

Miami Art Museum

MAMI

miami
currents

GALLERY NOTES

MIAMI CURRENTS: LINKING COLLECTION AND COMMUNITY PRESENTS ARTWORKS FROM MAM'S SIX-YEAR-OLD COLLECTION, SUPPLEMENTED BY WORKS FROM PRIVATE COLLECTIONS IN MIAMI AND BEYOND. TAKEN TOGETHER, THESE TWO HUNDRED PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, SCULPTURES AND MEDIA WORKS REVEAL THE DIVERSITY AND VIBRANCY OF THE MIAMI COMMUNITY. THE EXHIBITION REFLECTS MAM'S INCLUSIVE VISION AND DEDICATION TO INTERNATIONAL ART SINCE 1940, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ART FROM THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE. ARRANGED THEMATICALLY RATHER THAN CHRONOLOGICALLY, THE EXHIBITION ALLOWS ARTWORKS TO SPEAK TO EACH OTHER ACROSS CULTURES, GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES, AND GENERATIONS. THE RESULT IS A UNIQUELY MIAMI PERSPECTIVE ON THE ART OF OUR TIME.

MIAMI CURRENTS OCCUPIES TWO FLOORS OF MAM'S GALLERY SPACE AND IS ORGANIZED INTO FIVE SECTIONS: *UNDERCURRENTS*, *LOOKING AT THE ART OF OUR TIME*; *SHIFTING TIDES, NEW WORLDS*; *THE NATURAL WORLD*; *THE MATERIAL WORLD*; AND *THE IMMATERIAL WORLD*.



**UNDERCURRENTS,
LOOKING AT THE
ART OF OUR TIME**

This section highlights aspects of the visual language of recent art, focusing on the interplay between abstraction and representation, a key element of much of the art of the past half-century.

geometric works that dazzle the eye and confuse the mind. Odili Donald Odita complicates his canvas by mixing dynamic color interactions with forms that allude to landscape. Frank Stella, in a work from his *Polish Village* series of the early 1970s, uses color as a key element in his composition that also employs pattern and texture to create a series of interlocking planes whose forms dictate the shape of the canvas.

Space looks at how artists have used a variety of techniques to create a sensation of space in their works, from Morris Louis' overlapping veils of transparent color, to Al Held's use of perspective, to David Salle's sampling of illusionistic painting styles. Through this interplay between two and three dimensions, these artists explore the boundary between pictorial space and the space we live in.

In *Undercurrents*, works are arranged in groupings dedicated to *Line*, *Color*, and *Space*.

In *Line*, Lynne Golob Gelfman's painting makes use of the abstract quality of line to create a dense pattern inspired by a combination of Spanish filigree ironwork and Amazonian basketweaving. Christo's drawing for his project *The Gates* uses line to create both a convincing three-dimensional view of New York's Central Park and a diagrammatic map that turns the park's plan into an abstract drawing. Guillermo Kuitca employs line as an organizing tool in his painting of a theater seating plan, while José Bedia uses line to create a schematic narrative about departure and exile. A number of photographs in this area, by artists ranging from Russian Alexandr Rodchenko to California-based Lewis Baltz, reveal how 20th-century photographers have used line to blur the distinction between image and abstraction.

Color focuses on how artists use the interaction of colors to animate their compositions. Hans Hofmann, who came to the United States from Germany in the 1930s, was enormously influential in preaching the gospel of "push-pull." He encouraged artists to exploit the way "hot" colors (yellow, red) seem to come forward while "cool" colors (blue, purple) seem to recede. Jesus Soto and Gene Davis use this principle to create



**SHIFTING TIDES,
NEW WORLDS**

The works in this section engage in a dialogue between seeming opposites: the global and the regional, the universal and the particular. The section begins with works from the mid-20th century by such artists as Uruguay's Joaquín Torres-García, Roberto Matta from Chile, and Cubans Wifredo Lam and

Amelia Peláez. These artists lived in Europe early in their careers and sought out avant-garde circles in Paris, Barcelona, and elsewhere, then returned to the Americas and adapted their imagery to reflect local influences.

While living in Paris from 1924 to 1932, Torres-García was inspired by such artists as Pablo Picasso and Piet Mondrian. His paintings are gridlike compositions, in which a variety of symbols – many of them derived from pre-Hispanic art of the Americas – are arranged to create a universal language that seems both modern and archaic. Torres-García was a strong influence on New York artist Adolph Gottlieb, whose pictographs incorporate imagery inspired by African, Native American, and Oceanic tribal art.

With the outbreak of World War II, many artists fled Europe and relocated in the Americas. Matta came to New York from Paris and was influential in conveying the ideas of the European Surrealists about spontaneity and the unconscious to the American artists who became Abstract Expressionists. Wifredo Lam also left Paris and returned to Cuba, where he became newly inspired by his native culture. His hybrid figures of humans and animals are influenced by the language of Santería, the Cuban popular religion that fuses Christianity with African religions of Yorùbá origin. The intricate interlacing of forms in Peláez's painting suggests the baroque details found in Cuba's colonial architecture.

Since the 1940s, various factors have nourished the worldwide ebb and flow of artistic ideas and fashions. Social, economic, and political upheavals have impelled artists to flee their homes for new lands. Advancements in communications and technology and the increasing ease of travel have further encouraged artistic pollination across borders. Some of the artworks in this section reflect the sense of dislocation artists feel when they leave their native land and adopt a new home. Other works show the melding of different cultural influences. Still others reflect artists' desires to focus on unique aspects of their culture in terms that can be understood by all. The results are works that are as rich and diverse as the forces that shaped them.



THE NATURAL WORLD

In the past half century, scientific discoveries, advances in technology, and an awareness of the fragility of the earth's ecology have affected the ways in which artists depict the natural world in their art. From the representational to the abstract, the works of art in this section reveal the complexity of mankind's relationship to the environment. *The Natural World* includes works

that explore nature's beauty, fertility, and mystery. Nancy Graves' colorful bronze sculpture cast from leaves, vegetables, and other organic matter and Carol K. Brown's field of alien-looking plant life present a vision of nature's fecundity gone awry,

resulting in bizarre mutations. Nature's serenity and grandeur is the subject of landscape photographs by Lynn Davis, Boo-Moon Kwon, Joel Meyerowitz, and Catherine Opie. José Bedia and Edouard Duval Carrié draw upon the religions of Santería and Vodou, respectively, in images that allude to the belief that supernatural forces reside in the natural world.

Exploring aspects of mankind's relationship with the environment, Edward Weston's photograph *Abandon (Ted Shawn)* portrays a man in joyful communion with nature. Naomi Fisher depicts young women who appear to have been attacked by flora, commenting on how our relationship with nature can be simultaneously beautiful, adversarial, and cruel. This tension between natural beauty and man's destructive powers is also seen in Edward Burtynsky's large-scale photograph of a mining site in which nature has been transformed through industry.

A number of works in this section evoke the cyclical aspects of nature as a metaphor for the human condition. Jim Hodges' string of brightly colored artificial flowers is a poetic symbol of life, beauty, and the transitory nature of existence. Nancy Graves' sculpture *Phoenix*, made of bones scattered on the ground, refers to the mythic bird that in death, rises from its ashes and is reborn. Maria Fernanda Cardoso's field of lilies presents a perfect moment frozen in time. Despite their reference to the rampant violence in the artist's native Colombia, the artificial flowers defy nature's cycle by remaining forever beautiful.



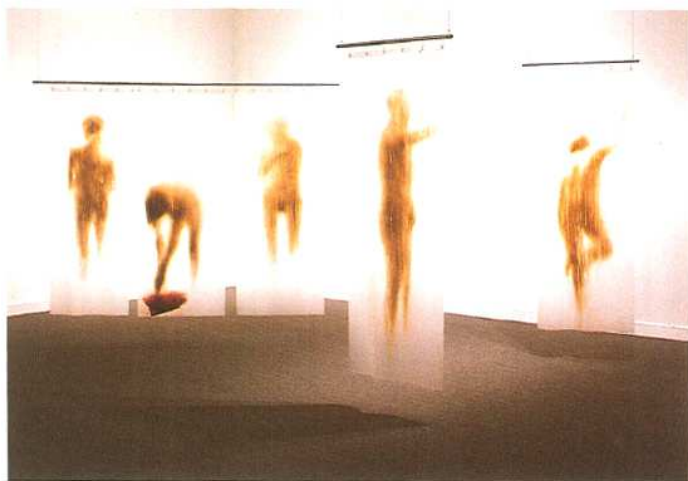
THE MATERIAL WORLD

The Material World explores how artists draw inspiration from the everyday world and how they instill common objects with new possibilities. One of the most famous artists associated with common objects is the

French conceptualist Marcel Duchamp. Starting in 1913, Duchamp selected mass-produced objects and declared them works of art. His most notorious was a urinal that he placed on a pedestal and titled *Fountain*. He called these objects "readymades" and his intention was to question traditional assumptions about art in a world that was increasingly characterized by mass production. Since Duchamp's time, other artists have explored the possibilities raised by his bold act. Seventy-five years later, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, for example, created a work that was nothing more than two light fixtures with glowing bulbs. Gonzalez-Torres' main purpose, however, was not to be ironic or critical; rather, his two entwined light bulbs are symbolic, honoring the artist's relationship with his lover, who was dying of AIDS.

The 1950s and '60s saw the explosive growth of consumer society. This led artists to include imagery from popular culture in their work in seemingly detached and often puzzling ways.

Advertisements for shoes, cigarettes, and real estate became subjects for art, as did such unremarkable things as frozen foods, ice bags, and suburban swimming pools. Artists associated with Pop art reproduced their imagery in prints, photographs, and books, making their output more affordable and accessible to the public. This tendency to delve into consumerism has been turbocharged by young contemporary artists. Luis Gispert's tricked-out go-cart, for instance, celebrates the customizing craze of urban youth culture.



THE IMMATERIAL WORLD

The Immaterial World considers the imperceptible and indefinable through works that suggest transcendence, absence, and transience. In exploring polarities of physicality and intangibility, presence and absence, and being and non-being, these works evoke universal questions about the nature of reality and human existence.

Works by Sol LeWitt and Robert Irwin reflect a preoccupation with art that is abstract, timeless, and transcendent. Sol LeWitt's *Open Cube* of 1974 presents an incomplete structure as a means of evoking an ideal form. Robert Irwin's painting plays upon our perceptions of physical reality by seeming to dissolve into pure light. Sculptures by Harry Bertoia and Howard Jones also transcend their physical forms and spatial confines by incorporating sound and light. Nam June Paik and Susan Rothenberg evoke the concept of transcendence in an altogether different manner in works that depict Buddha, who symbolizes enlightenment and a state of perfection.

Other works in *The Immaterial World* shift the viewer's attention from what is visible to what is not visible, requiring the viewer to complete the work of art in his or her imagination. Text applied to the surface of Lorna Simpson's large photograph of a wooded lake printed on felt describes actions between unseen figures in the landscape. In Ann Hamilton's (*lineament*), a shadow of a figure projected on the wall, two plywood boxes, and wound balls of text record the passage of time and the process of making.

The final grouping in this section looks at both the transitory nature of human existence and the passage of time. Michael Badura's sequential photographs trace, from beginning to end, the artist's presence, gradual disappearance, and metaphorical "death." Oscar Muñoz's ghostly figures painted on shower curtains hover between presence and absence. Works by Carlos Alfonzo and Mirosław Balka evoke human mortality by looking at the physical limitations of the human body.

Miami Currents: Linking Collection and Community testifies to the depth and variety of artistic interests in Miami and to the common ground that emerges amidst this confluence of diverse styles, interests, and histories.

IMAGES

UNDERCURRENTS

Frank Stella, *Chodorów II* 1971
Collection Miami Art Museum, gift of Mimi and Bud Floback
Photo: Peter Harholdt

SHIFTING TIDES, NEW WORLDS

Adolph Gottlieb, *Altar* 1947
Collection Miami Art Museum, gift of Tina and Lee Hills
Photo: Peter Harholdt

THE NATURAL WORLD

María Fernanda Cardoso, *Cementerio-jardín vertical*
(Cemetery-Vertical Garden) [detail] 1992
Collection Miami Art Museum, museum purchase with funds from Lang Baumgarten
Photo: María Fernanda Cardoso

THE MATERIAL WORLD

Claes Oldenburg, *Ice Bag-Scale B* 1971
Collection Miami Art Museum, gift of Joan and Roger Sonnabend
Photo: Peter Harholdt

THE IMMATERIAL WORLD

Oscar Muñoz, *Cortinas de baño* (Shower Curtains) 1994
Collection Miami Art Museum, gift of George M. Safirstein, M.D. and Pola Reydburd
Photo: Nancy Robinson Watson