

# At Perez Art Museum Miami, Adler Guerrier's singular view of the city

Miami's Adler Guerrier presents a tense, subtle tale of the city in his solo show at Perez Art Museum Miami.

By Anne Tschida  
09/12/2014



*"Untitled (Flaneur, 2000)." From "Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot," the first museum solo show by Miami artist Adler Guerrier, through Jan. 25, 2015 at Perez Art Museum Miami.*

There is a story unfolding in Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot, the Miami artist's solo exhibit at the Pérez Art Museum Miami. As the title suggests, however, it is not entirely finished, and it may never be. But it is an emerging tale of urban life and at times an uneasy existence, specifically that of Miami.

The somewhat obscure narrative starts physically on the left-hand side of the exhibition space, and it unfolds as you move through the photographs, collages, drawings, videos and sculpture, often with bits and pieces of text peeking out, that Guerrier has created since 1999. The journey ends up in the middle of the room, which is pierced with a huge site-specific installation. This is the first museum survey of Guerrier's work, which marks another fascinating journey.

Born in Haiti in 1975, Guerrier spent his formative years in Miami, where he earned his BFA from the New World School of the Arts. Barely out of school, he saw his work featured by the Studio Museum in Harlem, for the much-vaunted 2001 exhibition *Freestyle*. In 2008, he was picked to be part of the Whitney Biennial in New York.

That fast and stellar rise has been acknowledged with this exhibit, placed in the new museum's inaugural year calendar, and running through Art Basel Miami Beach. A major museum show for such a relatively young artist is noteworthy, and as the exhibit's curator and PAMM associate curator Diana Nawi laughed and pointed out, it's not even a career retrospective, "it's a pre-mid-career survey."

In a sense, we move with Guerrier as he moves through his particular artistic expression through the years, and through the city.

So the first set of photos you encounter are the earliest, from 1999 to 2001, a series taken in New York City and Miami. They initiate the ongoing theme in the exhibit of following the *flâneur*, a French term for an urban wanderer. Some are rather lonely shots, of the back of the artist wandering along urban streets, during the day, twilight, at night. The small prints are simple in composition, and the view is common and unexceptional, nothing touristy or glamorous or even interesting in the conventional sense. There is a cinematic, noir-ish feel to some of them, where jazz would be the natural soundtrack.

They all establish the tone and mood. We are now set to follow him through further explorations, depicted in more than 70 pieces.

The transformation of our urban spaces is another theme that starts to develop in the photographs, such as the 2006 seven-series *Untitled (Overtown North)*. Those familiar with Miami's core and its art scene will realize that Overtown North doesn't really exist, it is Wynwood — but both are neighborhoods in constant transition.

Other cityscapes that may or may not be recognizable include a series called *Untitled (Morningside Night)*, which have a flat, empty lot as the foreground and lights, buildings and a scattering of palm trees as the background. They are not the typical view of a traveler or average pedestrian; in fact, many of the shots are taken almost at ground level, adding an additional layer to the artist's distinct perspective.

Guerrier also narrows in on snippets of those views; maybe just a segment of a concrete parking lot, a piece of a peeling wall poster, a lone barred window, a small section of green grass, a fragment of a wall. Again, there is narrative here, but the observer needs to be part of the story.

Urban transformation is also associated with upheavals, another topic Guerrier addresses and that threads through the exhibit. The tumultuous 1960s, which included both race riots and civil rights advancements won at a cost, are a rich vein for Guerrier to explore, as he does with his most famous (to this point) piece, *Untitled (BLCK-We wear the mask)*. The installation featured in the 2008 Whitney Biennial, it incorporates prints, photos and sculpture. As part of the piece, monochromatic all-black signs that lean against a wall are the protest signs of a fictitious Miami-based black activist group from the era he has named BLCK. Although not even born when America's urban centers exploded, including Liberty City, Guerrier knows what a profound impact the unrest and the movements had on cities and its populations, changing them forever.

While the title of the exhibit reflects the narrative theme, *Formulating a Plot* is actually taken from a real-life 1960s event. During a 1968 court case, the radical black poet Amiri Baraka was accused by the judge of "formulating a plot" that resulted in the 1967 Newark riots. Guerrier continues with this particular thread with the powerful watercolor-and-ink paper work that depicts a flame creeping up toward the inverted words Liberty City. This time, the piece invokes the disturbances that engulfed Liberty City in 1980, sometimes called the McDuffie riots. The video clips that are running on the small TV screens placed throughout the exhibit also often reference the era and the results of the civil rights movements.

There are serious political, social and environmental issues that emerge from this art, but never does it blare or glare. Guerrier is after all an observer. He plots out a path, and then you the observer continue the journey, or finish the tale. His work can at times be too subtle, and in need of some guidance for the casual visitor.

However, once you've finished the tour around the room, you'll end up in the middle staring at the huge installation Guerrier has made for this space, not that subtle if by size alone. Two walls form an architectural intervention — and façades can tell such stories. One side is plastered with black-and-white wall paper, copied from a photograph of the artist's backyard, with one small photograph of the natural green lushness attached. The back side is painted a salmon color, reminiscent of so many Miami houses, with an adjacent lattice-work giant wooden fence. They are replicas of the mundane structures, architecture and landscapes that make up our Miami world, ones that we often overlook. Guerrier reintroduces us to the unexceptional and the special, the charming and the gritty aspects through a singular, formulating vision.

**If you go:**

**What:** 'Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot'

**When:** Through Jan. 25

**Where:** PAMM, 1103 Biscayne Blvd., Miami

**Info:** [www.pamm.org](http://www.pamm.org).