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Worth the effort

At Girls' Club in Fort Lauderdale, artists have time on their side.
BY COLLEEN DOUGHER

ART

Carol Prusa produces labor-intensive, contemporary art, so people frequently ask her how long it took to complete a work. This summer, the Florida Atlantic University art professor kept track of the hours spent on the 4-by-7-foot "Anande," and was surprised by the results. "That piece went close to 500 hours," she says, "and I thought, 'That's insane.'"

The process of creating the work — silverpoint with ground graphite, titanium white pigment and acrylic binder — is involved and meditative. "[Anande] was an intensely time-consuming work, which doesn't make it of value inherently, but expresses a certain kind of commitment to a process," Prusa says.

It's this kind of commitment Michelle Weinberg, creative director for Fort Lauderdale alternative art space Girls' Club, sought for the venue's latest show, *Set to Manual*, which will open Friday. "I was interested in work where at every step of the process, the artist's hand was there, but not necessarily the physical hand," Weinberg explains. "There are artists working with digital media, and we have a Web project, so then the hand becomes a decisionmaking gesture by the artist ... an intimacy and involvement with the work."

Of the nearly 30 works in the show, 21 are from the collection of Francie Bishop Good and her husband, David Horvitz, who founded Girls' Club in 2006. "They decided once their collection started overflowing, to make a commitment to the community, to have their private art collection be an inspiration, a catalyst for raising the bar in terms of cultural venues," Weinberg says.

As its mission became more defined, Girls' Club became more deeply entrenched in the community, forming educational partnerships with Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center and Women in Distress and helping Young at Art Museum to design *Girls in Power*, an art-based program for teens at Pace Center for Girls. Girls' Club also solidified its commitment to the local art community by offering art-related workshops and inviting select artists into curated, themed, one-year exhibitions that include works on loan from other collectors, galleries and artists.



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Like painting: Pepe Mar says it takes 1500 hours working on his piece for *Set to Manual*.

The Good/Horvitz collection dictates the themes of Girls' Club's shows. The first, *Talking Heads*, opened in 2007 after Weinberg discovered the collection contained much portrait photography focusing on women at various stages of life, in all their awkward moments. Traditional male

photography, she points out, tends to focus on women in their most sexually attractive or available years. Girls' Club's 2008 show, *Under the Influence*, explored female artists who in the '60s and '70s were recycling materials, collaborating, opening venues and laying the groundwork for the way artists

work today.

Set to Manual explores handmade contemporary art. Like previous exhibits, it draws heavily from the collection, which includes art by Tara Donovan, who creates pictures and 3-D installation spaces from everyday materials, and Amparo Sard, who makes drawings by punching pinholes in paper. About a third of the work is by local artists such as paper sculptor Jen Stark, filmmaker Clifton Childree, collagist Pepe Mar and Kerry Phillips, who obsessively collects everyday objects and spins them into art. Mar spent four months on his contribution to the show, a colorful multimedia sculpture titled "I'm Afraid of Everything" and made of wires, sea sponges, glittery doodads and dollar-store finds. He says it is inspired by club music, fashion and shopping. Creating the piece reminded him of painting, with the frequent addition of new layers, and he says he poured himself into the work until it developed a life of its own. "You can totally feel it," he explains. "[The objects] have been around me for a while and they start coming alive."

Prusa argues that when an artist spends 500 hours or more on a piece, time unfolds differently and a deeply meditative process emerges. The title of her work "Anande" means "bliss" in Hindi and was apparently as peaceful to make as it is to view.

"My piece was made to be a mattress of sorts, like a biological surface that you could find solace or refreshment in," Prusa says. "It's like a visual mattress that if you laid down on it, would make you happy. It's a little gift of painting so that everyone who is superstressed could just breathe a little differently, calm down a little bit. I think a lot of the work in the show functions that way."

Set to Manual will open 7-10 p.m. Friday at Girls' Club, 117 N.E. Second St., in Fort Lauderdale. Admission is free. Call 954-828-9151 or visit Girlsclubcollection.org. Contact Colleen Dougher at cdougher@citylinkmagazine.com.

