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Because I Say So …

The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum

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BECAUSE I SAY SO...
CIRCLING BACK
Dennis Scholl

When Debra and I were offered the opportunity to bring a selection of sculptural works to The Frost Art Museum I began to think about all the ways Florida International University has figured so prominently in bringing us to this moment.

As a young accounting major at FIU I remember wandering into the PC building’s first floor and, much to my surprise, finding a museum there. It was the first art museum I had ever set foot in. I saw prints by Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Lichtenstein and others, and a whole new world opened up for me. When I graduated and became a CPA, I began to collect art and kept returning to The Museum to see the shows curated by Dahlia Morgan. Eventually I headed back to law school, met my wife Debra and we began to collect contemporary art in earnest. Once I started practicing law, we met Phil and Pat Frost, who were instrumental in making us the collectors we are. They took us under their wing and exposed us to the art world in a profound way, by letting us view their collection, putting us on the board of our first museum and allowing me to handle the negotiations of the donation of their collection to the Smithsonian Museum. As a young lawyer I found myself working for a venture capitalist named Mitch Maidique who of course eventually went on to lead this institution. Roll forward three decades and here we are, all together at The Frost Art Museum.

We continue to find all those early points of connection inspiring as we look back on our 31 years of collecting. We want to thank Carol Damian and The Museum staff for their willingness to allow us to stretch The Museum’s boundaries with this show. We want to thank Yann Weymouth for creating such a glorious venue, Desiree Cronk for her continued commitment to the collection, Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, Frances Trombly and Miko McGinty for their efforts on the catalogue; Sid Hoeltzell for showing me that digital photography is the future and Gavin Perry, Gean Moreno and Tao Rey for their continued efforts in managing the installation of the collection.

Special thanks to Bob Nickas and Brian Antoni for a couple of out of the box essays for the catalogue.

As always, thanks to the artists who are willing to take the risks necessary to make great work.

FOREWORD
Carol Damian

Defining “art” is a major enterprise historically and recently. It is especially significant that this inaugural year of The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum will test the boundaries of the definition of art, sculpture in particular, with this remarkable exhibition. It will bring the museum into the most contemporary artistic arena, and dare us to consider why the new art is different. It is meant to be educational for a new generation and for those of us steeped in the traditional. Each work has been chosen because it is provocative and will evoke a strong response, challenge the senses, and encourage the viewer to do more than look, to participate. For many years, Debra and Dennis Scholl have been the ones to take chances as they compiled this cutting-edge collection. I am especially grateful to the Scholls for trusting the new museum with an exhibition of their extraordinary art, for their support of Florida International University, and for giving us an opportunity to demonstrate that this is a museum of the future. Now we can see unique works of art, question their meaning, and agree to disagree. The environment of The Museum galleries is transformed by the artists into a space for exploration and discussion that welcomes and confuses. “Why is that Art?” will certainly resonate within its spaces. “Because I Say So” is my response.

Jorge Pardo, Penelope, 2002, Lamps, Dimensions variable

Kori Newkirk, Untitled, 2004, Basketball hoops, braids, beads, and enamel, 24 x 19 x 175 inches
In 1965, Robert Rauschenberg participated in a portrait exhibition at the gallery of Iris Clert in Paris, and while he wasn’t represented by a painting or a drawing or a photograph, his is probably the only work in the show that anyone—and history—remembers. Rauschenberg sent a telegram, famously claiming: “THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF IRIS CLERT. IF I SAY SO.” On the face of it, his statement is art because it was in her gallery that Yves Klein presented his groundbreaking 1958 exhibition, “The Void: The Specialization of Sensitivity in the State of Prime Matter as Stabilized Pictorial Sensitivity,” for which he repainted the walls and a window pure white.

This is the first instance of an empty gallery presented as an exhibition, although Klein would insist that it was not empty at all; rather, the artist had staged an invisible situation that he related to “the best definition of painting in general, radica.” Rauschenberg would most certainly have been aware of Klein’s exhibition, and three years after the fact when he was asked to contribute a portrait to the same gallery, it’s very likely that he realized an opportunity to acknowledge Klein’s gesture and Clert’s willingness to brave public ridicule.

Today, of course, anything can be art, and anything can comprise an exhibition—even an empty space. But try to imagine the reaction to Iris Clert’s empty gallery over fifty years ago. Rauschenberg’s statement can be considered an early instance of conceptualism, and it constitutes not only a conceptual but a double portrait—of Iris Clert and Yves Klein. Rauschenberg renders the likeness of neither person; he renders the spirit of both, and his as well. Rauschenberg’s statement, in its insistence on the authority of the artist, gives the artist the final word, and in leaving the imagination of the viewer, reminds us that art registers in the mind’s eye.

In the art world, whether of 1961 or the one we inhabit today, the final word is usually had by critics, curators, collectors, dealers, the market and its afterlife—the auctions, a tragicomic theater of cruelty where most artists are concerned (Herman Melville notwithstanding). Despite the radical developments in art over the almost half century since Rauschenberg’s portrait of Iris Clert, not much has changed with respect to who or what usher art into history or obscurity. Most drearily, the general public, people who have neither created nor studied, let alone devoted their lives to art, gets to have their say. More often than not this amounts to the predictable dismissive “My child could have done that.” Or the thoroughly brilliant, always thought-provoking “It’s not art.” In the late 1990s, Seth Siegelaub, one of the first great champions of conceptual art, remarked: “Art is to change what you expect of it. We shouldn’t forget that. Unless we don’t ever want to be surprised again, in a world where everything has already been done, or seems to have been done, artists can still surprise us. But maybe it’s a good thing that there are people for whom art is an artifact, and wool is perpetually pulled over their eyes. What if we lived in a world where every work of art, no matter how challenging, heady or barely visible, was accepted as such, embraced, and unquestioned? What would it mean? That art had become like everything else we instantly recognize and understand, common objects we see each and every day: a snow shovel, a can of beer, styrofoam cups. What kind of world would that be?

In 1966, when Fred Sandback created a work with nothing more than a piece of string and some wire, suggesting volume without recourse to a three-dimensional object, he did something that had never been done before in sculpture, and if we see this act as a form of drawing in space, he accomplished something new in drawing as well. Work such as Sandback’s compelled their earliest viewers—and his fellow artists—to ask, “What else can a sculpture be?” Even so, artists continue to sculpt in the most traditional ways, carving wood, blowing glass, molding clay. With his building cuts and fragments beginning in 1971, Gordon Matta-Clark redefined drawing and literally opened up our notion of negative space with “architecture.”

Wolfgang Tillmans, Walead Beshty, and James Welling, among many others working today, with camera-less and abstract works that extend the experiments of the historical avant-garde, make us wonder: “Beyond the carrier of an uninterrupted image, what else can a photograph be?” There is an investigation which can be traced back almost to the invention of the medium. From the moment an artist held a camera, the world would be framed in ways never imagined by the human eye of a painter standing before an easel in the meadow.

Suddenly, the world could be turned sideways, or be de-focused, abstracted by this prosthetic eye. Despite the fact that today, as before, artists need not ever leave the darkroom to produce an image, photographs continue to walk in the street, paint their cameras in one direction or another, and take pictures. Inside of an overall spray-painted environment of Katharina Grosse, which, like an unacknowledged virus, overtakes the museum walls, floors, ceilings, windows, columns, and doors as if it was her canvas, we can’t help but question the very status of painting.

And yet some artists still go out to the meadow on a sunny day with their brushes, paint, palettes, and easels. The state in which advanced and retrograde art works consists is one that is mutually beneficial and necessary: we can only know one by means of the other.

The invention of photography was once thought to have made painting obsolete. Painting today is very much alive and well. Maybe obsolescence is the only way for a medium to survive. Because even admitting that painting is quite possibly the least effective carrier of information, it persists, and now more than ever. There was once much talk of the “death of painting,” and yet no one ever seriously speaks about the death of photography, the death of video, or the death of sculpure. And why not? Because it would be laughable. The only peril to art now would seem to be the end of invention—sapping the function to de-familiarize our world, to make it strange. Traveling, as we know it today, as before, art can no longer be taken for granted: who or what would be encountered along the way, it was wondered? What might be discovered that would have
Artists believe in this as well, so too should the viewer. Artists leave clues for us to follow. Puzzles for us to piece together. Art that makes us more aware of our surroundings and the people around us, that make us more curious and that more adventurous—even where the everyday and the commonplace are concerned—than we would have been otherwise.

Art works can be carriers of energy, which we use, maybe without knowing it guides us, to move forward in our lives. And the art which creates the most confusion and that questions itself and its audience is the art that will compel us to keep looking.

To those somehow invested in the notion that artists are con artists, of producing nothing more than, as the fairy tale would have it, the Emperor’s new clothes, we leave you with a pure, beautiful thought, and a true vote of confidence.

A wall drawing by Robert Barry:

ALL THE THINGS I KNOW
BUT OF WHICH I AM NOT
AT THE MOMENT THINKING
1:36 PM; JUNE 15, 1969

Among Barry’s early and ardent collectors were Herbert and Dorothy Vogel, who, without any great fortune to spend—he had worked for the post office, and she as a librarian—amassed a substantial collection, primarily between the ’60s and the ’80s. After donating their art to the National Gallery in Washington, they were interviewed by Mike Wallace for an episode of “60 Minutes” in 2004. Wallace toured their modest, art-filled apartment, and at one point stopped to examine a work by Richard Tuttle, one of the Vogel’s favorite artists. The piece that had caught his eye was a small length of braided rope that had been tacked to the wall at the top. With a doubtful look on his face and a pained expression, he asked Herb Vogel why this was a work of art. Calmly and matter-of-factly, Herb Vogel replied: “Mike, this is a piece by Richard Tuttle, and he’s an artist. . . . and that’s good enough for me.”

BECAUSE I SAY SO
AN ART HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION
Carol Damian

It all started with Marcel Duchamp. Let’s blame him for the sometimes mystifying practices and experimental agendas that spark such furious debate and passions from all who have ever waded into a super-contemporary art installation and descry the fall from grace of the old traditions and their comfort zones. Mr. Duchamp (France 1887–1968) must be blamed for his urinal (Fountain, 1917) and its anti-art aesthetic meant to be a test of the will of an exhibition committee, has become so very much a part of the historical discourse, or would be annoyed at the lack of humor that has elevated his idea to serious theoretical constructs? Has he been misrepresented and his objects given too much significance? Or is it the very nature of that misrepresentation that has paved the way for what we see today? In Duchamp’s famous defense of the work: “Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view — created a new thought for the object.” 1 We are now also encouraged to create new thoughts for the objects in this exhibition. A fan takes on new meaning, why a million pins? What is wrong with those huge birdcages? Who could wear that felt hat? Why does the door lead nowhere? What is what has been often described as the “degraded formal condition of new art”? 2 Just another attempt to rock the establishment and make work that is relevant for a new age? If that sounds familiar, it is because for hundreds of years artists have confronted the same criticism of their creativity—in music, literature, film, visual arts. Is today’s viewer any less intelligent that they would settle for the mundane and ordinary, or are they any more in the category of super-sophisticated risk-takers than their predecessors? The artists and the audiences were challenging their own contemporary notions of what was acceptable long before this contemporary environment. It is perhaps quite different this time the impact of globalization, the competition worldwide to build extraordinary museums for the art, and the rapid interchange that has come about in a time when communication is the norm, rather than the exception. There are no secrets. There are no hands. The avant-garde of today is a shared commodity. All of this may be seen as contrary to the missives of Marcel Duchamp and a compliment to his daring.

In 1913 Duchamp began a series of “ready-mades” that truly began the artist’s series of disavowal with formal values as he claimed a bicycle wheel, a bottle race, a urinal, and other objects to be “art.” As he moved from Europe to the United States in 1942, his influence transcended generations and locations. For the artists, “emphasis was no longer purely on the Dada-like choosing of existing man-made objects as ‘art’ , at the same time evolving the idea-structure of art with the purpose to change the status quo.” 3 Think forward to the challenge to Abstract Expressionism by Minimalism and Pop Art, to Conceptual Art, Environmental Art, and what follows is what we see today in the exhibition.

Sculture in particular has challenged the status-quo, especially when it defies the ordinary association with works of art, or is considered as “installation” art, as a part of an installation. The pedestal of the past, now long forsaken, are replaced by transformative environments, sometimes entire rooms dedicated to a single artist’s work. The viewer is confronted, confronted, invited and amazed as one becomes immersed in the space. In this exhibition, works are placed directly on the floor, hung from the ceiling, described in specific locations; counterfeited off the walls, defiantly testing notions of scale, and stimulating daring responses. The sculpture and their installation become an installation of a new interactive dimension—within the entirety of the gallery spaces. Each artist provides the viewer with a point of departure for an exploration of different levels of the mind and intellect not possible with traditional sculpture or painting—both of which were comparatively, one-dimensional in meaning. Today, what appear to be elaborate techniques are matched by conceptual complexity, or vice versa: conceptual complexity is driven by the arrangement of the ordinary and mundane (pins, felt, lights, fans, bird cages, legs, etc.).

An assault on the senses, the exhibition exposes the pretensions of the art world with its echoes of a Duchampian openness to new developments, use of chance and juxtaposition, and exposed use of assemblage and gathering of objects. Only these objects are relevant to current concerns about mass production, technology and material culture. Today’s artists tend to combine humor and intellect in remarkable ways that border on the ridiculous, but are nevertheless provocative gestures that are often as self-referential as they are universal. For example, the found object of yesterday may now be antiquated, but still speaks eloquently for a consumer society. A mixture of useless furniture, shelves, metal fragments, and the remnants of things semi-identifiable can be seen as an extension of an earlier artistic impulse to discard the traditional and express a radical desire for impermanence and confusion. A sense of recognition is quickly subverted in Simon Starling’s Inverted Retrograde Theme, USA (House for a Singletire, 2002). Two scale models of prefabricated single-family houses are perched like birdcages (one held two tropical birds in the original installation) on two trunks, comments on scale, freedom, a Puerto Rican experimental housing development, and the play on words that “inverted retrograde” implies as a constructed as a new reality is constructed.

Sculptural maquettes, exquisitely fants and light projections conceived by Olafur Eliasson transform the museum into an interactive space the viewer is “within,” rather than “looking at.” The viewer now occupies a privileged place, the center of perception and experience. Eliasson’s immersive environments demonstrate his experimentation with installations based on mechanisms of motion, projection, shadow, and reflection, creating complex optical phenomena using simple, makeshift technical devices. He succeeds in destabilizing the viewer’s perception of space to make it an almost dangerous or threatening place that forces one to wary of precarious objects and obscures light effects. One is forced to dismiss comfort zones with other objects in the exhibition as well. Leaves and twigs are placed high up on the wall—forcing the relinquishment of ordinary comfort zones based on typical eye-level arrangements. The very simplicity of nature forms makes us look again and think about materials and their sources and how they do not always need to be made into something else, but have validity in their original.

Robert Morris has long created a varied range of works that examine the relationship between the viewer and the object. His large felt work, with its not-to-scale folds and gigantic scale, becomes problematic at many levels: identity, usefulness, historicism, material objectivity, and pervasive aestheticism. Certainly based on a utilitarian clack form, its placement dominating an entire wall and confounds the senses.

The same may be said about Tara Donovan’s work, made of the most ordinary of utilitarian objects: pins—millions of them. Her fascination with compiling huge quantities of ordinary manufactured objects (Scotch Tape, pencils, gas, cup, glass) into sculptural objects often results in a Minimalist structure, but she is never limited to the movement’s rigorous geometry. Obsessed with rhythmic repetition and the process of building each work of art, the artist presents the unexpected. The cube of pins is beautiful, extremely attractive and demands to be touched. It is also dangerous and fragile, built on site, with each tiny gold pin drawing our attention as a mini-work of industrial art with its own aesthetic value.

All of these works are more than mere exercises in perception and art experience for the viewer. Each artist questions how space, objects and perception interact to form a unique aesthetic environment that demands new behavior—in the space, looking at the objects in that space, and contemplating their meaning for a ground-breaking museum exhibition.

1. An Art Historical Introduction
He stood in front of the urinal—come on champ, you can do it because big boys don’t cry—thinking how when he was a kid so many years ago he dreamed of having his own urinal, so he wouldn’t have to worry about peeing on the seat and nose that he was an old man, he only dreamed of a steady stream, so much of his life consumed with sex, because that was the only time he felt the face of god, the only time he knew art was not a lie you chose, his now endlessly faceted broken core as if some bitch took two bricks and smashed it between them and the Princes that was God behind an open door leading to nowhere and what the hell would Jesus do and he might as well ask what the hell would Neil Young do or was there such a thing as the possibility of romantic love? One tiny drop of piss dropped out like an elephant defecating a man—the inverted caged yellow song bird did not sing but stung like a billion pins formed into a cube, and he had to touch the drop because it was so beautiful, pins and needles and pins, a happy man is a man that grins and sticks and stones may break my bones and architecture is not art but a twisted Bauer chair can be because Dennis and Debra say so and a billion dollars seemed like a lot of money before the bailout and he now dreamed of his own bail out as he tried to stop the pain with revised negotiation as he thought of better times and he remembers his first time ever with the girl and her long braids punctuated with enamel beads and florescent hair pins and how she took him to the fort in the woods, which was more like a liaison platform or a large shelf cabinet and he sees himself grabbing onto those braids so he wouldn’t slip and fall as she guided him, a reverse Rapunzel, her head bouncing above him like a burned out sun, like a b-ball, hoop on the top and bottom because she never seemed to end, and he looked up through the pine leaves hanging down from above like gigantic green armpit hair like he was in a cave below the surface of the earth and they were roots and he took a deep breath because he had forgotten how to breathe and he smelled the bay rum smell of his grandmother and as the inside-out spider web of light danced in the shadow like a sun bulb eclipse of multiple twisted lamps and the breeze like puffa from an oscillating fan and she wore a golden chain with her initials hanging on the end, and there was something so venerable and small about the chain dancing in the hollow sundial space below her neck with her initials CNN like the television station even though everyone called her Black Betty, Futbol, Gina or Linda Blair, so he imagined the chain and the charm gigantic so he wouldn’t start to cry out of gratitude and pleasure and pain as her long painted green-blue-yellow-black-white nails dug deep into his adolescent zit-covered back as they tossed like a vintage seaps ocean liner and she stared down at him like a sailor’s wife bidding farewell on her widow’s walk and he felt as if he was sewing a pleasure filled folded vagina coat, pine in the middle because everything good was pine in the middle—Joseph’s technical coat with a red velvet center, a jelly filled donut, like his favorite chocolate pie with the cherry floating in the white liquid and he wore the coat with pride, a hard body marble man holding a marble gun until he felt it start to shoot from the center of his brain, a gigantic sling shot of new understanding, pleasure feedback that turned the urinal into a fountain and he was ejaculating into art itself. He started to piss a numb endless stream, enough to fill a caryatidal column of Styrofoam cups.

Liam Gillick, *Revised Negotiation Screen*, 2001, Anodized aluminum and transparent light blue and orange Plexiglas, 82 x 60 x 12 inches.
Gedi Sibony, Held Made to the Road, 2006, Sticks, 44 x 30 x 6 inches

Wade Guyton, Brewor Chair 1, 2005, Sculpture, 31 x 47 x 21 inches

Opposite: Thomas Hirschhorn, Necksaw CNN, 2002, Cardboard, foil, plastic, and gold wrapping paper, 98 x 31 x 4 inches
Terence Koh, Untitled IX (A Slingshot), 2003, Plastic slingshot, acrylic paint, rabbit fur, and bandage gauze, 55 x 6 x 1 inches

Jim Lambie, Gina X, 2004, Glue, bamboo canes, duct tape, and paint, 47 x 23 x 24 inches

Brian Jungen, Prototype for New Understanding #25, 2005, Nike Air Jordans, 20 x 21 x 9 inches
Martin Oppel, Flacid Cone and Bricks, 2005, Sculpture, Dimensions variable

Jim Lambie, *Black Betty*, 2006, Wood and black t-shirt, 37 x 19 x 4 3/8 inches

Daniel J. Martinez, *A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love or Where Are You Going with that Gun in your Hand, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton Discuss the Relationship between Expressionism and Social Reality Present in Hitler’s Paintings*, 2007, Marble, 72 x 75 x 11 inches
Adam Putnam, Sundial (Eclipse), 2007, Sculpture, Dimensions variable

Janet Cardiff, Feedback, 2004, Installation, Dimensions variable

Tom Otterness, Untitled, 1984, Sculpture, Dimensions variable
Olafur Eliasson, Light Ventilator Mobile, 2002, Fan, hemp, pipe, cords, and rope, 17 × 105 × 20 inches

Sean Duffy, Burn Out Sun, 2003, Twenty LPs, metal tripod, wood, and glue, 42 x 33 x 33 inches

Jeremy Deller, What Would Neil Young Do?, 2006, Poster stack, 32 x 46 inches

Paul Pfeiffer, Caryatid, 2003, Chrome monitor/DVD player, Plexiglas case, and video installation, 18 x 24 x 24 inches
BECAUSE I SAY SO...
An exhibition from the collection of Debra and Dennis Scholl, Miami Beach, Florida
Carol Damian
Director
Bob Nickas
Curator + Essayist
Brian Atkins
Essayist
Fulano, Inc. with Mike McGinity, Inc.
Catalogue Design
Mark Wesser Productions
Printer

The Frost Art Museum at Florida International University is an AAM accredited museum and Smithsonian affiliate, recognized for its growing collection of 20th and 21st century American and Latin American art, innovative exhibitions, outstanding lecture series and unparalleled programs. The museum is the repository of over 6,000 works of art including The Metropolitan Collection and the Cintas Fellows Collection.

PATRICIA & PHILLIP FROST ART MUSEUM

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
Modesto A. Maidique, Ronald M. Berkman, Sandra Gonzalez-Lury, Robert Conrad, Rose L. Jones, Vican A. Sanchez, Stephen A. Saub, George L. Walker, Douglas Wirth, Corrine M. Webb, Min Yoo

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Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery: 16 and 17
Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery: 26, Back Cover

Opposite: Nathan Carter, Aero Dolomiti Flight 3MTA3 Calling All Non-Stop Cali-Marys, Linda Blair and Give Your Blowers Some Go-Juice It’s a Furball, 2005, Plywood, acrylic, and enamel paint, 102 x 54 x 2 inches

Back Cover: Olafur Eliasson, Fivefold Dodecahedron Lamp, 2006, Copper, semitransparent mirror, steel, bulb, cable, and tripod, 76½ x 22½ x 23 inches, photo: Jens Ziehe. Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

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