

A promotional banner for a baseball game between the Florida Marlins and the San Diego Padres. On the left is the Marlins logo. In the center, it says "VS. Padres" with "SAN DIEGO" above "Padres" and "MAY 5 - 7:05 PM" below. On the right, there are logos for "Marlins Pom-poms", "Marlins Window Cling", and "Majestic". Further right, it says "YOU GOTTA BE HERE!" and "CALL 1-877-MARLINS WWW.FLORIDAMARLINS.COM".

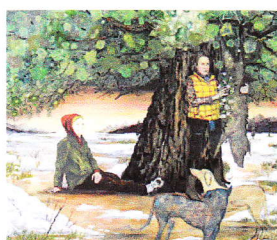
Close Encounters of the Absurd Kind

David Castillo's got aliens on parade, and a local artist's homecoming

By Carlos Suarez De Jesus

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Andrew Guenther's radioactive solo show at the David Castillo Gallery could well have been called "Invasion of the DayGlo Saucer Men."



Christian Curiel's *What Business Has Innocence Here*

His trippy suite of paintings, saturated in bleeding psychedelic hues suggesting a jumbo box of fluorescent Crayola crayons nuked in a microwave, taps into the central nervous system of Fifties sci-fi cult classics, and gives the impression that he's either been a recent victim of an alien abduction, or has been smoking some cosmic corn silk — or both.



TABLE AND FOUR CHAIRS \$999

Details:

Through May 5.
David Castillo
Gallery, 2234 NW
2nd Ave, Miami.
305-573-8110;
www.castilloart.com.

One sign that Guenther may have come under the influence of space teens visiting Earth to make way for a race of lobster-clawed invaders is the actual name of his show: "Standing in water up to the shins, your foot looks at a minnow and says, 'Look what I have become!'"

Another clue is the painting of one of the lobster-clawed intruders, *Splitting Off*, which depicts the Cyclops-eyed tarry-skinned creature looming eerily on a gallery wall and in the process of cleaving itself in two. Hilariously Guenther has sewn a pair of cast bronze shriveled raisins onto the canvas in place of the space mutant's balls.

The nine medium- and large-scale paintings on display mark a shift from the decapitated heads, death metal ghosties, angst-addled zombies, and vomit-slurping ghouls that haunted the darker landscape of Guenther's recent work. Fortunately the new paintings still manage to shine with a tasty, insalubrious decadence all their own.

Recreation, an acrylic and oil stick on canvas piece, depicts three spacy teens with vacant, atomic tangerine eyes, their bodies mottled with electric lime and cerulean lesions, lounging next to a phallus-shape tree. As the ground underneath them boils like a lava flow, the sky above seems to detonate with lush, purple, pink, and violet jellyfish clouds.

In this work, as in others, Guenther allows small sections of raw canvas to peek through while richly soaking other sections in sensationally contrasting hues. He also uses thinly dissolved paint to create oscillating splotches on his surfaces that combine to exude a somewhat atmospheric, special effects vibe.

Nearby six stellar marathoners sneak a furtive glance at the spectator as they race across a glowing

neon-carrot field in *Hey You*, one of the largest works in the show. At the bottom of the painting, juicy black space fronds seem sprinkled with rotting stardust, or glazed with toxic tapioca grains embedded under their skins.

On an adjacent wall *Social Group III* features a trio of the aqueous apparitions levitating shoulder-to-shoulder in a can-can line in deep space. Spectral bruises, burst blood vessels, and cold sores intimate their "faces," and their elastic bodies are plugged with cauliflower macerations, oily papules, and nodes.

Another work begging diagnosis is *Smash Through This*. It depicts three cyanotic figures doing jumping jacks against a salmon-hue void, their bodies blotched with gummy rainbow crusts and spinning constellations of acidic chakralike drips and daubs. Oddly Guenther has glued a bunch of broken sticks across the canvas, making the work appear more playful than menacing.

Unlike the nasty alien infiltrators of Cold War sci-fi B-movies, who came to colonize the planet and use humans as food, these creatures, though hinting at some wacky viral contagion, never cross the line into the demonic or sinister. For the most part they seem to have more in common with the visitors from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

The exception may be in *Falling Back*, a painting in which the figures look more like the cannibalistic cave-dwelling Morlocks from the 1960 movie adaptation of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Guenther renders an extreme closeup of one troglodyte's face at the left foreground of the canvas, while another foul hominid perches on a stone in the background.

Next to them a pair of what look like stoner Martian mopes space out on a couch in *Love Seat*, a work that almost looks like batiked fabric or a silk screen.

One wonders if it's the underlying metaphysical thread running through these works, the luscious head-shop poster sheen of their coloring, or even nostalgia for old-fangled sci-fi that sets the hook under the skin. But what doesn't surprise about Guenther's wildly inventive, otherworldly dreamscapes is that most of the canvases had flown, sight unseen, off the Internet to collectors before Castillo even opened the show.