

# GAMBLER



# FOR

DAVID CASTILLO'S  
UNCONVENTIONAL PATH  
HAS BEEN A WIN-WIN FOR HIS  
GALLERY AND THE GREATER  
ARTS COMMUNITY.

BY REBECCA KLEINMAN





# THE

# GOOD

Clockwise from top left:  
Sanford Biggers' *Nomad*,  
2022's *Sign and Substance*  
exhibition at Castillo's gallery,  
*Cabeza Gold* by Pepe Mar;  
photos courtesy of David  
Castillo Gallery. David Castillo  
and friend; photo by Mateo  
Serna Zapata.



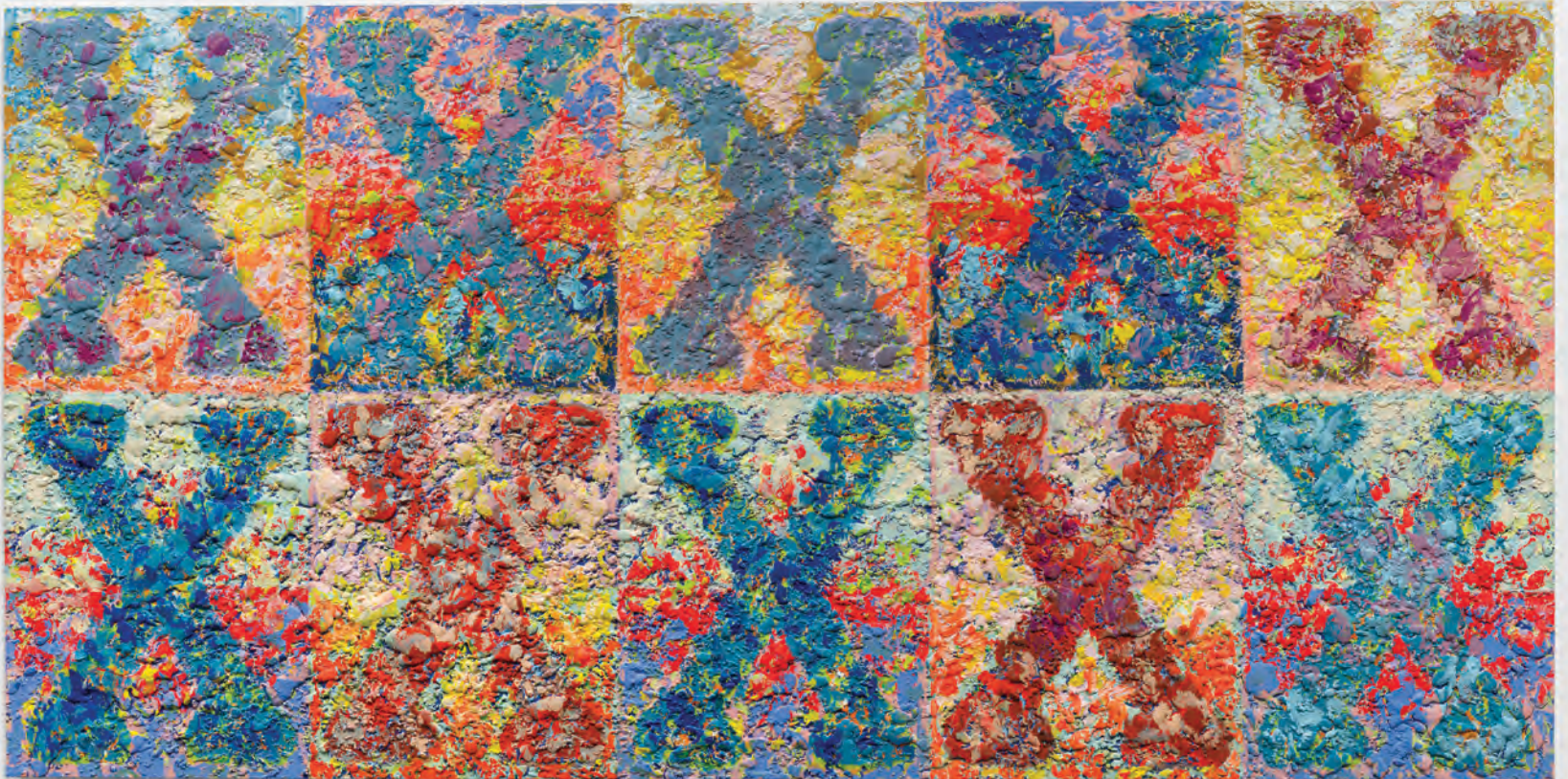


Clockwise from top left: Castillo in his gallery; photo by Nick Garcia. A look at Xaviera Simmons' *In the dim light pressing deeply against each other* exhibition, Vaughn Spann's *Marked men (factors of loss)*; photos courtesy of David Castillo Gallery.

Gallery owner David Castillo has left his doubters in the dust.

The 305-or-die lifer never once thought about ditching his hometown for grander, global art cities, even when people questioned his decision to open an eponymous gallery here in 2005. His founding program of artists from marginalized communities also puzzled the establishment; Castillo's gallery was often the first and only to represent these artists early in their careers. The whole operation, from location to mission statement, was a long shot that built slowly, one highprofile museum exhibition and collection acquisition at a time. Then came the invitations, beginning in 2008, to participate in Art Basel Miami Beach Positions and then 2011, Art Basel Miami Beach Nova, and as of 2018, Art Basel Miami Beach Galleries sector and every year since. But it was never about the payoff.

"There's a deluge of galleries showing 'overlooked,' 'underrepresented,' and 'other' artists. That was never my narrative take," says Castillo, who sees the term "overlooked" as hierarchical. "I wanted to show work that was rigorous and befitting my interests in art as an art historian and also I wanted to connect and see myself in the artists I was showing."







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Castillo, whose parents fled Cuba for Spain before settling in Miami, told *The New York Times* that his moment of truth came as a college freshman at Yale University, when he received a letter that read, “Dear person of color.” Having never considered himself as “the other” until then, the experience shaped his professional path to this day. Being so personally invested has benefited his roster of 15 artists. Works by Quisqueya Henriquez, Pepe Mar, Shinique Smith and Yesiyu Zhao have recently been acquired by institutions including the High Museum of Art and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. Sanford Biggers, Lyle Ashton Harris and Xaviera Simmons have had solo shows at the Orange County Museum of Art, Rose Art Museum and Queens Museum, respectively. Mar, whose 15-year survey opens at the Tampa Museum

of Art in July, also has solo shows at the Kemper and Everson Museum of Art this year. Vaughn Spann’s work is currently on view at the Bass, Rubell Museum D.C. and at Castillo’s gallery, his third solo show there. Biggers’ fifth solo show at the gallery follows in April.

It’s amazing to think that none of this might have happened if Castillo hadn’t taken a college art history class on a whim. Based on his love for science, he initially imagined a more practical career choice, such as medicine. “It was a done deal through that exposure,” says Castillo of clearly seeing his future. The path organically evolved from museums, where he first worked, to secondary art market sales to the primary market in establishing his gallery. “I wanted to develop artists’ careers and their vision.”









It's too far out for Castillo to announce plans for his June Art Basel booth — aside from sharing that it will feature first-of-their-kind presentations — and beyond the Galleries sector, his gallery's December Art Basel exhibitions have previously included Belkis Ayón (the subject of an upcoming retrospective at Malba in Buenos Aires) in *Kbinett* and Vaughn Spann and Pepe Mar in *Meridians*. The timing was all the sweeter, since he had just come from seeing Ayón's work at the Venice Biennale — he represents her estate — when he received the news about Art Basel Switzerland.

"They [Art Basel] do not provide feedback," said Castillo, of the impetus behind the honored invitation. "The gallery's program has grown to have more and more of an international presence including biennials, etc., and this perhaps plays a role in such selections."

A few years ago, Castillo relocated his gallery to the Miami Design District. More than just a cultural connection, it's a great fit for the clotheshorse who favors Gucci, Dries Van Noten and Comme des Garçons and styles his miniature schnauzers in designer dog accessories. He also spoils them with homecooked meals and walks around Miami Shores, where his artfilled home has a koi pond to unwind before and after long workdays. Says the gallerist, "Evenings always involve art-related and leisure reading, except Mondays when it's *Antiques Roadshow* uninterrupted by the world."

Clockwise from top left: Works from Pepe Mar's 2021 *You Should Have Never Crossed the Rio Grande* exhibition, Belkis Ayón's *Woman in fetal position*, and a look at 2022's *Journey to the West* and *STARGAZING* exhibitions by Yesiyu Zhao and Shinique Smith, respectively; photos courtesy of David Castillo Gallery.

