

Female but Maybe Not Fem

A couple of guys put together a show by women

By Victor Barrenechea
BT Contributor

Yes, Miami may have Naomi Fisher, Wendy Wischer, and Cristina Lei Rodriguez. But compared to the number of Miami men making names for themselves in the art world, it seems our female artists have yet to break through the artistic glass ceiling.

"It's just the reality of the way it is," says local artist Pepe Mar. "[Just] go to Chelsea [the New York City gallery district] or something, and count the number of male solo shows versus women solo shows." In response to this local predicament, Mar and Miami painter Aramis Gutierrez have curated an all-female exhibition, "The Continuing Adventures of Our Heroine," which opens later this month at the David Castillo Gallery.

"We were kind of picking up on the fact that there are not that many female artists in Miami," says Gutierrez, who, like Mar, is represented by the gallery. "It was nice to put a spotlight on some emerging female artists."

Shows of this nature are not without precedent. Recent exhibitions, such as "Global Feminisms" at the Brooklyn

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Museum in New York, and the traveling "WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution," have certainly put a spotlight on femme-centric art. Locally, too, there's the current "Dark Continents" show at North Miami's Museum of Contemporary Art, which explores the connection between feminism and nature. But "Continuing Adventures" doesn't address typical issues of feminism and gender politics; in fact, very few the works contain any kind of overtly feminist subject matter.

"I think we wanted to avoid a stereotypically 'feminist' show," Gutierrez explains. "We just wanted to do a show about people making art who happen to be female — which kind of is an



Guest Room, an oil painting by newcomer Natalya Laskis.

underrepresented niche in the Miami art scene."

The show brings together seven artists, each at a different stage in her career. You have Michelle Weinberg, Francie Bishop Good, Lee Materazzi, and Susan Lee-Chun. Only two non-Miamians will be taking part: Jaimie Warren from Kansas City and the wildly successful New York photographer Cindy Sherman. They will all be joined by newcomer Natalya

Laskis, a young painter for whom this is only the second show in a gallery setting, and the first ever in Miami.

Laskis, who paints in oils, says, "I think this is more important than [my other show]. People will be more critical of the work because of my association with Hernan." She is referring to perhaps Miami's best-known artist, Hernan Bas, for whom she works as an assistant and whom she considers something of a mentor. "He's a big influence on my work," she acknowledges, though she won't go so far as to consider herself his protégée.

Most of her work is about her twin sister and based on photos she has taken on



The logo for Lee-Chun's fictional corporation,

family trips to Thomasville, Georgia. Lakes, streams, and hunting lodges evoke a mood of quiet tranquility and nostalgia. Each finished painting is marked by some obscurity of detail that Laskis achieves by limiting the amount of brushstrokes. The goal, she says, is show more with less.

Photographer Lee Materazzi, also represented in the show, says she thinks the exhibition may raise questions

about what constitutes a feminine aesthetic, wondering whether it's a particular sensitivity or a particular way of stylizing that makes a work "feminine." "I wonder if people think 'masculine' work is more aggressive and 'female' work is more passive," she says. Her own work is often compared to that of Erwin Wurm, which leads her to conclude that neither gender can corner the market on the specific traits a work can embody. Even Mar and Gutierrez characterize their work as having a predominantly "feminine" sensibility. "I think in Miami, there are a lot of male artists who speak in a feminine voice," says Gutierrez.

For this show, Materazzi will have three photographs, each depicting someone caught in exaggeratedly complicated and cluttered domestic situations. "I try to pick [situations] that an everyday person has trouble with," she explains, "these frustrating moments you encounter in everyday life." *Hose*, for example, depicts a man tangled up in an uncoiled garden hose, while *Underwear Drawer* shows a woman engulfed in piles of clothing, her head stuck in an unkempt dresser drawer. In each photograph, the subject's face is obscured, so that while the surrounding circumstances seem fraught with tension, the people themselves appear quite relaxed, almost accepting of their discomfort. The absurdity of the domestic situations tinge the works with an element of dark humor.

The Suz. Korean-American performance artist Susan Lee-Chun will execute a project titled *You're Cordially Invited to Tea Time*, in which she will not physically participate. "I've always been the instigator," she explains. "This time I want people to come into the work on their own."

Her piece, which touches upon issues of ethnicity and identity, centers on a company known as The Suz and represents the different aspects of Lee-Chun's

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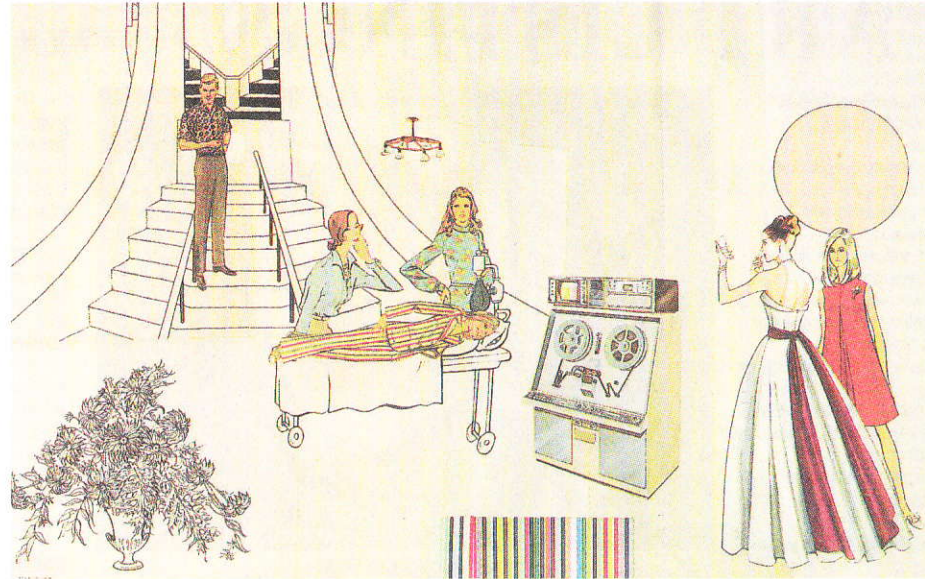
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personality through characters she has created and performed throughout her career. Meet “Sue,” Lee-Chun with a blond wig, who represents an Americanized Asian. There’s the more aggressive “Sioux,” who rejects that assimilation and is characterized by a headpiece with a protruding rhino horn. Then there’s “Su,” the bridge between the two. Headshots of the three characters combine to create The Suz company logo.

Lee-Chun hopes to occupy the space with a quasi-corporate tea party that’s almost Starbucks-like. Viewers will be encouraged to sit on pillows emblazoned with The Suz’s company images, atop an octagonal platform. As soon as four people seat themselves, a professional caterer will be instructed to serve tea. The setup will be decorated in an Asian style Lee-Chun describes as not Korean, but rather generic Asian. “People feel like it’s all kind of the



Michelle Weinberg’s collages evoking the 1950s and early 1960s.

same,” she says. “Race tends to oversimplify branches of ethnicity.”

Very subjective and personal world views seem to be the common threads among all the works on display, be it Sherman’s costumed self-portraits or Weinberg’s collages that simultaneously romanticize and criticize the notion of 1950s housewives.

All in all, Gutierrez and Mar agree that the discovery of a younger generation of local female artists was the most exciting part of putting this show together. “You do find all these little pockets where artists are working that you just didn’t think about,” says Gutierrez. “Hopefully, this show will influence some of the younger female artists.”



Among the domestic situations explored by Lee Materazzi.

“The Continuing Adventures of Our Heroine” opens October 11 at David Castillo Gallery, 2234 NW 2nd Ave., Miami. For hours and more information call 305-573-8110; or visit www.castilloart.com.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com