

ARTS

New Frost museum makes FIU a serious player



The art of GisMo, a collaboration of Jessica Gisperte and Cristal Pearl Molinary, plays with notions of class and identity in Cuban culture. This work is *Despejando vistas de oscuridad* (Clearing up sights of darkness).

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IF YOU GO

What: The work of FIU students artists

When: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday through Friday

Where: Art Forum @ the FIU Painting Studios, W-9, Florida International University, 11200 SW Eighth St., Miami

Cost: Free

Info: 305-348-6672

BY TOM AUSTIN
SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

With the opening of the Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum on Florida International University's Tamiami campus, the FIU art department is poised to become an even more visible player on the South Florida art scene. The school's more notable made-in-Miami alumni include the collaborative teams GisMo and the TM Sisters, as well as Teresita Fernandez, who won a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant in 2005.

In December, the Frost will present a show drawn from the work of the 150 students in its School of Art & Art History.

The school is also throwing edgy openings at its Painting Studios with *Artist Forum*, a series of open-to-the-public student exhibitions mounted four times a semester and covering a lot of aesthetic turf.

The Nov. 12 show *Hepatic Heterotopia* featured Christine Fitzgerald consuming household objects while inside a red fabric organ meant to be a liver. Earlier this fall, a performance piece during the *Recto-Verso* exhibition examined the horror of water-boarding: Rick Diaz stripped down, covered his face, stepped into a black box and had onlookers shoot water pistols at his torso and not-so-private parts.

In October, *Fashionatrix: The Seamstress of Rage* entailed art-to-wear clothes by Hans Rasch and Susan Thomas, along with a performance by FLEA

(Florida Laptop and Electronic Arts Ensemble), presided over by Paula Matthusen, an assistant professor and coordinator for music technology. As several students manipulated laptop computers to produce an eerie new kind of music, others sashayed down a makeshift runway in ensembles that played with the notion of fashion. On one wall, graduate student and teaching assistant Josh Neel screened a post-Dada video entailing segmented images of an aimless cat: Neel intends to show the video guerilla-style in various street locations during Art Basel Miami Beach.

In the painting studios, a contingent of women earnestly worked on still lifes. Amid the studiously alternative flaming-youth scene, the women at their easels almost seemed like a performance piece. Jacek Kolasinski, assistant professor of electronic media, took in a spectacular painting on the wall -- Barack Obama, Sarah Palin and John McCain duking it out in some futuristic wasteland.

"Well, my professor said to paint something I like, and something I don't," Daniel Ortiz, its student artist, said, "so I mixed video games with politics. This was inspired by the new edition of *Gears of War*."

NEW ARRIVAL

Ortiz's teacher Mette Tommerup, assistant professor of painting, is one of the department's newer arrivals working at keeping FIU in the moment. During Art Basel Tommerup and her husband Robert Chambers, an artist and member of the College Board National Task Force for the Arts in Education, will welcome students and the public to *Yard Work*, their show at CasaLin, a house just behind the Rubell Collection in Wynwood with a garden featuring installations from assorted artists.

Meanwhile, Janine Antoni, whose parents and novelist brother Brian live part time in South Florida and whose work blurs the line between performance and sculpture, will visit the FIU art department in February to kick off a masters workshop series. In March, homegrown star Hernan Bas will curate an M.F.A. show drawn from the work of FIU and University of Miami students, and later in the spring, Mark Coetzee of the Rubell Collection will conduct a contemporary art theory class at the collection. Focusing on art made after 2000, it will be open to the public and art students from the University of Miami, New World School of the Arts and other art schools.

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For some time, most of the buzz about student artists has been centered around downtown Miami's New World School, which produced Naomi Fisher, Joshua Levine, Bas and two artists tapped by the 2008 Whitney Biennial, Bert Rodriguez and Adler Guerrier.

"We've had a lot of attention here in the past because of our faculty dedication and the talent of the students," says Maggy Cuesta, dean of New World's Visual Arts Department. "FIU, especially with the new museum, is going to be getting stronger and stronger, and it's always great to have another museum for students to visit."

To Bonnie Clearwater of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in North Miami, the sharing of resources among art schools helps students learn "from each other as much as they do their teachers. All it takes is the right people: FIU has an impressive faculty, and Teresita Fernandez -- who we showed a long time ago in a group show about the Nineties -- is an amazing artist. The reputation of an art school tends to rotate, according to its students, luck and media attention."

STUDENT ART

For now, FIU students seem to be turning up everywhere, from a recent presentation at the Dorsch Gallery to an opening for GisMo at the Carol Jazzar gallery amid the groovy garden at Jazzar's Miami Shores house. GisMo is a collaborative team consisting of Jessica Gispert, the sister of Whitney Biennial winner Luis Gispert, and Cristal Pearl Molinary. The FIU alums play with notions of class and identity in Cuban culture, photographing themselves as high Cuban princesses, in tableaux that entail such parodies as errant Chongas with unfortunate moods or pink-upon-pink ladies of leisure shaving their legs with pink razors in a hot tub flanked by Santa Barbara statues.

The work is raw, urban stuff, but GisMo's new show *Limpiezas (cleansings)* -- on view through Jan. 10 -- features more dreamy images of the duo in the Everglades, Earth mothers leaving behind technology.

To Gispert, the "Cuban thing" and her art go back to FIU. "They were very open to the idea of us graduating as collaborators," she says, "and everything we needed was right there on Eighth Street -- grabbing a *cafe con leche* or escaping out to the Everglades after an art and shamanism class, leaving behind all the societal pressures in the inspiration of nature."

Another collaborative team, the TM Sisters, appears everywhere -- VJ stints at Poplife, lecturing in Sweden or participating in the Second Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art. Monica Lopez De Victoria earned a B.F.A. in photography and video from FIU in 2002; sister Tasha has a B.F.A. in electronic intermedia from New World. For Monica, FIU offered a chance to explore the notion of "visual thinking," of creating art from ideas. "But FIU also taught me to be a surviving artist," she says, "not just a dreaming artist."

"We require students to take courses in visual thinking," says Juan Martinez, who heads the Art & Art History Department, "and since so much of contemporary art is conceptually based, it's a good foundation for an art career."

TERESITA FERNANDEZ

The best-known FIU artist alum is Fernandez, class of 1990, a panelist on the Art and Architecture symposium during this year's Art Basel Miami Beach. Fernandez has pieces in Seattle's Olympic Sculpture Park and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

"Art departments are organic entities that shift all the time, depending on who's there: the loudest places don't always have the most interesting people," Fernandez says. "Everyone at FIU was encouraging, and I learned things that I'm still using today. But ultimately, you don't do well because of -- or in spite of -- your school. You do well when you work hard."

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