

# Common Space

October 20, 2021–  
January 23, 2022



Oolite Arts





# Common Space

Curated by Sally Eaves Hughes

*Common Space* explores the notion of space as a site for social relations and artistic production. The exhibition features works by ten international artists based in Miami, Chicago, and New York, including new commissions and site-specific installations. Through a diverse set of practices, the shared themes of architecture, the body, and language emerge as subjects and methods to reconsider the functions of space as well as the production of culture and power therein.

Several projects in the exhibition examine architecture as a container of space in which people are positioned and directed. By registering the ways we are situated and influenced by our surroundings, these works illuminate and challenge the structures that hold power over personal and shared experience. History itself is embedded in the built past. When preexisting structures and routines are opened up, positions of power are contested and reformed. Here, the body becomes a tool to reclaim space—particularly abandoned, hybrid, marginal, overlooked, or residual space.

Language plays a crucial role within social space. The words we use and their meanings are not merely ways to communicate information. They also reflect our social experience, help to construct that reality, and are the means for understanding it. As a result, culture and knowledge are often shared or denied through lived experience in common spaces.

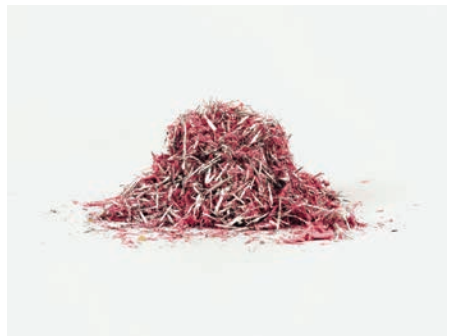
Breaking with the notion of the exhibition as a static presentation, *Common Space* bridges the gallery with studios and common rooms at Oolite Arts and integrates the activities and production of residency and visiting artists. Numerous projects also extend beyond the building and into the city of Miami. Site-specific installations and activations throughout the duration of the exhibition provide prompts for audience participation and engagement, highlighting how many of the artworks can only be completed with communal participation. Offering up multiple strategies of resistance and empowerment, the exhibition aims to be a space of conversation and shared experience.

Cover and Left: Sarah Sze, *Night*, 2003 (details)

# Bethany Collins

b. 1984, Montgomery, AL; lives in Chicago, IL

Through language—as both subject and material—Bethany Collins explores United States history and the nuances of racial and national identities. In her *Dictionaries* series, Collins utilizes the dictionary as an archival object that documents meaning at a specific time as determined by certain individuals (such as the editors at Merriam-Webster). For *Black and Blue Dictionary*, Collins isolates and erases all uses of the words “black” and “blue” from a *Webster’s New American Dictionary* published in 1965; in *Colorless Dictionary*, all mentions of “white” are obscured from the 1988 *Webster Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary*. Minimal and poetically charged, the sculptural works reveal how the rhetoric of color functions in society and alludes to colorism: discrimination against individuals with dark skin tones and privilege given to those with light skin. In *Bound*, the artist’s laborious process of erasure results in a small pile of paper and eraser residue, the material traces of language. Here, Collins alters, blurs, and destabilizes the connection between a word and its meaning, suggesting that language is a material ripe for new uses.





# Rafael Domenech

b. 1989, Havana; lives in New York and Miami



Rafael Domenech engages notions of architecture and publishing to create new pathways in which language, space, and people collide. His installation at Oolite occupies and divides the common room where the organization's library and kitchen are located, transforming the space into a labyrinthine architectural publication or, as he has stated, "objects are words in a poem, the building is the page." His *plastic sunshine-opaque transparencies* function on multiple levels: as room divider, modular sculpture, mode of display, visual poem, and venue for gathering. Inspired by Chinese folding screens, the semitranslucent panels are composed of plywood

and construction mesh, provisional materials emblematic of a changing urban landscape. Running across the top and bottom of the screens is a text written by the artist, which appears like subtitles to read and interpret the room. The artist's book objects are distributed throughout the installation, composed of urban material, photographs, and graphic poetry from his walks around New York and Miami. Utilizing a poetics of dislocation, Domenech cuts space in a gesture that invites viewers to pay attention to what is ignored—how the spaces we inhabit and their structure are active sites that impact the way we feel, move, and relate to one another.

# GeoVanna Gonzalez

b. 1989, Los Angeles; lives in Miami and Berlin



Taking the form of an experimental dance film and installation, GeoVanna Gonzalez's *lost underground* explores the role of underground spaces, specifically queer clubs. Motivated by acts of communal care, queer clubs often function as spaces for the expression and embodiment of desire, fostering intimate connections through people, music, and shared place. In Gonzalez's installation, a large architectural structure acts as a portal that both obscures the gallery space and invites people in to discover the film. By emulating the entrances of clubs, where visibility is incremental, the structure creates feelings of anticipation, play, and

release. The film itself reflects on the importance of queer clubs as conduits for liberation and self-preservation, both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The narrative centers on the dreams and memories of Akia Dorsainvil, who is known in Miami as a caretaker in the club community. A score by Yesenia Rojas guides visitors through a journey of different music samples from techno to house, R&B to ambient sounds.

Additional support  
provided by Maven  
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# Diego Gutierrez

b. 1982, Los Angeles; lives in Miami



Diego Gutierrez's installation expands the process of painting beyond the space of the studio into the gallery. Challenging the predetermined components that make up a painting, he incorporates installation and packing materials often used by art handlers, such as foam and mat board, as part of the work itself. Here, Gutierrez emphasizes the materials that typically surround a painting after it leaves the artist's studio and enters storage. He allows room for his everyday context to attach to the work in progress, from politics and pop culture to conversations and arguments while painting in the studio, hinted at in the

works' titles. Prolonging the practice of painting itself, his installation incorporates sculptures inspired by paintings that will in turn influence future works, creating an endless loop of art-making. Through this open process, Gutierrez investigates how his work exists in his studio and in a public setting where it might be activated in unexpected ways.

# Paloma Izquierdo

b. 1995, Havana; lives in Miami and New Haven

Paloma Izquierdo builds and choreographs sculptures that consider how body language and social customs expose different functions of public space. In a two-part project at Oolite and the main branch of Miami Dade Public Library, Izquierdo introduces subtle interventions into the experience of gallery and library visitors. To create her sculptures, she isolates found objects and routines, expanding or compressing their everyday functions. Frozen in time, a bronze key falls to the floor, pencils

rotate and sway, and an enlarged magnifying glass examines lost and found possessions. Utilizing a dance vocabulary, her sculptures perform, gesticulate, and keep time, inviting viewers to pay attention to actions that often go unnoticed.

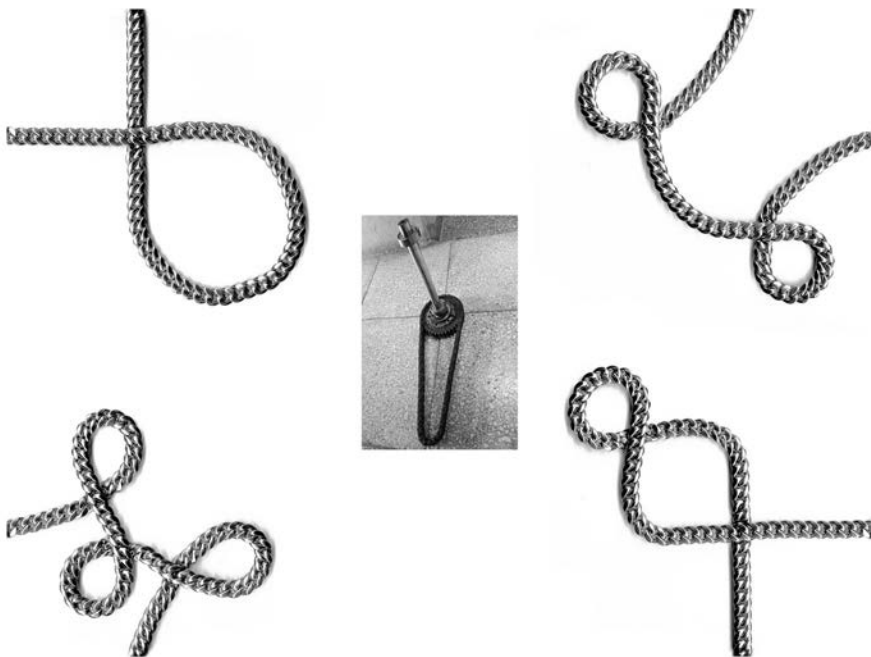




# Ernesto Oroza + Pedro Vizcaíno

b. 1968, Havana; lives in Miami and Saint-Étienne, France

b. 1966, Havana; lives in Miami

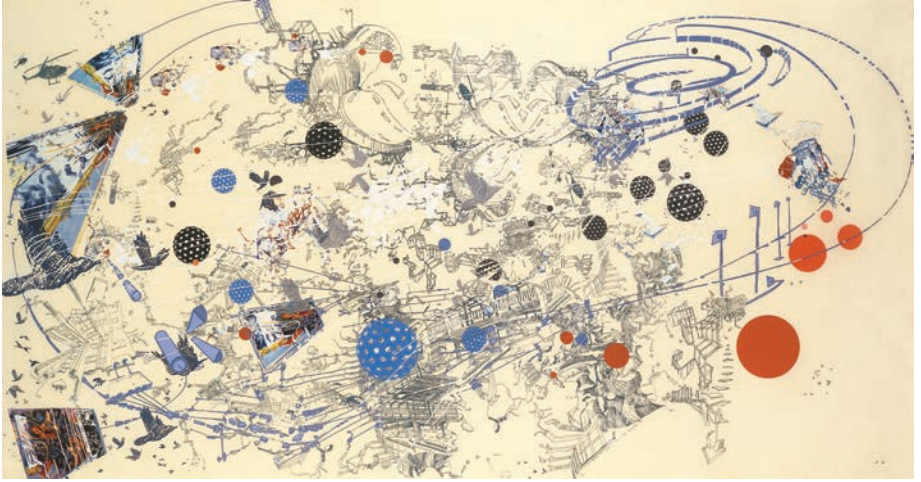


Ernesto Oroza's project *Tactical Placeholder* presents a series of newspapers as wallpaper installed along with a painting by Pedro Vizcaíno, the Cuban-born, Miami-based artist and cofounder of the influential Grupo Arte Calle. On one side of the newspaper pages is a pattern of a Cuban link chain and a photograph of a car part. Inside the tabloid, Oroza compiled text and images based on his research of the Cuban practice of repairing and inventing automobiles and other vehicles to address the country's severe transportation needs. Through reuse, repair, and hybridization, these "rikimbili" are invaded with parts and

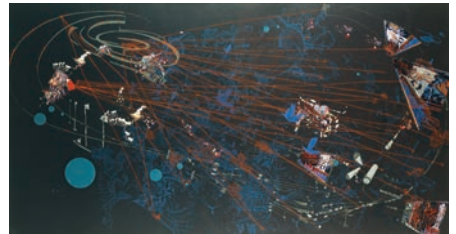
fragments from other vehicles and listed on *Revolico*, a classifieds portal for selling cars, goods, and houses online. Alongside his research, Oroza commissioned a text by curator Gean Moreno to accompany the display of Vizcaíno's painting *Roswell Greys* (2020), which presents the artist's thesis that aliens have already invaded humanity. Oroza investigates how new objects drive us to produce new languages, or what he calls an architecture of necessity, "to understand that new needs demand the emergence of new productive protocols, new ways of speaking and doing."

# Sarah Sze

b. 1969, Boston; lives in New York



Known for her intricate environments of everyday objects and images, Sarah Sze began her first graphic prints in the early 2000s. *Day and Night* present seemingly inverse systems of order, exploring abstract and architectural forms in a large-scale print format. Here, Sze breaks down and makes visible the complex layers of her spatial constructions, presenting an imaginary universe grounded in the basic components of color, form, motion, perspective, and scale. The print was produced using several techniques: screenprint for the areas of flat, dense color; digital tools to reprocess compositional aspects of preexisting works; and lithography for the hand-drawn linework.



As Sze explains, “These works investigate movement, disintegration, and disorientation. Here, I wanted to enter a two-dimensional frame and find a location that is entropic, fragmenting, spinning, and adrift. These drawings frame a fragment of a larger system that could potentially expand beyond the frame. They start from an exploration of atmosphere, fleeting situations, and environments with a specific kind of weather.”

# Rirkrit Tiravanija

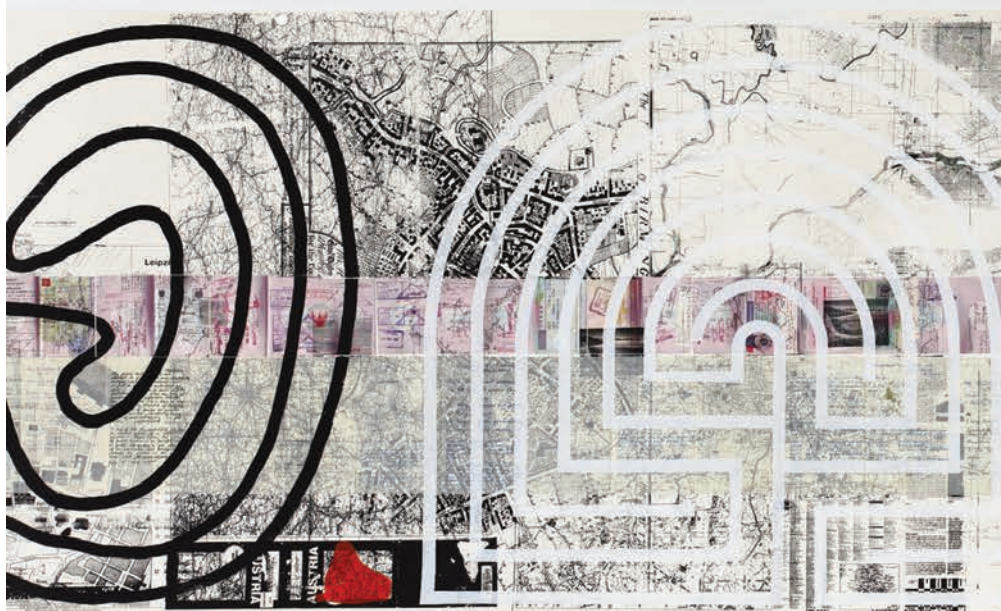
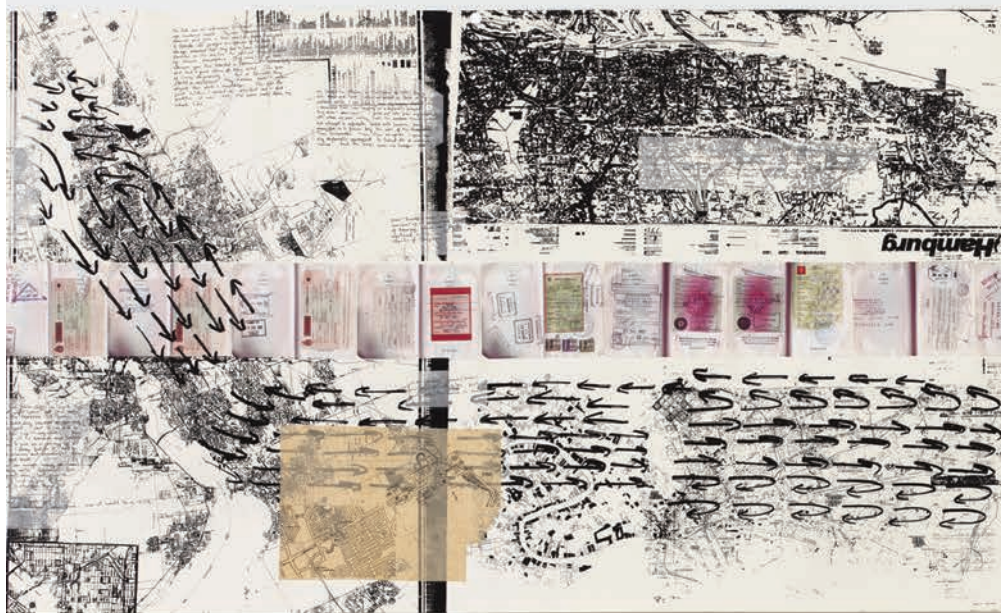
b. 1961, Buenos Aires; lives in New York

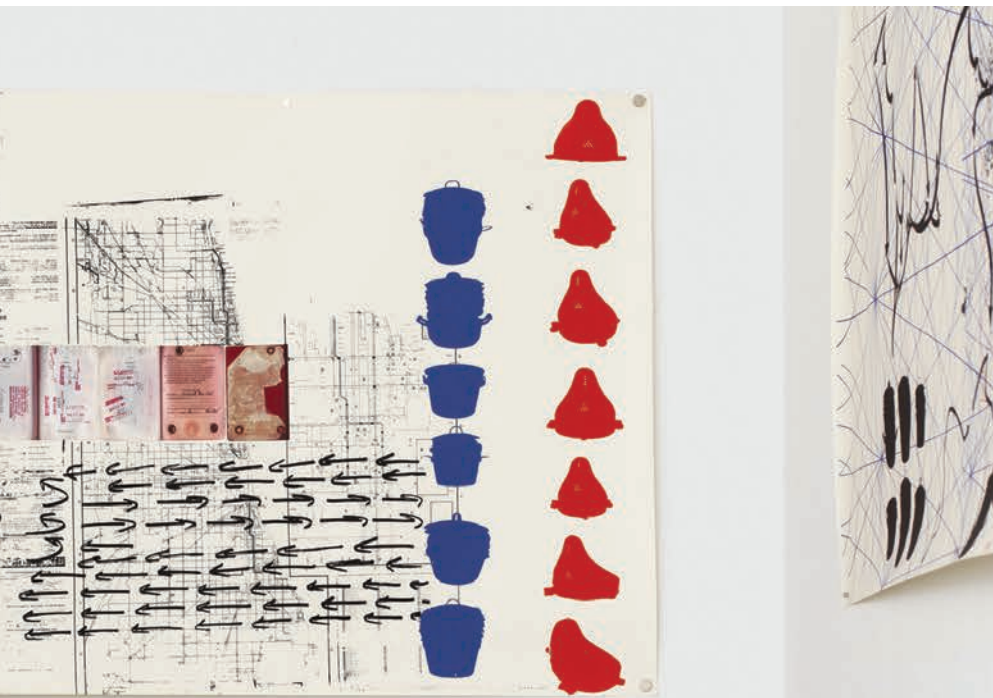


*Untitled (the map of the land of feeling)*

I-III presents twenty years of Rirkrit Tiravanija's travels and life experience as a visual narrative in three long-form scrolls. Each scroll features a print of one of three passports Tiravanija was issued between 1998 and 2008 surrounded by layered and overlapping images of maps and time zones, archeological and architectural sites, letters, notebook pages, recipes, and works of art that have been influential to his artistic development. The process of making the suite of maps was an exhaustive and collaborative undertaking that unfolded over three years and included the participation of more than forty master printers, shop managers, and students. Also on view is the large-scale work *Do We Dream Under the Same Sky*, a multi-block woodcut printed over a grid of *New York Times* pages from 2019. Here, Tiravanija combined elements of Philip Guston's paintings from the 1970s, repurposing the artist's imagery in a similarly complex, political moment of crisis.









# Rafael Vargas Bernard

b. 1979, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico; lives in Miami



In the installation *Home Theater 2*, Rafael Vargas Bernard meditates on the functions, routines, and emotional impact of home. This work consists of brightly colored wall and floor sculptures that contain live plants, including “longevity spinach” (*Gynura procumbens*) and “orégano brujo” (*Plectranthus amboinicus*), both of which have medicinal anti-inflammatory properties. Each plant is accompanied by soil moisture sensors

connected to a circuit that converts the sensor’s reading into an audible sound emitted by an adjacent speaker. Bernard encourages visitors to water the plants, affecting the moisture of the soil and the frequencies produced. Exploring the interactions between water, earth, plant, sound, and people, the installation reflects on the ways in which the spaces we inhabit impact our mental and physical health.



# Tomas Vu

b. 1963, Saigon; lives in New York



Tomas Vu creates futuristic landscapes informed by technological advances and their consequences. Immersive and complex, *Dymaxion Chronofile II* is a double-sided, site-specific painting installation comprising five aluminum panels. Utilizing printmaking as a primary method, Vu covers the work's surface with depictions of fauna, dense networks of lines, fragments of intricate worlds, and layered images of industrial machines. *Dymaxion Chronofile II* is titled after Buckminster Fuller's project in which he documented his life—saving every piece of paper he encountered, creating a massive video archive, and documenting his actions and conditions every fifteen minutes. *Dymaxion* is Fuller's portmanteau of the words *dynamic*, *maximum*, and *tension*, describing a state in which minimum energy provides maximum results. Vu picks up Fuller's

concerns by addressing surveillance, documentation, sustainability, and the relationship between nature and technology. Ultimately, his paintings are a protest against the destruction of our planet and humanity.

# Home Theater

Rafael Vargas Bernard interviewed by Laura Marsh

**Laura Marsh:** What is the title of your work for *Common Space*? How does the piece physically relate to the space at Oolite?

**Rafael Vargas Bernard:** It's a bit of a coincidence that the space is both an artist residence and gallery, and that the show is about common spaces. I've been reflecting on spaces that one is normally in a lot and the relationship to them and how that affects your daily life, who you are, how you feel, and your physical and mental health. This is all part of a series, and this piece is called *Home Theater*, which is the TV, the speakers, and the couch. It's also the theater of life that happens in your home. Your interaction with someone if you live with them, pets, yourself within the space, how you feed yourself, how you clean your house, what you're watching and listening to, and how that affects you while you're sitting in front of the TV or sound system—and filling yourself with this stimulus. How does what you are feeding yourself visually and auditorily affect you, your mental and physical health?

“Longevity spinach” is the name of the plant that rests in the chair of *Home Theater*. It's not the plant's scientific name but, rather, the colloquial name.

**LM:** I enjoy *longevity spinach* as a phrase—it could be a band name or spirit phrase.

**RVB:** That would be an awesome band name! It has superior nutritional value to kale. It doesn't have the same amount of hard, insoluble fiber. But it does have a lot of fiber, and the leaves are huge. They are two-by-three inches when they're full-size. They're kind of fuzzy, which is why people don't eat them a lot. It has a weird texture but a spicy, cinnamonony flavor to it. It's the kind of plant that can survive anywhere. It can survive droughts and doesn't need sunlight. It's a very hearty plant. Kind of what I would like to be; I'm hearty, but I'd like to be heartier, you know?

I have a tendency to survive difficult situations, and I kind of saw it that way. It really says something about health: You can care for the plant, but the plant is going to care more for you than you have to care for it with the nutrients that it gives you. This plant is sitting in this chair waiting, and it has a soil moisture sensor that generates sound relative to the moisture of the soil. So, if the plant is dry, it shoots off high frequencies that sound like emergency noises. And the more moisture in the soil, the lower the tone, which becomes more of a relaxing, stable sound. The idea is that the plant is there

waiting for you to water it, and the attractive element is the participation.

Also, when I started making the piece and as a result of the technology used, it created an electromagnetic field around the plant. If you get really close to the plant where you touch it, that affects the sound too. That added this other level of interactivity with the piece, which I believe is wonderful. I didn't expect it, and seeing people interact with it. Brush by it and it makes a weird sound, which helps them understand that they can interact with it. There's a watering can available for them to water it. This work helps you to question, in general, what's going on with you in life?

**LM:** When you bring the performances into the white cube, into the gallery for *Common Space*, you're encouraging participants to deal with dissonance. How do you help people deal with that dissonance? Is it through the inviting pastel colors and the motion sensors?

**RVB:** Aesthetically, I do use these pastel colors and cutesy style, which to me is part of the irony—it's supposed to be kitschy, campy, and ironic. That's what makes me personally happy about doing it.

It does help make the work more approachable. There's something that people can grab onto that they're already familiar with. What is challenging is how you may interact with it or the wholeness of it with the sound and participation, which is more abrasive. The non-challenging elements balance it all out. Also, the interactive piece of being able to see how the sound is created and know that your action propels a reaction from the artwork itself, which makes it more welcoming as well. You are a part of it. You're the one who helped create this abrasive sound or moment. Then it becomes something more relatable, and you can start thinking about why it's the way that it is: Why did I do it, why this element, why is this the title, why is this the way that I'm interacting with it? Why does the sound make me feel this way?



# Checklist

## Bethany Collins

*Black and Blue Dictionary*, 2014. Found Webster's New American Dictionary (1965) with "black" and "blue" terms erased,  $8\frac{1}{4} \times 10 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$  in. ( $21 \times 25.4 \times 5.7$  cm). © Bethany Collins / Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

*Colorless Dictionary*, 2015. Found Webster Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary (1988) with all mentions of "white" erased,  $9\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$  inches ( $23.5 \times 15.9 \times 6.7$  cm). © Bethany Collins / Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

*Bound 1968*, 2015. American Masters paper and Pink Pearl eraser. Dimensions variable. © Bethany Collins / Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago

## Rafael Domenech

*plastic sunshine-opaque transparencies*, 2021. Plywood, artist books and construction mesh. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

## GeoVanna Gonzalez

*lost underground*, 2021. Sculpture and video. Powder coated aluminum,  $90 \times 79 \times 6$  inches ( $228.6 \times 200.6 \times 15.3$  cm). Courtesy of the artist

## Diego Gutierrez

*Stuck in a void*, 2021. Acrylic and oil on wood.  $32\frac{1}{2} \times 44$  inches, ( $82.6 \times 111.8$  cm) Courtesy of the artist

*A sacrifice to be included in the group show*, 2021. Acrylic, oil, and oil pastel on wood,  $32\frac{1}{2} \times 44$  inches ( $82.6 \times 111.8$  cm). Courtesy of the artist

*Don't worry about me*, 2021. Acrylic, oil, oil pastel, foam and fabric on paper and wood,  $43 \times 51$  inches ( $109.2 \times 129.5$  cm). Courtesy of the artist

*There's a reason for all of this*, 2020. Acrylic, oil, fabric, wood on mat board,  $16 \times 18$  inches ( $40.6 \times 45.7$  cm). Courtesy of the artist

*I pictured a rainbow*, 2021. Acrylic, oil, oil pastel, fabric, and wood on paper and wood,  $42 \times 52$  in. ( $106.7 \times 132.1$  cm). Courtesy of the artist

## Paloma Izquierdo

*Falling key*, 2021. Bronze,  $2 \times 1 \times 11$  inches ( $5.1 \times 2.5 \times 27.9$  cm). Courtesy of the artist

*Smearred pencils*, 2021. Graphite, wood, aluminum, and rubber,  $7 \times 4 \times \frac{1}{2}$  in. ( $17.8 \times 10.2 \times 1.3$  cm) each (variable). Courtesy of the artist

*Magnifying found objects*, 2021. Walnut, plexiglass, and lost and found objects in Miami Dade Public Library,  $17\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$  inches ( $44.5 \times 54.6$  cm). Courtesy of the artist

## Ernesto Oroza + Pedro Vizcaino

*Tactical Placeholder: Ernesto Oroza (and Pedro Vizcaino)*, 2020–21. Newspaper and acrylic on linen. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

## Sarah Sze

*Day*, 2003. Offset lithograph and screenprint,  $37 \frac{3}{4} \times 71$  in. ( $95.9 \times 180.3$  cm). Courtesy of LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies

*Night*, 2003. Offset lithograph and screenprint,  $37 \frac{3}{4} \times 71$  in. ( $95.9 \times 180.3$  cm). Courtesy of LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies

## Rirkrit Tiravanija

*Untitled (the map of the land of feeling) I–III*, 2008–11. Scroll with digital printing, lithography, chine collé, and screenprint,  $36 \times 334\frac{1}{2}$  inches ( $91.4 \times 849.6$  cm) each. Courtesy of LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies

*Do We Dream Under the Same Sky*, 2019. Woodcut on digital image,  $72 \times 198$  in. ( $182.9 \times 502.9$  cm). Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist

## Rafael Vargas Bernard

*Home Theater 2*, 2021. Wood, acrylic, plants, and sound. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

## Tomas Vu

*Dymaxion Chronofile II*, 2021. Aluminum, acrylic, car paint, and wood veneer,  $39\frac{1}{2} \times 65$  inches ( $100.3 \times 165.1$  cm). Courtesy of the artist and Fredric Snitzer Gallery



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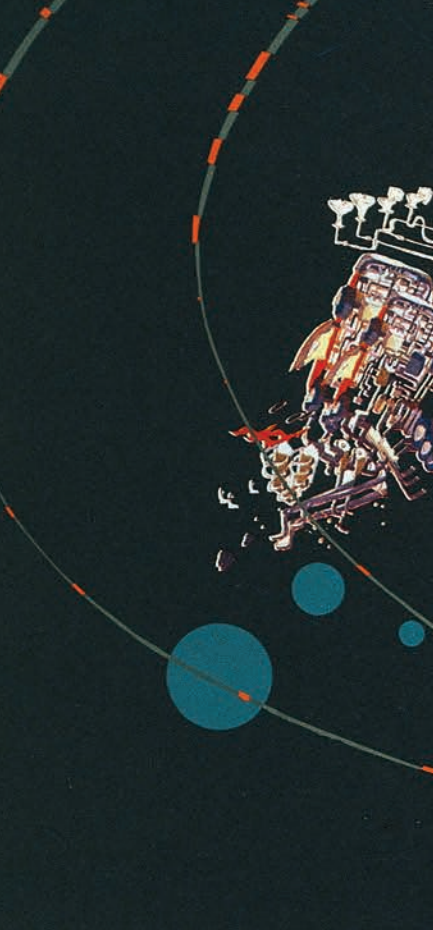
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**Special thanks** to Dennis Scholl and Rafael Domenech for the invitation; to Amanda Bradley and Samantha Ganter for their dedication and expert coordination; to Laura Marsh for her interview; and to the artists who contributed their work and vision to this exhibition.

The curator would like to acknowledge the lands and waters now known as the State of Florida, the ancestral homelands of the Calusa, Tequesta, and Mayaimi. Today the Greater Everglades are the unceded ancestral homeland cared for by the descendants of people that came to be known as the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, and the Independent Miccosukee-Simianolee.

