York, London, and San Francisco, affordable housing—let alone studio space—becomes an artist’s ultimate luxury.

This may help explain why artist residencies have become so indispensable to today’s art world, even as artists themselves move away from traditional studio practice. While by no means a new phenomenon—one of the United States’ most prestigious residencies, the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, debuted in 1946, and the exchange program at the American Academy in Rome dates all the way back to 1893—residencies have undergone something of a renaissance lately, with variations and experimental formats cropping up everywhere from the rice fields of Thailand to an island off Newfoundland to commercial container ships trekking across the Pacific.

Typically, a residency program provides artists with a quiet work space, often in an Ikea-style setting (the white cube made bedroom), with a few local-color quirks thrown in for inspiration. “Artist residencies offer invaluable time away from the constraints of daily life—to reflect, focus, experiment, create—and give artists opportunities to respond critically to the world around them,” says Alexandra McIntosh, director of programs and exhibitions at Fogo Island Arts, a residency program whose starkly beautiful setting in Canada has attracted artists like Willem de Rooij, Silke Otto-Knapp, and Lisa Oppenheim. “This is especially important given our contemporary moment of disposable content, instantaneous reaction, and mass dissemination,” she adds.

“I never sought commissions or commercial success,” admits Nigerian-born artist Onyedika Chuke. “What I wanted was an opportunity to conduct research for my archive and create work with no strings attached.” A board member of the nonprofit Residency Unlimited, Chuke has amassed an impressive string of residencies since graduating from Cooper Union in 2011, including the Verbier 3-D sculpture program in Switzerland, Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, New York, and a stay at the American Academy in Rome as part of an exchange program with the Queens Museum. “The one pitfall is the competition for such residencies,” he adds. “With up to 200,000 artists graduating from American art schools every year, there are simply not enough residency programs nor exhibition institutions to service such a population.” (One trick that Chuke has found is to apply for a summer spot: “Programs tend to give more leniency to emerging artists when the more established artists are on vacation.”)

Artist Maayan Strauss, founder of the Container Artist Residency, concurs. “The art world is extremely saturated with artists,” she says, “and it is not an easy industry to penetrate.

Residencies are an important way for artists to build their career, especially for those who do not receive gallery representation early on. More than the work space and stipends offered by many residencies, the framework they provide for art-making, including the connections and exposure they entail, as well as their strong addition to an artist’s résumé, are all important in developing one’s art practice in a professional sense.” Strauss got the idea for the Container Artist Residency—which sends artists on extended voyages aboard container ships—from her own three-week journey from Haifa, Israel, to New Jersey (then the cheapest available transportation for an artist with limited means). “In such a hyperconnected world that presents us with endless streams of information that we don’t necessarily need, the isolation offered by many residencies is key. It allows time and space for a more focused process. This is definitely one of the significant aspects of Container Artist Residency: There is very limited Internet and cellular access onboard a cargo ship. It is paradoxical and interesting that the physical platform that connects the world—shipping—is actually a very isolated place.”

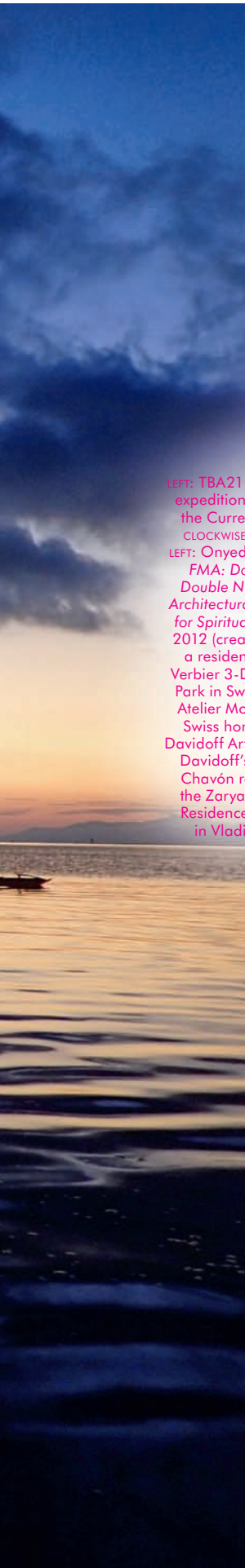


LEFT: A plot of climbing string beans at the Land in Thailand.
BELOW: Maayan Strauss, *Curve*, 2011 (from her Container Artist Residency). OPPOSITE PAGE: Fogo Island Arts’ Squish Studio in Newfoundland, Canada.





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OPPOSITE PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY GONZALO ANGARITA (ATELIER MONDIAL)



LEFT: TBA21 Academy's expedition vessel for the Current. BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Onyedika Chuke, FMA: *Dome and Double Nymph: An Architectural Template for Spiritual Worship*, 2012 (created during a residency at the Verbier 3-D Sculpture Park in Switzerland); Atelier Mondial, the Swiss home of the Davidoff Art Residency; Davidoff's Altos de Chavón residence; the Zarya Artist-in-Residence building in Vladivostok.

While isolation may be conducive to focus, more and more frequently, residencies are styled as networking opportunities rather than refuge. As Devon Bella, director of collections and residencies at the San Francisco branch of the Kadist art foundation, points out, “We have found that being in the center of a city, with access to lots of different resources as well as Kadist’s local and international network of colleagues, collaborators, and partners, is more helpful than the more common retreat model of an artist residency. The value of Kadist is bringing artists into conversation with local attitudes and inclinations, and in return providing local audiences with the opportunity to become part of an artistic process that reflects another cultural or political point of view.”

This kind of exposure can be critical in scenes that lack a developed infrastructure for the support of emerging artists. For example, the Caribbean-based Davidoff Art Residency, in partnership with Art Basel, was formulated to help foster the local art scene by facilitating international exchange. Every year, the program brings five international artists to the Dominican Republic while also placing artists from the Caribbean in programs as far-flung as Beijing, Bogotá, and Basel. Meanwhile, the Zarya Artist-in-Residence program operates at a former sewing factory in Vladivostok, a Russian city closed to foreigners from 1958 until 1992. “Zarya is significant not only for the artists, but also for the city itself,” says Zarya chief curator Alisa Bagdonaite. “In this once-isolated art scene, the residency acts as an embassy of new strategies.”

One of London’s most famous residencies, at the Delfina Foundation, also operated as a kind of embassy, by hosting artists exclusively from North Africa and the Middle East. “The value of this format is that it provides opportunities for deep and considered engagement with

a region, accounting for all of its diversity and complexities,” explains Aaron Cezar, director of Delfina. In 2014, however, the foundation shifted from a geographic focus to thematic, in turn transforming the role of the institution itself. “The themes mean that we aren’t just the hosts,” he says, “but collaborators and repositories of all of the knowledge produced during residencies.”

The idea of a residency as a repository of knowledge is the impetus behind another experimental program currently making waves (quite literally). Founded in 2015 by Francesca von Habsburg, the Current is a three-year initiative that sends artists, architects, marine biologists, and other scientists to islands in the Pacific—the front lines of climate change—to collaboratively brainstorm solutions to urgent environmental issues. So far participants have included curators Ute Meta Bauer and Cesar Garcia and artists Tue Greenfort, Armin Linke, and the Propeller Group.

A similarly eco-conscious initiative is the Land, set up in 1998, which has brought artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, Superflex, and Tobias Rehberger to interact with a simple plot of land in Thailand. The project started as an “experimental community,” advocating for the meditative pleasures of working with the land through sustainable farming. With a little help from Tiravanija, the Land has operated as a foundation since 2004, offering its space free of charge; in 2014, it announced plans to add a formal artist residency, a project publicized during Art Basel in Basel on Messeplatz as part of Tiravanija’s 2015 collaborative work *DO WE DREAM UNDER THE SAME SKY*. “The Land Foundation belongs to no one, and at the same time it belongs to everyone,” says the foundation’s manager, Sedhapong Kirativongkamchon. Perhaps what’s important is not where artists live, but how. **ABMB**

