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Dynamic duo: David Castillo and Pepe Mar

After collaborating for decades, the gallerist and artist continue telling stories that resonate in Miami and beyond

Though Miami is home to one of the world's greatest art fairs, gallerists in the same area code are not gifted special treatment, so it's especially remarkable that **David Castillo Gallery** not only secured a spot in 2011 but returned again and again, appearing in 2018 – and reappearing there every year since. Its success, the gallery's namesake owner says, are the precious relationships he cultivates with multifaceted creatives like **Pepe Mar**, the second artist to join the gallery after it opened in 2005. Mar's work has been exhibited worldwide and is included in myriad major collections, so it has been quite a ride for these two consummate professionals. Though Castillo and Mar spend the bulk of their time examining themes of identity and cultural alienation, Art Basel Miami Beach is one place where they know they belong.



Left: David Castillo, 2022. Photo by Mateo Zapata. Right: Pepe Mar. Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery. Photo by Zach Balber.

What do you remember about the first Art Basel Miami Beach?

David Castillo: The first Art Basel Miami Beach had the excitement of the new to a city that is always on the cusp of the new. It felt like a synergy that would last. And it has.

Pepe Mar: I remember a lot of excitement from local Miami-based artists. I had one of my early assemblages made with stuffed animals and paint at the first Art Basel, which was very exciting as a young artist. And I sold it! And, of course, the legendary plastic (now obsolete) Basel VIP card that would get you into amazing parties.

Did you develop any significant relationships that have continued?

DC: I met Noah Horowitz, who was then the director Americas for Art Basel and has just been appointed as Art Basel's CEO. We developed a professional relationship with mutual respect for each other's work that has been ongoing within the fair and beyond it.

PM: In 2019, I had a major installation at the first **Meridians sector** curated by Magalí Arriola. It was exhilarating having such a monumental installation dealing with forgotten LGBT histories in the middle of South Beach. This is my old stomping grounds from my coming of age, so it was very special. During the run of the fair, I met Erin Dziedzic, director of curatorial affairs at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. She invited me to Kansas City and commissioned me to do their annual Atrium Project dedicated to Latinx and Hispanic artists. [Pepe Mar's installation is on display now through July 30, 2023.]



Pepe Mar, *Double Face* (left) and *Worm* (right), 2021. Both images courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami. Photos by Zachary Balber.

How has your participation in the fair changed over the years?

DC: The fair, like the works exhibited, is contemporary in nature, so there is always an evolution. I was first invited to participate in 2008 with the first artist I ever represented (and still represent), **Quisqueya Henríquez**. That was the **Positions sector** when it was still in the shipping containers on the beach. For the last five years, we have been invited to participate in the main Galleries sector of the fair where we curate a group show each year, as we will do once more this year, including works by **Lyle Ashton Harris**, **Belkis Ayon**, Pepe Mar, **Xaviera Simmons**, **Shinique Smith**, **Vaughn Spann**, Yesiyu Zhao, and others.

PM: I first showed at Art Basel in the early years. Later, when David Castillo started showing my work at the fair, one of the most exciting memories was in 2018 when he showcased a booth of all black-and-white works from the gallery's artists. I had three works in the install, including shadow boxes and fabric paintings, and all were acquired by [collector] Ernesto Poma. This year, I will be showing some amazing ceramic pieces that were produced at Ceramica Suro in Guadalajara, Mexico.



Installation view from "Sign and Substance", previously on view at David Castillo, featuring works by Vaughn Spann.

How do you 'Basel'?

DC: Like everyone else, I used to try to see everything, but that's not possible for a visual person like me. Parties were never my big thing and I always have to host my own large dinner, talks, and gallery opening, plus I'm working the booth as many days as possible to get the maximum outreach for the artists we exhibit. Art is enjoyable and can be shared literally with anyone who is at your side right when you say, 'I'm going to walk around' – unless, of course, you have to walk straight back to the booth because someone is waiting for you!

PM: As a tradition now for 15 years, my very good friend and gallery artist Quisqueya Henríquez makes her annual trip from Santo Domingo to Miami to attend the fair and all the parties. We have had great times at the Davidoff lounge when she collaborated with the brand for their Art Basel presentations. I think we have definitely slowed down now and only hit specific parties, like the fabulous Ruinart party at Miami Beach Botanical Garden or the Loewe takeover at the iconic Twist bar. Still the parties, just more selective!



Left: Pepe Mar, *On a Spiral*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery. Photo by Zach Balber. Right: Belkis Ayón Manso, *Untitled (woman in fetal position)*, 1996. Courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo Gallery. Photo by Jose A. Figueroa.

What do you think of the fair today and how it has evolved?

DC: I love that the fair feels like it's constantly evolving. Change is good. Change is of this moment, change is contemporary, and the fair is all of those things. You see many artists you expect to see because of their critical and market status, but then you turn a corner, and, wow, there's something truly special and engaging that your eyes were not fully prepared to see in that moment. I don't think that could ever stop no matter what is going on in the world. COVID helped prove this point in an intimate way. The fair invited me to do a Conversation and it was on Zoom during the pandemic. They invited exhibitors all over the world to continue engaging with audiences and they did so with various formats, including OVR Portals. I don't think there is ever a singular vision for evolution, so a fair, like art, cannot move forward in any one way. It moves forward in organic and multifaceted ways.

This article was originally commissioned for the *Art Basel Miami Beach* magazine 2022.

Captions for full-bleed images: 1. Detail of Pepe Mar, *Solar Power*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami. Photo by Zachary Balber. 2. Installation view of Vaughn Spann's *Sullivan, Piper, Tate, Brooks, and Wyeth*, all 2022. Courtesy of the artist, David Castillo Gallery, and de la Cruz Museum, Miami. Photo by Zach Balber.