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Art's *silver lining*

WITH A DISCERNING EYE FOR ART AND A STRONG SENSE OF HISTORY AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE, DAVID CASTILLO CURATES IDENTITY-DRIVEN EXHIBITIONS THAT SPEAK VOLUMES.

WRITTEN BY MELISSA JACOBS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY SONYA REVELL



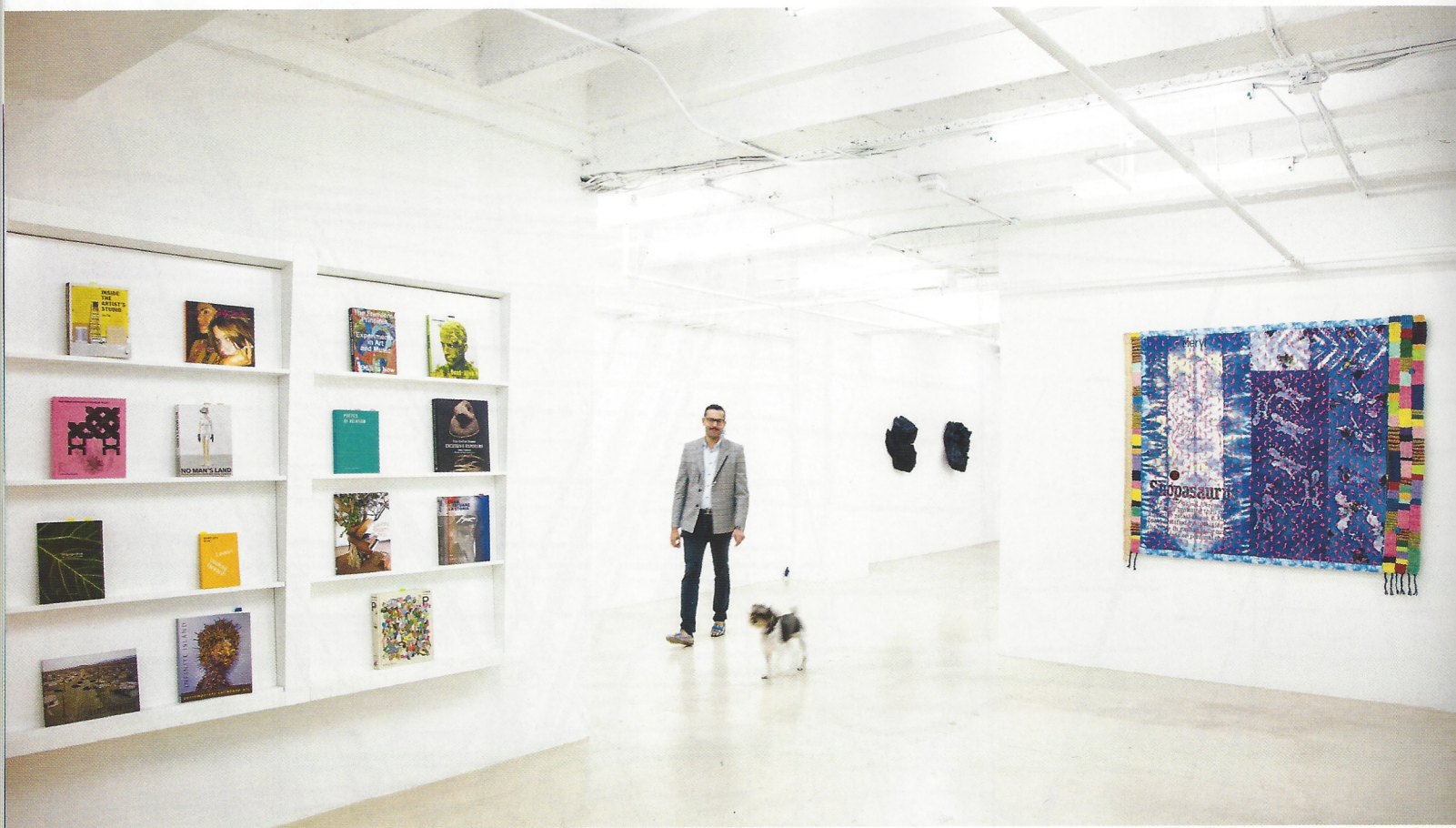
Medicine was the plan for David Castillo, until he discovered an untapped passion for art while attending Yale University. "Before then, I had never considered art as a career path," he says. "I hadn't had the experience of seeing it as anything other than enjoyment." The rest, as they say, is history. The math and science whiz and high school valedictorian has since earned multiple Ivy League degrees and studied Latin and history at the Angelicum in Rome. Now Castillo is an art dealer, curator and educator at his own 5,000-square-foot gallery in Miami Beach.

For a decade, the David Castillo Gallery was located in a dilapidated warehouse that Castillo renovated in Wynwood before he took the leap, relocating into Miami Beach's storied 420 Lincoln Road building designed by Albert Anis in the 1940s.

"I've always wanted to be in a historic building," he says, adding that the move proved to be a wise business decision, as well. "At the other location, we used to have 400 people visit the gallery for an exhibition opening but not one serious collector. Here, we may have only 70 people on opening night but three or four of them are buyers."


The history-rich Art Deco backdrop of the 420 building presents the ideal juxtaposition for Castillo's contemporary offerings and is fundamental to his creed. "The building's lobby murals were painted by Leo Birchansky, who fled Russia in 1922, and give me pause every time I look up, reminding me that human beings can still create beauty and progress in the midst of loss and pain," he says. It's this intersection of history and cultural experience that moves throughout the gallery. Castillo represents 22 artists ranging from emerging to mid-career to well-established,

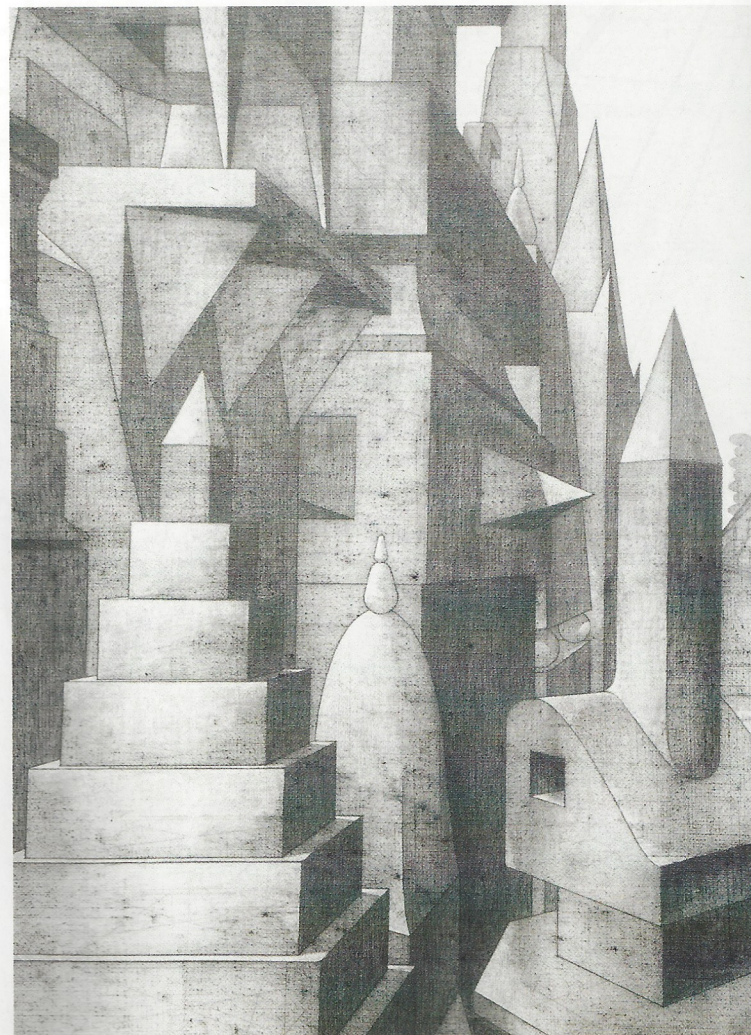
David Castillo (shown above) has worked with artist Sanford Biggers for years. So it's no surprise that a large tapestry by Biggers adorns one of Castillo's office walls inside his Miami Beach gallery. The installation by Gardner Cole Miller (opposite) was on view this past summer in an exhibition curated by Danielle Damas.



and regardless of their medium, identity is the mutual element that brings them all together. "All the artists I have ever worked with maintain concepts of identity in their work, be it personal, cultural or historical. This notion of cultural identity manifests itself in how an artist interacts with the human subject," says Castillo, who has also highlighted the varied works of late greats such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Louise Bourgeois, Jean Dubuffet and Wifredo Lam.

Several high-profile exhibitions are on view at the gallery through the end of the year, including "tête-à-tête," curated by Mickalene Thomas, which highlights works by Wangechi Mutu and Carrie Mae Weems, among others. The gallery will also have a presence at Art Basel Miami Beach's main fair, with new works by Sanford Biggers and Xaviera Simmons. "Expect geometry and sensuality," Castillo says.

Just as the artists he represents dare to make a statement, so too does Castillo's own personal sense of style. Some days, he can be seen sporting one of the 300 bow ties he's collected from all over the world or donning his Alessandro Michele for Gucci shoes, with their blue insoles, patchwork and embroidery on the vamps, fabric and metal for the toe caps, and a flat blue bow on each throat line. It seems he's found a way to take art seriously while still having the fun he's always associated with it. "Whether it's a pair of shoes or a work of art, I don't look around endlessly," Castillo says. "The quality of the piece becomes apparent very quickly to me and I just go for it." 





Castillo, whose work space is chock-full of catalogs and inspirations (left), takes a stroll through his gallery past a blue tapestry also by Miller (opposite, top). The graphite-on-canvas work (opposite, bottom) is by Glexis Novoa, whose work is on view at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana through January. He and Castillo hosted a talk at the museum in September.