

reviews

MIAMI

Frances Trombly and Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova

Bass Museum of Art

Two of Miami's most intriguing sculptors, wife and husband Frances Trombly and Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, recently collaborated on an exhibition at the Bass Museum. Visitors might be forgiven for thinking that Trombly and Rodriguez-Casanova have nearly identical aesthetics—they both *appear* to use ordinary objects, from prefabricated doors to extension cords and cleaning utensils, as readymades. "Come Together," however, demonstrated that their projects may be complementary, but their processes are quite divergent.

On first inspection, you might have thought that the cleaning staff had left a mop against the wall of the ground-floor gallery, then you realize that you've never seen a mop head so finely or beautifully constructed. Trombly made *Mop* from handspun silver wool and cotton attached to a wooden mop handle, thereby continuing her project to painstakingly handcraft seemingly mass-produced objects. In *Storage*, empty stretchers and already assembled canvases lean against a wall. Trombly hand-wove the fabric, a project that must have taken an incredible number of hours. After a few moments of looking at *Storage*, it is possible to make out variations in segments of the weave and a

hanging string that has not been snipped.

A feeling of abandonment pervades Trombly's work. To "abandon" means to surrender or give up, and Trombly creates pieces that seem to be discarded or forgotten. The labor that goes into hand-crafting each piece is, however, a mini-rebellion against the throwaway culture in which we live. In reality, Trombly relinquishes nothing. Her sculpture also makes reference to the Etsy movement (hand-crafters selling their wares on-line) but without any of its preciousness. Her new work, as with her pieces from the past few years, exudes dignity and thoughtfulness.

In *Side by Side*, Trombly and Rodriguez-Casanova hung her hand-

crafted canvas curtain next to a set of his white vertical blinds; here the artists are literally "coming together" in a piece, the handmade next to the mass-produced. In *A Shelf in Front of a Frame*, Rodriguez-Casanova orients an ordinary Ikea-style bookshelf in front of a gold frame, apparently empty except for a pane of glass and some brown paper. It complements Trombly's *Storage* in that the pieces initially feel haphazard; but the longer one stands next to *Shelf*, the clearer it becomes that something (books, art, or literature) is being suppressed.

Frances Trombly, *Mop*, 2008. Handspun silver wool, cotton, and wooden mop handle, 52 x 14 x 13 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID CASTILLO GALLERY, MIAMI



Rodriguez-Casanova's most powerful piece in the exhibition was *A Fallen Ceiling Held by Blinds*, installed in the Bass Museum's "Cabinet," a small replica of a 16th-century cabinet of curiosities. In his installation, a ceiling appears to have fallen and is now partially propped against the wall. A lit-up brass chandelier, still attached to the ceiling, rests on the floor. One museum visitor remarked sarcastically, "And that's supposed to be art." His companion suggested, "No, it's just a room under construction." I imagine Rodriguez-Casanova relishing these comments. The materials that constitute this installation have no artistic merit of their own. In fact, the half-open vertical

blinds, the 1980s-style chandelier, and the very frigidity of the installation (now "crashed" to the floor) force you to reflect on the pervasiveness of this bland office aesthetic in our society. Some viewers may wonder why these ordinary objects are displayed in a museum; perhaps the better question is why there is so little originality or art in the work-a-day world. Rodriguez-Casanova crystallizes his ideas in a quietly powerful piece; it is a fully digested and conceptualized artwork, with intellectual consequences. Only after the museum visit does one realize that both Trombly's and Rodriguez-Casanova's works have a clear connection to

the stark white architecture and design ethos of Miami (minus the tropical sensuality). The restraint we find in their sculpture resonates like the final chord of a Satie *Gymnopédie*.

—Laura Albritton

Above: Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, *A Fallen Ceiling Held by Blinds*, 2011. Vertical blinds, lamp, wood, and textured ceiling paint, detail of installation. Below: Frances Trombly, *Storage*, 2011. Hand-woven canvas and wood, dimensions variable.



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