



ART REVIEW: Irreverent Text-Obsessed Art by Cisco Jiménez Charts Multiple Pathways

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by Elisa Turner

It's old news that large, capacious buildings established by Miami's prominent art collectors to showcase their own holdings have inspired the term "Miami model."

But in Miami there's another collector-run space operating well beyond the highly-publicized, museum-competitive territory carved out by [Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz](#), [Martin Margulies](#), [the Rubell Family](#) and [Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation](#). This one is much smaller and easy to miss when heady days of "Baselmania" ricochet across the calendar during Miami Art Week. Yet for serious art lovers, it's worth investigating.

This would be the [Farside Gallery](#), operated by collectors Arturo and Liza Mosquera since 2007, and located not far from the Frost Art Museum of Florida International University. The gallery has hosted exhibitions by an international roster of artists hailing from New York, Buenos Aires, Paris, Costa Rica and Mexico, as well as artists based in South Florida.

The Mosqueras' Farside Gallery is in a converted one-story home adjacent to the building housing Dr. Arturo Mosquera's orthodontic practice, where since 2000 he has exhibited a changing selection of work in a series called "Art@Work." Both programs are a tribute to the Mosqueras' passionate generosity to Miami artists and art community. These collectors make possible a steady source of intriguing complements to exhibits already presented at Miami galleries and museums.

On view now through March 6, 2016 is "Cisco Jiménez: In Advance of a Stupid Glandule." Curated by Cheryl D. Hartup, former chief curator of the [Museo de Arte de Ponce](#) in Puerto Rico, the exhibition is accompanied by a catalog with essays by Hartup and Arturo Mosquera. All the works on view are from the Mosquera Collection.

Multi-tasking, Multi-Layered Experience

In this exhibition, visitors encounter 27 works from 1996 to 2015, offering a multi-tasking, multi-layered experience. Included are paintings, works on paper, sculpture and drawings.

As for the eye-catching, peculiar title, viewers should consider "In Advance of a Stupid Glandule" an early warning for the irreverent, text-obsessed, and quizzical art to follow.

The word "glandule" sent this critic to the dictionary, as did numerous works in the show, with their curious, cartoonish mix of medical illustrations and bilingual slang. This mix is slyly incorporated

into a signature style that marries often exquisite draftsmanship and inventive collage with provocative allusions not only to dangerous, desperate conflicts spanning U.S. and Mexican borders but also to ubiquitous (if not imperialistic) American consumerism.

For example, in the excruciatingly detailed *Bossa Nova Painting*, Jimenez depicts a cross-section diagram of cutaneous tissue with hair follicles, veins, and arteries. Bilingual text in English and Spanish give this apparent medical illustration the surreal look of road map, with awkwardly hand-printed “signage” reading Naciones Unidas de Benetton (translates as United Nations of Benetton) and Diet Coke. Although this was painted in 1999, some of the text suggests a timely reference to the international drug trade and its notorious tunnels, one of which was used for the recent escape of the notorious “El Chapo.” These are “Narco Tunel” and “Narco Celula,” standing for “Narco Tunnel” and “Narco Cell.”



“Bossa Nova Painting” by Cisco Jiménez, 1999. Acrylic on canvas, 47 x 43 cm. Courtesy The Mosquera Collection.

Jiménez is clearly preoccupied with the metaphorical implications of cartography and the human body, with his art deftly layering intricate maps of both bodies and countries. These evoke links between connective human tissue and destructive networks of the illegal, international drug trade and conflicts at the borders that “connect” two countries.

References to Social Activism and Mexico’s Pre-Hispanic Culture

A contemporary Mexican artist who has exhibited extensively in Mexico and Latin America, as well as the United States and Europe, Jiménez embeds his art with references to social activism and the pre-Hispanic culture that distinguished 20th Century Mexican Muralism.

Discussing the exhibit’s title, curator Cheryl Hartup wrote in an email: “Cisco chose the title as an homage to Duchamp and his readymades, celebrating 100 years. A glandule is a small gland so we can’t secrete too much stupidity. The title is playful, irreverent like Dadaism, anti-art, absurdity. Cisco’s philosophy of art, I believe, has always embraced Duchamp’s concept of the readymade—anybody can become an artist and anything can be art.”

Despite this art historical precedent, the artist’s quirky playfulness seems very much a product of the late 20th century and early 21st century. It conveys the saucy swagger of street art and rapid-fire visual cascade of social media. Tossed into this mix are updated references to wooden, hand-carved Mexican ex-votos and violent mythology animating Mexico’s pre-Hispanic culture.

Ex-votos, religious offerings to a divine figure as gratitude for difficulties resolved, are found in

many cultures, but in Mexican folk art and art history they play a particularly significant role. Often they are simple carved objects—like a miniature crutch perhaps signifying the healing of a broken leg—placed frequently at religious shrines.

Artists have alluded to these carvings in countless ways. In numerous works depicting her acute physical and emotional suffering, Frida Kahlo adapted the so-called naive or self-taught tradition of Mexican *retablos*, small narrative devotional paintings describing a personal catastrophe and its miraculous resolution and rendered with a flattened perspective.

Certainly an awareness of Mexico's rich cultural and artistic history surfaces in art by Jiménez, who was born in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1969. In this context, the flat perspective of many paintings and deliberately rough sculptural forms, in works like *Campesino* and *Cabeza*, carry allusions to Mexico's self-taught artistic traditions. What viewers get from this exhibit is a dizzying visual experience that's positively visceral. It is insouciantly charged with the past and present.



"Cabeza" by Cisco Jiménez, 1996. Carved wood and human hair, 20 x 20 x 10 cm. Courtesy The Mosquera Collection.

Consider the painting *Molleja Fractal*. Its title can be translated as "fractal gizzard." The deliberately clumsy composition is in-your-face explosive, appearing to thrust forward from a shallow, greenish background with a queasy combination of gray, fleshy forms and disintegrating fragments of geometric structures losing their mathematical precision and colorful edge.



"Molleja Fractal" by Cisco Jiménez, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 110 x 130 cm. Courtesy The Mosquera Collection.

Juxtaposing bizarre, truncated references to bodies, be they animal or human, with the fraying logic of geometrical structures is a visual strategy the artist uses to evoke a larger breakdown in the world around him.

There's a humorous cleverness to his imagery that becomes discomforting over time, such as in the sculpture *Falopium Chevrolet*. This features an actual hubcap, possibly a Duchampian reference to the iconic "Bicycle Wheel" readymade. It surely reflects the artist's training in industrial design as well as fine art. At its center is a yellow disc painted red with the forms of fallopian tubes, which are rendered in a vulnerable, delicate silhouette, posing a vigorous contrast to the gleaming metal

design of the hubcap itself.



“Falopium Chevrolet” by Cisco Jiménez, 1999. Enamel paint on sheet metal, 39 cm. in diameter. Courtesy The Mosquera Collection.

While cars are routinely branded with macho sex appeal, this surprising reference to female reproductive organs is brazenly out of kilter with predictable marketing campaigns and appears to point to hot-button, timely issues regarding sexual abuse of women.

Hartup compares the painting *Molecular Coatlicue* to “a kind of low-tech Minecraft city plan.”



“Molecular Coatlicue” by Cisco Jiménez, 2013. Collage of drawings on paper, 120 x 82 cm. Courtesy The Mosquera Collection.

Highly characteristic of the artist’s aesthetic, this painting overlaps allusions to Aztec culture with 21st Century video gaming—specifically to the geometrically structured video game [Minecraft](#).

In the Aztec pantheon, the grisly Coatlicue, who wore a necklace of hearts ripped from her victims, was the goddess of life and death. Stylized, cartoonish drawings of Aztec deities and pyramids appear throughout this elaborate composition, collaged with various drawings on paper, so that there’s no sense of scale or perspective. These drawings are layered over a map of Cologne, Germany, with streets so tiny they resemble capillaries or even molecular structures.

The effect is that viewers are immersed in a disorienting, social media-like flood of visual information.

On its website Minecraft is billed as a game in which players can work together “to create wonderful, imaginative things” although “at first people built structures to protect against nocturnal monsters.” Collaged with rectangular bits of urban detritus from Mexican and European cities, like a Lacoste clothing label, the painting appears to evoke the improvisational, forward-thinking spirit of Minecraft.

With his signature embrace of high and low art, Jiménez charts novel if sometimes obscure pathways for bridging old and ancient ways of thinking with the ever-evolving logistics of our

current era.

BASIC FACTS: “Cisco Jiménez: In Advance of a Stupid Glandule” continues through March 6, 2016 at Farside Gallery, 1305 SW 87th Avenue, Miami, Florida 33174. 305-264-3355; farsidegallery@bellsouth.net.

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