

Tschida, Anne, "Contemporary vision, de la Cruz-style," *The Miami Herald*, February 26, 2012

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Contemporary vision, de la Cruz-style

The exhibition at the De La Cruz Contemporary Art Space brings extraordinary global works to Miami's Design District.

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SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

It's become a cliché to point out that many of the private contemporary art collections of Miami are by and large bigger and better than any of the public institutions. In fact, they are some of the most prominent in the world.

When they are locked behind closed doors, that's a shame. But a number of private collectors make their offerings accessible, even standing in as alternative museums. What's most exciting about a visit to one of these spaces is the mixture of permanent works from some of the most important artists of the last half century with new, fresh output from lesser known names, and increasingly, from locals as well.

Such is the case with the De La Cruz Contemporary Art Space, Miami's only free and regularly open privately run art collection. Opened in 2009 by Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz as an exhibition, lecture and residency



Shows of works by Rashid Johnson are slated for museums around the country; one standpoint is "Napalm," a painting/sculpture on display at the De la Cruz Contemporary Art Space in the Design District through mid-October, 2012. Adam Reich

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outlet, this Design District museum makes an effort to highlight work from Miami artists on a monthly basis. But the latest exhibit it unveiled during Art Basel Miami Beach also showcases art from up-and-comers making news on the international scene, and it's great to be able to encounter it here on the southern tip of the country.

Like the Rashid Johnson painting/sculpture on the second floor; it's a stand out. This work, called Napalm, is made from red-oak wood flooring, black soap, wax and gold paint (a similar work is on the ground floor, as is one currently hanging at the Rubell Family Collection). These works include hieroglyphic-like symbols, scratched markings, and mysterious forms that reference ancient mythologies and, more ominously, branding such as that done to animals, and once upon a time, to slaves. Johnson, whose works are often steeped in Afro-centric imagery with a dash of humor, is hitting it big these days; big solo shows slated for Chicago, Los Angeles and London are coming up. And MAM is set to give him an exhibit later this year.

Johnson's burnt offerings seem to have a strange connection to a somber piece that makes up one of the De la Cruz's crown jewels: the expansive body of work from Ana Mendieta. The room on the third floor devoted to the Cuban-American female pioneer, who died in 1985, includes another burnt-wood work, this time of a human silhouette. Mendieta literally played with fire in her work and in her life, and like Johnson today, with myths and native symbolism. Although her pieces are on permanent display and not part of the new ones up at the De la Cruz, it is a crime to visit this space without at least glancing at her work.

In fact, the third floor is often the strongest draw here, and this time around it includes a great array of Gabriel Orozco's work from the couple's collection. There are dozens of the Mexican artist's photos, the results of his wonderings around the globe, from Mali in Africa to the rural areas of his homeland, to urban crevices in New York City. It is the first time they have been exhibited all together.

In the middle of the room is a special treat: a ping pong table. One could conceivably play a game on it, except that there is a real, water-lily-filled pond in the middle. Above hang some light and lovely sculptures, Bamboo Balls, made of bamboo leaves and rubber balls.

Orozco's connection to nature is echoed by another one of the de la Cruz's stellar artists, also up on the third floor, Jim Hodges. Anyone who has visited the space should be familiar with his beautiful napkin flower drawing and fabric flower curtain. But take a good look at his painting of an orange tree, which suddenly becomes 3-D on closer inspection, with collaged leaves jumping off the surface. The every-day-object works of the much-mourned Felix Gonzalez-Torres also reside here, along with pieces from local artist Cesar Trasobares.

Down on the second floor is a selection of work from another hot artist, Kathryn Andrews. Her off-beat

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sculptures -- often including clown costumes and stainless steel cages -- have popped up all over the place, including locally in MOCA's Modify, as needed show last year and also now at the Rubell's. Clowns have always signified something playful, but also creepy; these sculptures elicit a variety of responses. Less ambiguous is her shiny, polished aluminum chair with a baseball bat sprouting from its seat that sits in front of an image of six out-sized lit candles, a multi-dimensional black-and-white that is transfixing.

Resounding through the huge space is the reverberation from the video of Alex Hubbard's *The Border, The Ship*. This 2011 non-linear trip from the Brooklyn-based artist is less a video than a collage in moving form. While the DVD itself is isolated in a darkened room, the soundtrack seems to play off many of the other sculptures and paintings, creating an eerie but good effect.

In another segregated area, the "informational" media room highlights the struggle of one of Cuba's most prominent dissidents, the blogger Yoani Sanchez. Through her blog *Generation Y*, she's trying to free her homeland. There's a video documentary here, and visitors are encouraged to view her blog and send her posts. The room clearly grounds the de la Cruz's in their Cuban background and underscores their interest in community involvement. It also makes it very Miami.

On the first floor, the De la Cruz's love affair with German painting is most apparent. There are five pieces from the provocative Martin Kipperberger -- who also died early in life in 1997 -- and a piece from fellow flame-thrower Albert Oehlen. There are works from Sigmar Polke and Jonathan Meese, and a spectacular wall covered with mirrors, plastic gel reflectors, wood and paint from the Swiss Ugo Rondinone fortunately has remained as a permanent fixture. On the entry level are also works from familiar Americans such as Glenn Ligon and Wade Guyton.

There is no single theme to the art works hanging at the de la Cruz space, nor are they arranged in a traditional way, with works by a single artist surrounded by white space. This can be a little disorienting -- an effect that is intentional.

As they explain in the introduction to the current exhibit: "This year, rather than doing a traditional thematic exhibition or creating a dialogue between the individual artists, we wanted the overall pattern of the installation to be seen as a large puzzle; where the installation throughout the space transcends preconceived notions of authorship."

In other words, these works -- and the ideas behind them -- may look like part of a whole, but each stands on its own.