



ART REVIEW: Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection Brings a Gotham State of Mind to Palm Beach

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

Beth Rudin DeWoody can be described in many ways: New York businesswoman, philanthropist, part-time Palm Beach resident, Norton Museum of Art avid supporter, former Hamptons resident, parent, patron of the arts and serious art collector. It is this last role that DeWoody has been attracting the most attention in the art world lately. Her collection has been the subject of an exhibition of [West Coast artists](#) at the Parrish Art Museum in The Hamptons and two shows at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, the latest which opened on February 7, 2016.

A collector of art for more than five decades, Beth Rudin DeWoody's collection is comprised of around 10,000 artworks, acquired since the 1970s. With such an extensive collection of significant art to choose from, the Norton lobbied and received permission to mount two shows curated from the DeWoody collection. The first was 2015's "[The Triumph of Love: Beth Rudin DeWoody Collects](#)," which featured witty sculpture and drawings plus paintings, mixed media works and more which filled two galleries at the Palm Beach museum. There was even a decked out disco Airstream trailer by Randy Polumbo' (*Love Stream #2*) parked outside to set the mood for the show presented inside. Click [here](#) to see some installation images.

The second exhibition, "Still/Moving: Photographs and Video Art from the DeWoody Collection," opened on February 7 and remains on view through May 15, 2016. The show features more than 200 works selected from a collection of around 3,000 photograph and video-based art works. During a press preview tour of the Norton show on February 7, 2016, curator Tim Wride remarked, "DeWoody has so much work and much of it is in storage. I was pulling items from the collection she had not seen in a while and some she had forgotten she even had."

The idea that DeWoody might have forgotten any pieces in her collection seems hard to believe, considering some of the images on view are among the most famous photos in American art history. New York—as subject matter, locale and hometown—is a significant feature in much of the art, which includes photography and images made by [Andy Warhol](#), Cindy Sherman, Peter Beard, Tseng Kwong Chi and Marcia Resnick.



Photograph by Marcia Resnick.

“The challenge here was to find the clear threads of the collection,” said Wride. “It was also important to me to define who Beth is as a collector, and as a New Yorker. She is very into fashion, contemporary art, and has a very classic eye, which is fun to play off against some of her more quirky pieces. She’s a real risk taker in what she collects, she likes to pair the known with the unknown by being fearless and democratic. She has the ability to place art into context as she has lived it and collected it since the 1970s.”

As a press release on the “Still/Moving” exhibit points out, works from the late 19th century share wall space with images from the 21st. Early 20th-century fashion and celebrity photography, the basis for many of the most innovative ideas of portraiture and narrative, are an important part of the collection.

Portraits and self-portraits by well-known photographers are also important features of the exhibition. A self-portrait by British fashion photographer Cecil Beaton shows him with elaborate backdrops and props, a sly smile on his face. New York self-portrait specialist Cindy Sherman has some extremely early work here, from 1977 when she had not quite developed her signature style. And Chinese conceptual artist Tseng Kwong Chi—whose soaring self-portraits against gleaming towers in Manhattan and other massive structures have been shown widely—is also represented.



Photograph by Tseng Kwong Chi.

Also pulled from the DeWoody collection are some of Andy Warhol’s famous Polaroids of Liza Minelli, Halston, and his own scarred torso.

Chronicler of New York’s downtown punk scene Marcia Resnick has an early work here as well, one of a series she made of pairing sentences with arresting, unusual female images.

As a side note for Resnick fans, the artist’s rock and roll punk portraits of Iggy Pop, Johnny Thunders, John Belushi and many more are included in *Punks, Poets and Provocateurs, NYC Bad Boys 1977-1982*, a new book of her work published by Insight Editions. An [exhibition](#) with the same title, featuring signed contemporary silver prints and large archival pigment prints of images from the book, is on view through the end of February 2016 at [How! Happening](#) at 6 East 1st Street in New York.

DeWoody’s collecting tastes also include classic imagery from artists like the photographer [Irving Penn](#). The “Still/Moving” exhibition has a great grouping of his work, including Penn’s portraits of the Duchess of Windsor and Truman Capote.

The artists to whom DeWoody is drawn are “those who take the greatest visual and intellectual risks; their art, in turn, demands a commensurate amount of risk from the viewer.” In line with this assertion, Wride has made some smart curatorial choices here, with groupings of early black and white fashion images leading into bolder color work from different eras.

A personal favorite is the acrylic and gold strapped stiletto shoe worn on a foot with a dirty heel by [Marilyn Minter](#), a wickedly cool image of female sexuality and contrast.



Photograph by Marilyn Minter.

The works in the exhibition are presented and framed in different ways; some pieces were matted and framed and some were not. The eclectic presentation extends to video: some works with audio accessed from either hanging headphones or through Bluetooth on an iPhone.

Videos are scattered throughout the museum, positioned thematically to make sense in their surroundings. One video, of a singing cartoon fish, is amusingly hung in the glass enclosed room facing the front of the museum with a waterfall behind it outside and beautiful undersea glass creatures by Dale Chihuly hanging above it. Another large video of flickering movie images dominates the atrium.

The energy and edginess of New York’s art world, nightlife and celebrity culture through the decades can be felt strongly here, a tropical show with a Gotham state of mind.

BASIC FACTS: “Still/Moving: Photographs and Video Art from the DeWoody Collection” is on view from February 7 to May 15, 2016 at the Norton Museum of Art. The museum is located at 1451 S Olive Ave, West Palm Beach, FL 33401. www.Norton.org.

To see images from “The Triumph of Love: Beth Rudin DeWoody Collects,” on view at the Norton in 2015, click our slideshow:

[View Slideshow](#)

A selection of West Coast artists in the DeWoody collection, “[EST-3: Southern California in New York-Los Angeles art from the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection](#)” was exhibited in The Hamptons in 2012 at the Parrish Art Museum in its former Jobs Lane location in Southampton, N.Y.

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