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Hybrid Bodies and Charged Narratives at David Castillo Gallery

Artsy Editorial



Sanford Biggers, *Quilt #16*, 2013

From Wifredo Lam to Wangechi Mutu, artists with roots in marginalized or oppressed communities have worked to reconcile dominant narratives with their own, appropriating established visual languages in order to assert their voices. At David Castillo this month, a group exhibition, titled “Metabolic Bodies” and featuring artists in the gallery’s roster, gestures toward loaded histories of colonization and cultural domination across the Americas. The exhibition draws its central concept from the 20th-century poet and thinker Oswald de Andrade, whose *Cannibal Manifesto* advocated for cultural cannibalism in Brazilian art, as a means of empowering the marginalized to deconstruct and repurpose prevailing discourses for their own.

Shifting, multivalent identities find expression in Biggers’s *Quilt 16* and Henriquez’s *Carmen Herrera Inside Popova*. In

Miami, Florida’s melting pot and city of transplants, is home to a richly diverse community of Afro-Caribbean and Latin descent. Its cross-cultural makeup is reflected in the city’s David Castillo gallery, some of whose roster of artists probe the histories and narratives latent in their cultural ancestry. Acclaimed artist Sanford Biggers conflates disparate references to African American identities, Buddhism, and the Western art historical canon; while Quisqueya Henriquez, with roots in Cuba and Santo Domingo, mashes up elements from Western modernism and indigenous Caribbean crafts. Adler Guerrier, who hails from Haiti and produces layered collages, drawings, sculptures, and snapshots that delve into the urban landscape of Miami, says simply, “I am Haitian, therefore I make Haitian art...I use what I have, that is a particular history, shaped by family, education, migration, neighborhoods.”



Adler Guerrier, *Untitled (Blck, Red and Tang)*, 2008



Lyle Ashton Harris, *The Watering Hole III*, 1996

the former, Biggers takes as his base an antique quilt, invoking Southern domesticity and all of its charged connotations. Onto it he layers acrylic, spray paint, and silkscreen elements, inscribing it with imagery that refers to Afrofuturism and Buddhism, in effect reimagining the histories embedded in the original object. Henriquez similarly fuses cultural elements, inserting the geometric minimalism of Cuban artist Carmen Herrera within a ground that references the work of the 20th-century Russian avant-gardist Liubov Popova. Other artists in the show include Bronx-born Lyle Ashton Harris, whose photography, video, installation, and performance works reinterpret the representation of the black figure in Western art. Harris presents *The Watering Hole III*, which mines iconic African American figures and media images that surface the fraught histories of race in the U.S. These bodies and forms metabolize the world around them, reconfiguring narratives and frameworks, and expressing complex, nuanced identities.



Wendy White, *El Clásico*, 2013



Robert Melee, *Untitled*, 2012



Quisqueya Henríquez, *Carmen Herrera Inside Popova*, 2013

“Metabolic Bodies” is on view at David Castillo Gallery April 5th–May 10th, 2014.