



Events

The wild bunch

Death, rebirth ... and fitness? No topic was off-limits for the artists in the stunning new show *Gallery Projects*

By John Thomason

At first, the artworks on display at the David Castillo Gallery seem to have little in common. Including macabre multimedia assemblages, weightlifting equipment repurposed as an art object and a simple rope (or is it so simple?), these works are wildly different in form and content. They didn't have to have anything in common, after all—they simply had to be new.

This was the only rule enforced by gallery owner Castillo for his current group exhibition, *Gallery Projects*, which runs through July 31. But as it turned out, a show that deliberately lacked a unifying theme came together in what Castillo calls "the strongest of all our group shows to date."

"There were themes and organic relationships that evolved, and everything made sense together," Castillo says. "And that's part of the vision and conception of the gallery."

Aramis Gutierrez, the lone painter in the show, agrees. "This was one of my first group shows where a lot of the artists were having a dialogue, aesthetically and conceptually," he says. "There are similar running themes throughout a lot of the work. I was happily surprised."

Titled "At the Water Park," Gutierrez's contribution depicts a pregnant woman and her companion standing in the titular amusement park. The top of her swimsuit has come loose, and she succeeds in covering half her chest while her rotund lover tries to fix her wardrobe malfunction.

"A friend joked that I make Catholic John Currin paintings," Gutierrez says. "They're not necessarily these ideal Protestant images. They have more to do with Catholicism and guilt. I've done this kind of thing before, and I've studied religious paintings like the Madonna. I have the pregnant woman covering one breast, and the Madonna only bares one breast. I wanted to create a weird, guilt-ridden, chivalrous painting."

It's a change of pace from Gutierrez's first solo show at David Castillo Gallery, last year's Morrissey-referencing *Even Now in the Final Hour of My Life, I'm Falling in Love Again*. The final hour indeed: The pieces in that show focused largely on the suggestion of imminent death.

"Fatalism, and more specifically failure, are philosophically related to my work," he says. "I read it as an investigation of the purported death of painting."

The death of art, in a broader sense, is an idea Gutierrez shares with fellow Castillo Gallery artist Glexis Novoa, whose piece in *Gallery Projects* is overtly doom-laden. A graphite, site-specific work drawn directly onto the dry wall, it shows



a pigtailed girl balancing like a weather vane atop a skull tower, whose suited victims dangle from its branches.

"The grim picture of the bodies hanging is only a fiction of the art scene in Miami, where most of the artists are subjected to torturous anxiety caused by the market and the art trade, now merged with the art and culture," Novoa explains. "The bodies can be collectors, who embody the dictators of the market, or local artists. It all depends on which of them is the viewer."

The Cuban-born Novoa has shown his work to Fidel Castro, and is never one to shy away from socially conscious themes. "That was the spark that prompted a defining stage in my career and responds to my training as a citizen in a society such as the unhappy Cuban society, which intended to change the world through revolution," he says. "It is the only thing I have learned to do. I'm already out of fashion, as my colleagues on the island now are not revolutionaries and seek what I have in U.S."

The theme of death, and possibly rebirth, also can be detected in works such as Quisqueya Henriquez's "Collage Made According to the Laws of Change." Here, modern images of athletes preparing for and celebrating their sport are laid over an old, archived image of an actress performing before a crowd in a theater. Turning the old into the new is similarly evident in Pepe Mar's seven-part installation "Zona Rosa," nightmarish assemblages made of wood, twine, tinfoil, netting, wicker, rabbit's feet, rubber skeleton hands and more.

Then, there's Wendy Wischer's "Angels and Ancestors XX," the 20th and final entry in a series that focuses on trees. It's a collection of five chrome, steel spheres sprouting dead trees in graduated sizes. Again, the theme is death and rebirth, but it is in tune for an artist long fascinated with nature and the bigger picture.

"I've been thinking a lot about burnt trees," Wischer says. "There's a lot of burning in the Everglades, so they're about death in a sense. The spheres represent little globes and they're all together, but they also could work separately: a lone tree that's dead, and a planet that's turned into this molten metal, able to cling around the surface."

Wischer's works have strong reflective power, a similarity they share with other pieces in the show, such as Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova's modified photo frame "Fifteen Dark Reflections" and Susan Lee-Chun's symmetrical weight-room setup, "Suzercise," which similarly plays with mirrors. There are plenty of these similarities and communications being made between the works, but unlike most gallery shows, here you have to figure them out for yourself.

Gallery Projects will be on view through July 31 at David Castillo Gallery, 2234 N.W. Second Ave., in Miami. The gallery is open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Call 305-573-8110 or visit Davidcastillogallery.com.

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