

J.K. Yearick

BY JUDY CANTOR

Collective Experience

Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz's assemblage of cutting-edge contemporary works boldly questions the traditional definition of Latin American art

Conspicuous white spaces and thick strands of loose picture wire evidence the absence of some of the artworks that usually hang in the high-walled, sunlit living room of Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz's spacious Key Biscayne home. Two paintings — *Star Gazer*, by the Mexican modernist Rufino Tamayo, and *Orchestra Pit*, by the Chilean surrealist Roberto Matta — are currently on loan to the University of Miami's Lowe Art Museum for the exhibition "Latin

American Art in Miami Collections." Elsewhere in the living room, *Sea Bitch Born Deep*, a large, hectic painting charged with Santeria symbolism that is an exceptional example of the work of Cuban painter Carlos Alfonzo, is present on one wall, while a figurative painting alluding to Afro-Cuban ritual by artist José Bedia hangs high on the back wall, above glass doors that lead to the house's garden and pool. But a yellow apartment floor plan painted on a twin-size mat-

tress by Guillermo Kuitca is gone from its place on the left side of the room; the piece is on tour as part of a retrospective exhibition of the celebrated young Argentine artist's work that just opened at Miami's Center for the Fine Arts (CFA). And for the moment, another important Kuitca painting, *Kristallnacht*, which belongs in a nook outside the living room doorway, can be seen at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, part of a major exhibition dealing

with the Holocaust. "When I'm asked to loan a work, I respond," says Rosa de la Cruz, emerging from her study on a recent morning with a list of a dozen institutions in different parts of the country that have pieces on loan from her and her husband's collection of nearly 200 works. "When things go out, other things take their place. I don't want to create a deposit of artworks; they should be seen

Continued on page 15

Collective

Continued from page 13

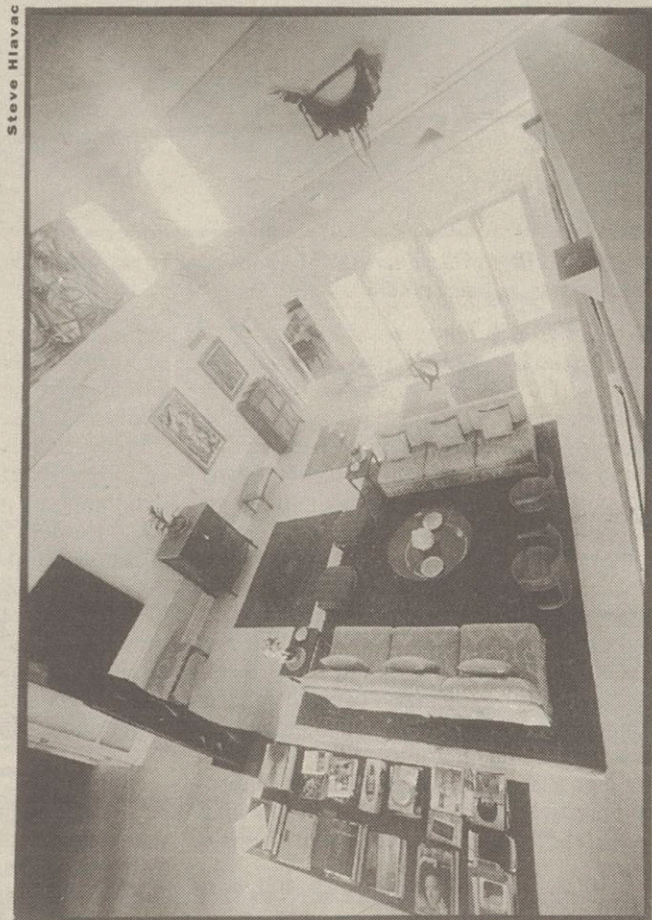
outside of my house. It gives me a lot of satisfaction to see that these artists are recognized. As collectors we have a responsibility to support the work of an artist. It's not just buying. Buying is the easy part."

Other pieces are absent from various parts of the house, christened *Punta alegre* (Happy Point) by the de la Cruzes: a light installation by the Cuban-American artist Felix González-Torres consisting of 45 light bulbs with porcelain sockets; Chilean Alfredo Jaar's *Terra non descoperta*, an installation of three two-sided light boxes that show ocean images on one side, and pictures of indigenous Latin American peoples on the other side, the latter reflected in fifteen small mirrors decorated with gold leaf hung on a wall behind the boxes; Miami artist César Trasobares's *Vitrine*, a wooden box filled with Cuban-American artifacts; *Lost Forest Reliquary*, an altarlike structure containing a slice of trunk and other pieces of wood, by Uruguay's Rimer Cardillo; and about a half dozen other works, all of which have been loaned to the Lowe.

Additionally, the Colombian-born artist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *Flotilla* — three truck-tire inner tubes marked "Niña-Río Grande," "Pinta-Palm Beach," and "Santa Maria-Key West," respectively — and several other pieces by young Latin artists belonging to the couple were part of a show called "Exodus" that was on display in December at the South Florida Art Center. Finally, Andrés Serrano's Cibachrome photograph of a Ku Klux Klan member, *Klansman (Imperial Wizard III)*, plus two other photographic works by the controversial artist are part of a traveling one-man

exhibition scheduled for the CFA in May.

"I don't want to buy only validated art," points out de la Cruz, a slim blond woman who moves swiftly about the house in a tailored skirt, T-shirt, and suede loafers. "My whole focus is to document a decade. We're interested in collecting art that is happening now." Although the couple usually visits exhibitions and goes to artists' studios together, it is Rosa who oversees the day-to-day maintenance of the collection, the loans to museums, and philanthropic endeavors



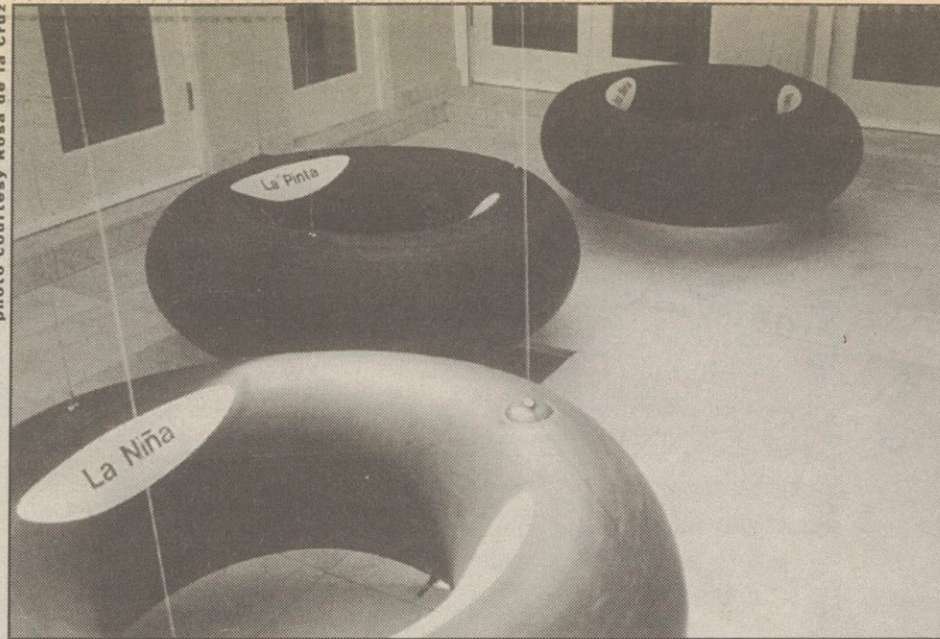
Works on loan have left some empty spaces on the walls of the collectors' art-filled living room

such as providing funding for artists' shows or exhibition catalogues.

"For me business is still my main focus," concedes Carlos de la Cruz. "But for Rosa this has become a true passion."

The de la Cruzes, both born in Cuba, met in Miami when they were in their teens, marrying when Carlos was twenty years old and Rosa nineteen. The couple lived in

Photo courtesy Rosa de la Cruz



Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *Flotilla* swings outside on the de la Cruzes' patio

Philadelphia, New York City, and Madrid before moving back to Miami in 1975. Carlos, a businessman with an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Business School and a law degree from the University of Miami, is the chairman of Eagle Brands, the Anheuser-Busch distributor in Dade County. His holdings also include three local car dealerships. Now in their early fifties, the de la Cruzes have five grown children.

For their first — paper — wedding anniversary, Carlos's gift to his wife was *Mainstreams of Modern Art*, a classic 1959 art-history tome written by John Canaday. Wherever they lived, the de la Cruzes went to galleries and museums regularly. "We were always going to galleries and we talked about buying art. But with five kids, we didn't have the money," remembers Carlos. "Then we saw that we could afford it and we began buying, and it sort of became our hobby. We really just drifted into collecting." Like many other Cuban collectors in Miami, at first they bought modern works.

"We weren't focused," Rosa de la Cruz explains. "Because of our Cuban identity, we

thought why not start in the area described by those words that are used so much — *Latin American art*." Accordingly, they bought the Matta, the Tamayo, a Wifredo Lam, a work by Cuban artist René Portocarrero, and other important mid-century paintings. However, as they visited more and more galleries, they became interested in the contemporary field, and now

"My whole focus is to document a decade. We're interested in collecting art that is happening now."

they are committed to buying only recent works.

"Contemporary art is not for everyone," Rosa de la Cruz cautions. "It's not decorative. It's not something you hang over a sofa." She walks back into her study and picks up a small cardboard box from the top of a file cabinet cluttered with exhibition cat-

Continued on page 16



We Know You
**CAME TO
PLAY.**

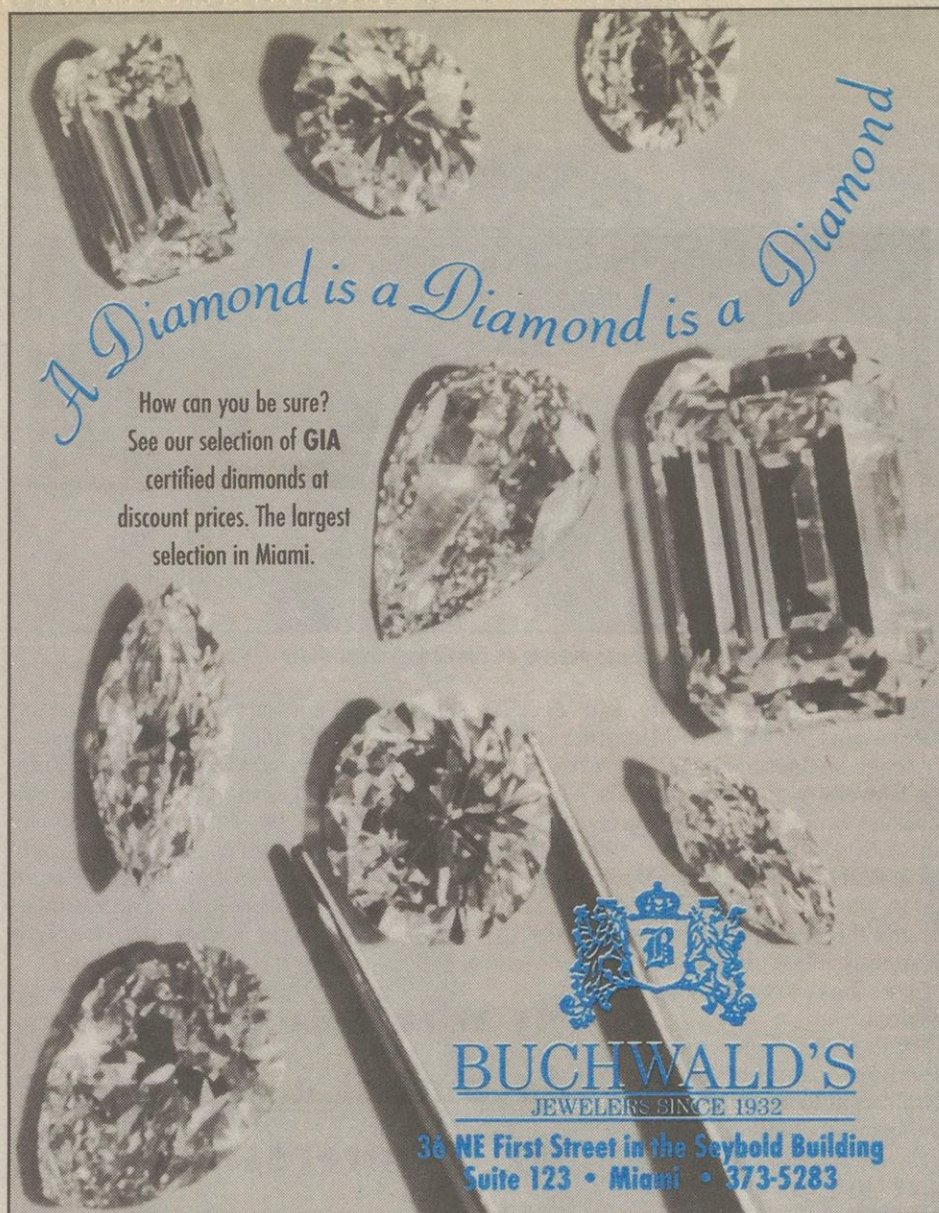


Florida Lottery

Welcome To Florida.

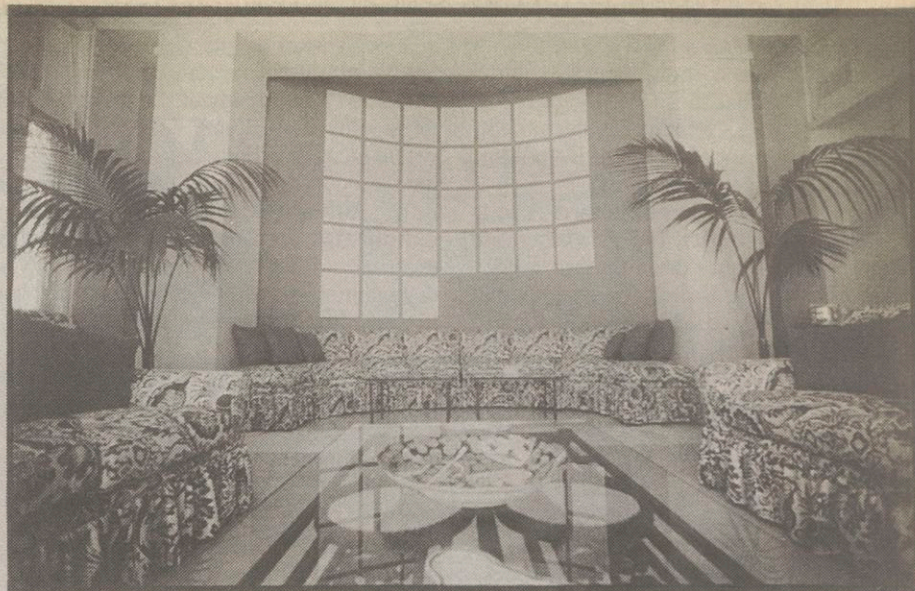
A Diamond is a Diamond is a Diamond

How can you be sure?
See our selection of GIA
certified diamonds at
discount prices. The largest
selection in Miami.



BUCHWALD'S
JEWELERS SINCE 1932
36 NE First Street in the Seybold Building
Suite 123 • Miami • 373-5283

Steve Hlavac



Untitled (31 Days of Bloodworks), by Felix González-Torres, honors the last month in the life of the artist's lover, who died of AIDS

Collective

Continued from page 15

alogues. The box is full of nylon stockings, part of a work by the young Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto that she acquired while in São Paulo for that city's biennial last October. Upon her return, the collector bought two 25-pound bags of lead shot at Home Depot with which to finish the piece. To install the work, called *Colonia*, each stocking leg must be filled with five pounds of the lead pellets, then dropped to the floor from waist level. When all of the stockings have been dropped, they form a nearly twenty-foot-long composition. By way of demonstration, de la Cruz puts some shot into one of the stocking legs and releases it, creating an anthropomorphic blob on the carpet. A few lead balls trickle out and roll under the file cabinet.

Understanding that works such as this one might be challenging for those unfamiliar with contemporary art, de la Cruz has put together a guide to her collection. Each of the pieces is documented with a thick ream of photocopied sheets, which she dis-

symbolism, they take a step back. The countries are so foreign that they feel more comfortable here labeling them as one culture. When things are foreign, the easiest way to simplify them is to give them one name — Latin American art.

"Sometimes people come into the house and they walk right past all the work and go straight into the garden. Maybe it's that they've seen only paintings [before], and they're confronted with an installation, and they say, 'What the hell is this?' People are afraid to ask questions, so it's the institution's responsibility to make people more comfortable. That's what I try to do here."

At a record-setting auction of works by Latin America artists held at Sotheby's in New York last November, collectors from South American countries and the United States paid a total of \$13.4 million for 61 pieces. The sale also broke individual records for the work of seventeen different artists. A Christie's Latin American auction, held the same week, totaled \$16 million, a figure that

broke that house's record for Latin American art. The January issue of *Art & Auction* magazine heralds these precedents with a cover story entitled "Brash New World." Writes editor in chief Amy Page, "No longer a fringe area on the underdeveloped outskirts of the art world, [Latin American art] is becoming increasingly a mainstream concern."

Increasing attention has

been paid to Latin American artists by collectors, critics, and curators over the past decade, and some of that interest has centered on Miami, often referred to as a Latin American art capital. Its claim to that title was corroborated convincingly at the annual Art Miami fair, held earlier this month at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Art Miami organizer David Lester said in a recent interview that he would like to play down the fair's reputation as a Latin American event, featuring instead a broader range of galleries. Nonetheless this year's fifth edition still had a predominantly Latin flavor, testimony to the strength of an existing Latin American art market in Miami that caters to buyers from both South Florida and other U.S. cities, as well as from Latin American countries.

This Miami market, dictated by the tastes of members of a Latin (mostly Cuban) elite, is primarily for works in traditional media (paint-

Continued on page 18

**"Cuban doctors are
among the biggest
buyers of Cuban art.
One is trying
to impress the other."**

tributes to the museum docents, students, and senior citizens groups who frequently ask to view the collection. On each page, she lists the artist's name, country of origin, and the titles of his or her works in the collection. Below that de la Cruz adds excerpts from catalogue texts or art magazine reviews pertaining to the artist. Sometimes she adds her own observations.

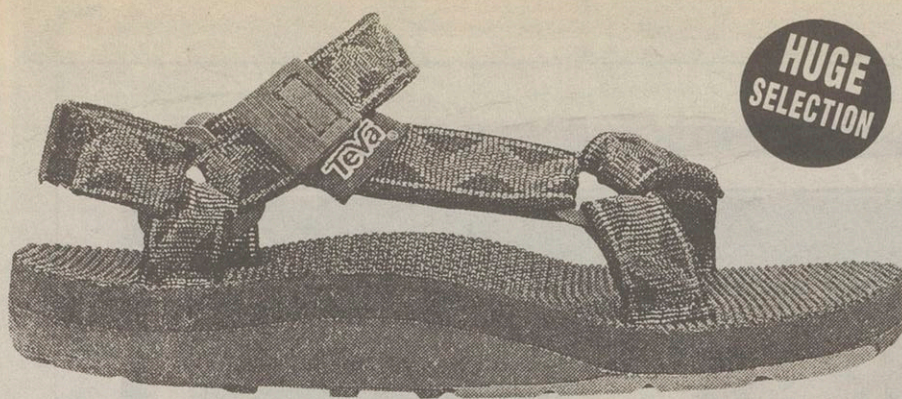
"You have to introduce people to contemporary art," de la Cruz contends, taking a seat on the living room sofa with a cup of espresso brought in by a housekeeper. "You can't just expect them to know about it immediately. For some reason, contemporary art is difficult for people to view. I think an artist who has a Spanish name is immediately foreign to the non-Latin public. The name's difficult to pronounce and remember. It doesn't stick in your mind the way a name you're familiar with would. It's not that people don't want to know. It's that when they don't understand the language and the

**THE CROMWELL
CONDOMINIUMS**
1614 JEFFERSON AVE
NEXT TO LINCOLN ROAD MALL

**FROM \$98,500
ONLY TWO UNITS LEFT!**

CLOSE WITH ONLY 5% DOWN!

Completely Renovated Spacious Art Deco
1 Bedroom 2 Story Condominiums
Amenities Include Private Entrances, Central A/C, Hardwood Floors and Fireplaces.
For Information 674-7221



**HUGE
SELECTION**

SANDAL SALE

UP TO 50% OFF SELECTED NIKE, REEF AND TEVA

FootWorks

5724 Sunset Drive • South Miami
667-9322 • Open 7 Days

ONE MAN'S DREAM IS ANOTHER'S POSSESSION.

SEA-DOO

EVERYBODY'S DOIN' IT



**WE HAVE THE
GOPEDS!**



**NO FEAR
GEAR IS HERE!**

R&R JETTECH

67 N.W. 167TH STREET • NORTH MIAMI BEACH 33169
651-4999 • FAX 651-3547

Collective

Continued from page 16

ing and bronze or ceramic sculpture) depicting time-honored Latin American subject matter: folkloric still lifes, figurative landscapes, or bright-colored "fantastic" abstractions. There is also a current interest among local collectors in work by contemporary Cuban or Cuban-American artists that reflects the political and social concerns particular to that culture: José Bedia, who finds inspiration in the Afro-Cuban Palo Monte religion; María Britto, who addresses personal themes of exile in her multimedia constructions; and the conceptual and performance artist Juan-Sí, whose latest works critique aspects of Miami's Cuban community.

While bilingual, cross-cultural Miami may be an ideal showcase for diverse works by artists from the Americas and of Latin descent, not everyone here is prepared to throw caution to the wind. "So much of what the Latin community buys has to do with status," laments Giulio Blanc, a Miami-based art critic and consultant who curated "Latin American Art in Miami Collections" at the Lowe. "It may have to do with identity and roots, but it's also status — there's almost a tribal dimension to this. Cuban doctors, for example, are among the biggest buyers of Cuban art. They all buy the same names — Lam, Mario Carreño, Amelia Paláez — and it's very competitive. One is trying to impress the other. It's status buying."

And commerce inevitably dictates what makes it into the galleries and what doesn't. "I specialize exclusively in Latin American modern and contemporary art," notes José Martínez Cañas, owner of Elite Fine Art, a well-established gallery in Coral Gables. "But I do not experiment. Not because I'm not interested in far-fetched experimental art, but because I just feel it's unfair for a dealer to

thought that Felix González-Torres's light sculpture, which stands at the entrance to the "Latin American Art in Miami Collections" exhibition, was a holiday decoration.

While the works in the de la Cruzes' collection are by artists of Latin American origin, they depart considerably from what many people here think of as Latin American art. The couple has compiled an avant-garde survey that highlights the individual strengths of exceptional contemporary artists, whose varied use of media and conceptual strategies

**"Artists from Latin
America may have
similar problems, but
their responses to them
are different."**

serves to question the validity of the term "Latin American art" as a catchall category.

"There's a stereotype that's been reinforced in this country, and especially in Miami, of seeing art produced by Latin Americans as something fantastic and colorful," asserts Berta Sichel, a New York-based Brazilian curator in town recently to attend Art Miami. "People don't recognize conceptual art as Latin American. But there's a strong conceptual art movement in Latin America, especially in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. A lot of the artists whose work is in the de la Cruz collection come out of that tradition."

The almost 200 works in the collection are, with some exceptions, by artists under the age of 40, born in various Latin American countries. Many have emigrated to the U.S., either as children or as adults, for both professional and personal reasons.

Their work addresses complex issues of national and cultural identity as filtered through personal experience, and their techniques reflect elements of the artistic traditions — both academic and indigenous — of their respective native countries. While the works in the collection most of all point up the diversity inherent in what could be called contemporary Latin American art, they share at least two common characteristics: a continuous search for identity and the use of a postmodern language of universal symbols.

"I think that when we look at the de la Cruzes' collection, we see art that has become kind of transnational or has gone beyond any regional definition," observes artist Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, who lives in Chicago. "The aesthetics that they are looking at encompass a larger scope of concerns. I think the interest in this collection has been to see a major collector in



In the "chapel," Jac Leirner's *Double Blue Chain* and 21 shirts pierced with a steel blade (*Untitled*), by Doris Salcedo; in the background, works by Ana Mendieta and Ernesto Neto

experiment with his clients' money."

This attitude that prizes Cuban masters or decorative contemporary painters while leaving little room for emerging artists interested in any kind of a postmodern discourse affects the general public, too. At the Lowe, for example, according to Blanc, several visitors

Miami be one of the precursors of how contemporary work is being collected. This major shift has to do with terminology."

The debate over what qualifies as Latin American art — and indeed, whether that term should be used at all — has been going

Continued on page 20



Exclusive Design By:
OLIVER PEOPLES®



LOS ANGELES

Please join us for our
**1995 Trunk Show featuring
The Spring Collection of Paul Smith & Oliver Peoples**

COCO LUNETTE

Trunk show:

Sat, Jan 28th 1-6pm
3015 GRAND AVE
COCOWALK
305.441.0457

SOBE LUNETTE

Trunk show:

Thurs, Jan 26th 4-10pm
751 WASHINGTON AVE
SOUTH BEACH
305.532.6363

**A true reflection
of exquisite taste**



*Imperial
Designs*

S H O W R O O M

Classic reproductions, custom upholstery
and finishes, accessories. Complete
Interior services. Centrally Located at
12413 Biscayne Blvd. North Miami.
Call today for our new arrivals, 895-1207

Collective

Continued from page 18

on for decades among curators, critics, dealers, and artists. These politics of identity have become more complicated as more artists explore the disparate cultural influences in their work. While the artists whose work composes the de la Cruz collection are from Latin America or of Latin American origin, most would not define themselves as Latin American artists.

"I'm not necessarily comfortable with the term 'Latin American artist,' that particular south-of-the-border distinction doesn't jibe for a lot of artists," says Manglano-Ovalle, who is currently working on a piece inspired by the recent Summit of the Americas. "And yet our particular kind of roots, our culture and concerns, has to do with a particular nationality, but also with our status here in the United States. I usually use the term 'Latino.' It's an alternative to 'Latin America' and 'Hispanic,' and one that also implies social, cultural, and political demographic shifts."

Guillermo Kuitca, considered one of the leading contemporary Latin American painters (his *Idea de una pasión* sold for more than \$40,000 at the Sotheby's auction), says that despite the fact that dealers, museum curators, and art critics classify his work as "Latin American," he doesn't use the term to identify himself.

"I don't classify myself as a Latin American artist," says the 34-year-old painter, speaking from his studio in Buenos Aires. "For me the term doesn't really signify anything. To other people it signifies a lot. I'd say some people give it too much importance. One thing that artists from Latin America share is that they are permanently imprisoned by this classification."

"Artists from Latin America may have similar problems, but their responses to them are different," he continues. "Each individual, each city, each country has their own experiences. For me 'Latin American' does not represent a concept that serves me in my work or my life. If it works for others, I think that's fine. It's very important that everyone find his or her own place despite the place where they come from."

"When you set up a collection, you have to deal with these particular terminologies," notes Manglano-Ovalle. "I think the de la Cruzes' interest is in artists who have gone beyond the modernist description of the Latin American to a more critical reconstruction of one's identity."

Rosa de la Cruz gets up to take a phone call from Felix González-Torres, the artist whose light sculpture at the Lowe was mistaken for a holiday display. González-Torres is in town from New York. A loud, animated conversation in Spanish about restaurants and food ensues. About ten minutes later, the collector, still smiling at the artist's anecdotes, leads the way to a sparsely furnished library off the house's living room. The silhouette of a female form sculpted from sand lies on the marble floor. It is a prized acquisition, one of the few existing pieces by the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta, who died in 1985 after falling from a window of her New York apartment.

Several photographs of Mendieta's powerful, spiritual earthworks, made by burying her body in mud or sand — or burning her outline into the grass at sites in Mexico and Cuba — are displayed on a mauve wall over a recessed bookcase. A stack of 21 men's shirts, all white, pene-

Continued on page 22

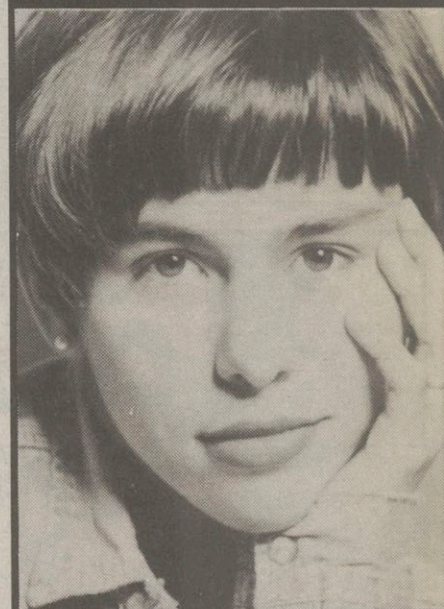
**Art &
Tradition**



VILLAR TILE

7800 NW 34 STREET • MIAMI
(305) 591-7283

**No-Makeup
Makeup**

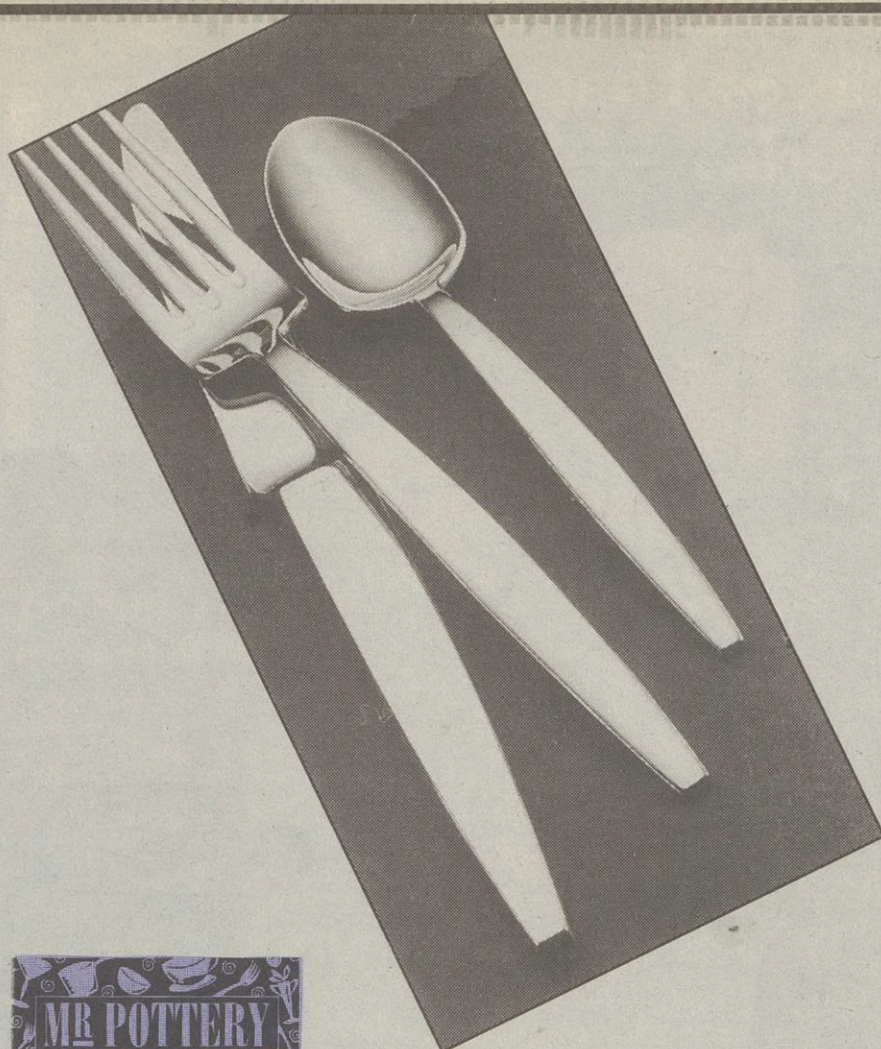


200 lipstick colors • 63 lipliner colors
379 eye shadows & blushes
73 eye pencil colors
Water, aloe, oil and
powder-base foundations • Wigs

Eye Brow Shaping \$10.00



South Beach Makeup
439 Española Way • Miami Beach
538-0805



AVENTURA 18721 Biscayne Blvd. (Loehman's Fashion Island) 937-2638	SOUTH MIAMI 11301 S. Dixie Hwy. (Sunland Shopping Center) 238-8085	KENDALL 8514 Mills Drive (Town & Country Center) 274-7268	FT. LAUDERDALE 2000 N. Federal Hwy. (Capital Bank Plaza) 566-1969	BOCA RATON 9882 Glades Road (Westwinds of Boca) 451-1128
--	---	--	--	---

Collective

Continued from page 20

trated by a steel rod sits on the floor behind the sand sculpture. This untitled piece by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo was inspired by the experiences of 40 women who witnessed their husbands being killed on their own doorsteps. A dark work entitled *Witness*, painted by Carlos Alfonzo — who died in Miami of AIDS at age 41 — is on the wall behind it. De la Cruz refers to this room as "the chapel."

She points through the windows of a connecting parlor to the back yard, where she soon plans to start construction of a separate exhibition space for works from the collection, which has outgrown the house. Many of the installations the de la Cruzes own have special spatial requirements. "I'm not buying normal household art," de la Cruz emphasizes. "I'm going beyond that.... I have a work by Rimer Cardillo that requires soil and leaves — where do I put it?"

De la Cruz speaks fervently about each artwork in her home, stressing that she and her husband do not buy art as an investment. "If I were to start pricing the current value of my works, that would defeat the purpose of what I'm doing," she explains. "I just want people to recognize these artists for the quality of their work. I'm not doing this for myself, I'm doing it for the artists. It's not my work, it's theirs. I don't care how much it's worth. This art is not for sale."

The strong-willed de la Cruz has been known to have her differences with art dealers, who she often circumvents by buying directly from artists in their studios. The artists themselves enthusiastically confirm the couple's ongoing support of their work above and beyond that of most collectors.

"The de la Cruzes bought one of my earliest paintings," remembers Roberto Juarez, whose show, "They Entered the Road," opened last week at the CFA. "Then they bought a more recent painting, so it seemed they were trying to tell a story. It wasn't like they were just buying a name that everyone else was buying. They were really interested in the development of the work, and that's rare."

"Rosa and Carlos are open to a lot of experimental work, not only in terms of materials, but in terms of philosophical approaches," says César Trasobares, who created the light-box installation owned by the couple. "They're not the typical Cubans who collect prerevolutionary art. They're buying live art. It goes beyond accumulating valuable property, it's sort of a philosophical commitment. I've met a lot of collectors through the years, and if we had three more like them, Miami would really be in good shape."

The de la Cruzes plan to donate their collection to a public institution at some point in the future. With this in mind, they are acquiring museum-quality pieces that most private collectors would stay away from. For instance they often buy works that are large in scale or otherwise difficult to install. And they have supported artists by funding works for museum shows. "The de la Cruzes have commissioned work sight unseen," confirms Mangano-Ovalle. "They said to me, 'We know you do a lot of work that could never fit inside a house. So if you ever need financial support, give us a call.' So I did." The result was an installation piece called *Balsero* (Rafters), currently on a museum tour. The de la Cruzes still have not seen the work.

"I want the best of every artist's works," de la Cruz states emphatically, gesturing to the artwork around her. "These are the kind of works that museums are looking for, but they may not have the funding right now to buy them. So we will. **NY**"

change your style

Thai-Style Cushions



Imported directly from Thailand
Reasonably Priced,
5 Different Colors

945-8079 - 10am-11pm
3455 NE 163rd Street, NMB

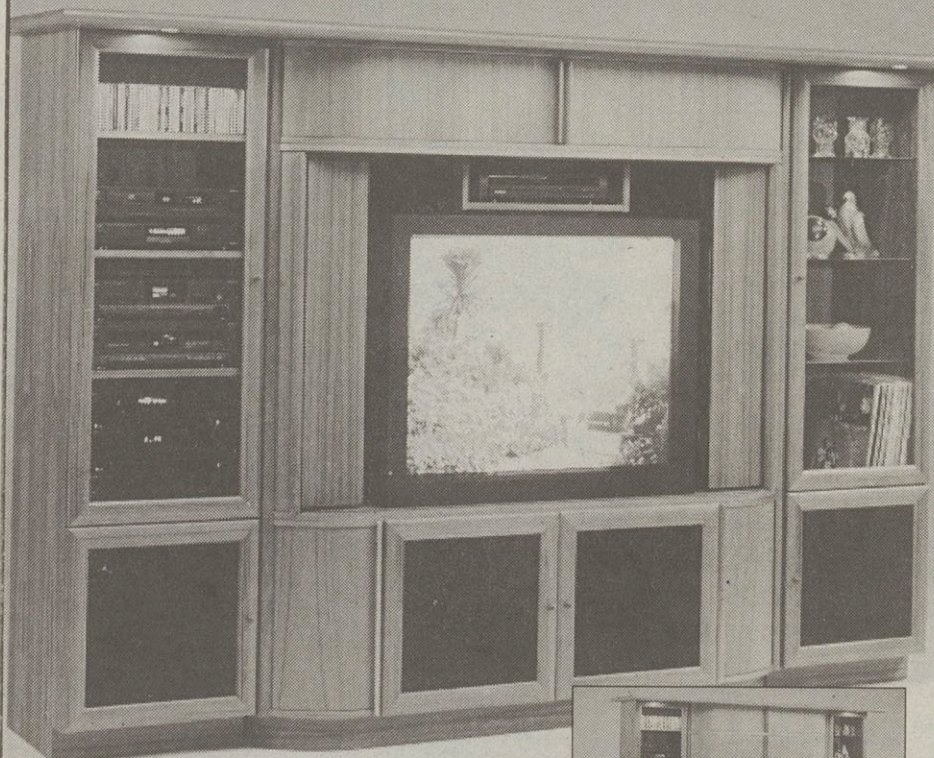
Hottest Shoes on South Beach!



Bonnie & Clyde

Shoes for Men & Women
829 Washington Ave • Miami Beach
674-9676
Open 7 Days • 10am-10pm

The Great Dane



Available in Teak
and Rosewood

JENSEN & HANSEN INC.

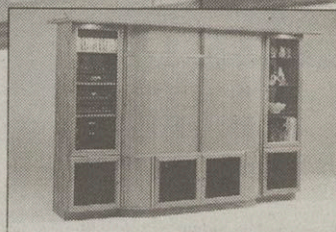
FINE SCANDINAVIAN FURNITURE FOR HOME & OFFICE

MAIN STORE: 450 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, Call: 444-7469

PLAZA WEST: 12821 North Kendall Drive, Miami, Call: 386-3666



Financing Available



GOLDWELL

NATURAL
ENERGY
PERM

PERM SPECIAL

\$65 \$100 value
Perm, Cut, & Styling

ACRYLIC NAILS

\$35 \$45 value
FULL SET

♥VALENTINE'S SPECIAL♥

A Day of Beauty

\$75 Manicure, Pedicure,
Mini-facial, Cut & Styling
\$100 value



SHEAR IMAGE
HAIR & NAIL DESIGNERS
8450 SW 132 St.
378-1588

Must present coupon.