

Demolition of downtown Miami building sparks debate: Graffiti or art?



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MIAMI – Ever since artists from around the world in town for Art Basel last year descended on 100 Biscayne, covering the building set for demolition in bursts of colorful bold lettering, it has been caught in the crossfire of local controversy.

The downtown Miami building, which started its demolition process last year, has been the center of a worldwide conversation: is it graffiti or art?

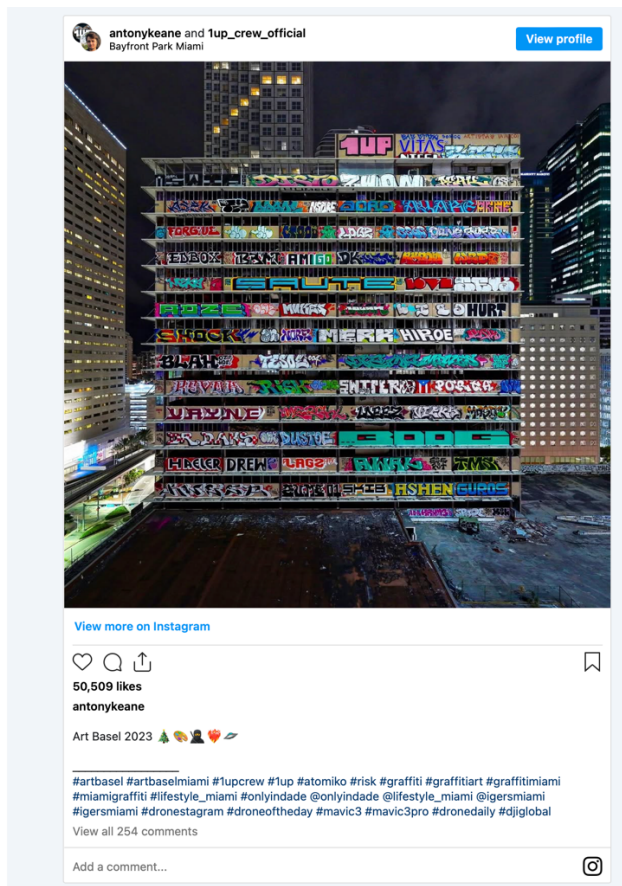
There are those who like the aesthetic.

Felipe Montes de Oca, who works nearby, said, “I walk by it every day. I think it is cool. I have taken pictures of it.”

And others who view it as an eyesore.

A passerby commented, “That’s ugly. I don’t like it.”

The tag “1 UP” next to the word “VITAS” at the top of the building reveals that the paint wasn’t just random tagging.



[1UP](#), for example, is a European-based artist collective out of Berlin.

According to pop culture publication Complex, other internationally known artists participated in the 2023 Art Basel artist activation takeover.

The publication [wrote](#) at the time: “After the demolition of One Bayfront Plaza was announced by city officials, graffiti artists from all over the world who visited Art Basel this week covered the building from top to bottom. HAEL, DR. DAKS, REVOK, HAEL, VAYNE, MERCH, and others from the Los Angeles–founded crews MSK and OTR were some of the first to hit it. Europe’s 1UP crew also threw their name up on the building, and a slew of other graffiti writers followed suit.”

They [have done that in LA](#) — I am from there — but in that case, it was new construction and that was annoying and it made the area look run down and that is not OK,” real estate professional David Moghavem, who works nearby, said. “But in this case, they are about to tear this building down. The building was an eyesore, and they (the artists) made it a little more beautiful.”

Leola Bermanzohn, a New York-based multi-disciplinary artist and muralist, said, “Graffiti as an art form is one of the most well-known art forms of our time. Everybody knows what graffiti is.”

Bermanzohn, one of the artists who contributed to the legendary [Five Pointz mural site](#) in Long Island City, Queens, added, “Yes, its roots are in vandalism, but it is a very widely recognized art movement.”

“The building itself is ugly, so I am glad to see it go,” Montes de Oca said.

That’s why this caught some who work in the area by surprise.

“The building itself is an eyesore, not the paint,” Moghavem said. “The paint made the eyesore (uninspired architecture of the building) a little less sore.”

Addie Bailey, who also works nearby, added, “It made it better coming to work.”

Moghavem concluded, “My office overlooks it. I thought it was beautiful, but I am also glad they are tearing it down. I think whoever made the art knows that it is part of the process too, and that is what art is all about—coming and going.”

A representative for the property owner said interior demolition started last year, and they are now in the heavy demolition phase, a process expected to last a few months.

“Florida East Coast Realty (FECR) is committed to the safe demolition of One Bayfront Plaza. The work is being conducted with all necessary permits and in close collaboration with the City of Miami to expedite the process while prioritizing public safety. Demolition is now fully underway, with heavy machinery on-site daily dismantling large portions of the building. We expect it to be completed during the fourth quarter of 2025. Explosives are not being utilized as the tower is a steel frame, requiring higher-energy explosives to melt and fall compared to a concrete structure. Utilizing these higher-energy explosives in a dense urban neighborhood results in an increased risk of shrapnel affecting neighbors and stakeholders. FECR remains dedicated to transforming this property into a vibrant addition to Miami’s skyline.”

—FECR CEO Jerome Hollo