

MY CITY

Miami Gallerist David Castillo Spills the City's Best-Kept Secrets

The art dealer shares how to reject FOMO and embrace the best Miami has to offer.

WORDS
Cultured Magazine
December 2, 2023

Some people attending the Art Basel Miami Beach fair never stray too far from a few-block stretch of Collins Avenue. That is a mistake, according to David Castillo.

The art dealer and longtime Miami resident became only the second local gallery to gain entry to the fair's coveted main galleries section, in 2018. Since founding his eponymous outfit in 2005, Castillo has built a forward-thinking program committed to investing in artists of color, including Shinique Smith, Vaughn Spann, and Lyle Ashton Harris, all of whom will present new work at Castillo's ABMB booth when the fair opens this week. Many of the gallery's artists have gone on to work with megas as well, but they remain committed to the specific brand of support Castillo provides.



Portrait of David Castillo by Michael Adno for The New York Times. Image courtesy of David Castillo.

Back at the gallery, a sold-out show of work by the Chinese-born and Brooklyn- and Pittsburgh-based artist Su Su is on view. We asked Castillo to give us a tour of Miami through his eyes.

Where are you right now? What do you see, hear, and smell?

At this moment, I am sitting at my kitchen counter, looking out of a picture window onto the park in front of my home. I see a grandfather palm rising well above 22 feet on my property and very old trees in an open park; I hear my miniature schnauzers patrolling the other dogs they see in the park; and I smell an unlit Diptyque candle, "La Droguerie."

What's the best neighborhood for a visitor to stay in? Any hotel recommendations?

Coconut Grove is experiencing a renaissance while retaining its decades-long bohemian energy. The Mayfair House Hotel is a lovely Miami experience.

Where do you go to escape the crowds?

My neighborhood, Miami Shores. Its tree-lined streets and abundantly diverse architecture make for a quiet stroll.

Favorite place for Cuban food?

Hands down, La Casita on 8th Street. All the classics and always super consistent. Tastes like it was made in someone's home for a party of two, yet they serve hundreds of people on any given day.

Best place for a coffee meeting?

Miami has so many cool coffee spots but one of the best and easiest is the Rosetta truck outside Museum Garage in the Miami Design District.

Best place for a drink after work? What about a late-night drink?

For both, Calle Dragonos in Little Havana. You get a nice cocktail, live music, and dancing. It is a taste of Havana in the heart of Miami.

Your ideal art-viewing itinerary?

You can never go wrong with the de la Cruz Collection and the Rubell Museum. You will always discover something or see new things in works you may already know very well.

Underrated Saturday-afternoon activity?

Fairchild Tropical Garden or Vizcaya. Miami is always thought of as such a young city but it also has very established and beautiful sites that are easy to visit. Fairchild is a magnificent garden and Vizcaya—or, even farther afield southbound, the Deering Estate—offers a view of Miami's past that is deeply connected to its present with concerts, artist residencies, and more.

Favorite places to shop for clothes?

Valentino is a must: a classic and an avant-garde designer in one.

For gifts?

Glottman and Base, which are next to one another on NW 2nd Avenue in Wynwood. Both have eclectic and fun gift ideas. They are also directly across the street from where my gallery began 20 years ago.

For everything you didn't know you needed?

Lincoln Road Antique Market, which happens every winter. Check the website for dates. You will find the most charming items—including bronze monkeys, which are now part of my office desk!

What is something someone can do, wear, or say to look like a local?

There is no imitating Miami originals. You know the real deal when you see them.

What is the one item everyone around you seems to be wearing right now?

Quiet luxury. Although it never really gets super cold in Miami, people seem to be bringing out their cardigans, jackets, and sweaters even at 79 degrees.

What is your pick for a local restaurant you can actually get into for dinner?

Jaguar Sun, 230 NE 4th Street.

Any tips for getting the most out of Miami Art Week?

Pace yourself. Art is about enjoyment and discovery. Trying to see everything is pointless. As an expert, even my eyes start to want a distraction. I can do a few museums, give a lecture on art, and go back to an art-fair booth all in one day, so I know a bit about pacing oneself. Take it easy, stroll the art fairs (Art Basel Miami Beach being a must), pick one museum, one private collection, and one other fair, spaced out over the two or three days you may have in town. Don't fear you're missing out. After all, something that moved you and captured your eye, millions of other people didn't see at all. It's your experience. Enjoy it.

What is your favorite thing about where you live?

That it is in the middle of the entire city but feels like a retreat when you are home, with lots of landscaping and my koi fish.