

Debra and Dennis Scholl
atop Jim Lambie's *Zobop*
installation at the Bass
Museum of Art

brush work

THE BASS MUSEUM OF ART'S "VANISHING POINTS" PROVES RUMORS OF MODERN PAINTING'S DEATH ARE MUCH EXAGGERATED.

BY BRETT SOKOL

Asked what kind of new museum show he most wanted to see, conceptual artist John Baldessari didn't miss a beat. The pioneer majorly responsible for popularizing the notion that modern-day painting had reached an aesthetic dead end—and who burned his own early paintings to dramatize that point—was unequivocal. **"There's so much of this 'Isn't it interesting how the kitchen door looks like a painting?' school of art,"** Baldessari told the *Los Angeles Times*. "Rather than that, I'd just like to see a painting."

Devotees of both schools will find plenty to gaze at within Miami Beach's Bass Museum of Art exhibition **"Vanishing Points: Paint and Paintings from the Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection."** There are quite a few pieces on display in the kitchen-door-as-painting category—most dramatically, Swiss artist **Sylvie Fleury's Fiat automobile, squashed flat as a pancake and given a coating of hot-pink enamel.** But there's also a gorgeous array of canvases from some of the best painters Miami has served up over the past decade: homoerotically charged tableaus from **Hernan Bas**; eye-popping abstracts from **Jacin Giordano**; portraits of teenage homeboys striking their best gangster poses from **Michael Vasquez**; industrial machinery rendered both full of power and ominously crumpled courtesy of, respectively, **John Sanchez** and **Timothy Buwalda**; and not least, a hypnotically geometric work from **José Bedia** that reminds one his skills are as effective as when he first burst upon the scene in the early '90s.

A local boy's club? Sure. And one drawn largely from the Fredric Snitzer Gallery, a pattern on the Scholls' part that speaks to Snitzer's key tastemaking role. Still, selection quibbles aside, "Vanishing Points" is ample proof that the "death of painting" trope, resurrected every generation and once again gaining steam, is ultimately hollow. Not that the exhibition's curator, Miamian **Gean Moreno** (an artist in his own right), has much patience with either

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side of the debate. “Saying painting is dead is as meaningless as saying painting is ‘in,’” Moreno scoffs. “You need to find some nuance, some middle ground, and start talking specifics. That’s the problem with this argument that crops up every five years. **There are examples of every medium that make it seem ridiculous, and other examples that make it seem viable.**”

Don’t look for Dennis Scholl to take sides, either. He’s happy to see these dueling facets of his collection duke it out for attention. “In some bifurcated, schizophrenic way, we’ve managed to carry these two themes forward,” Scholl says. **“It’s not just all edge. But it’s not just all raw emotion either.”** And don’t try to neatly divide these varying approaches between husband and wife. “It’s not me versus Debra, because we’ve been collecting together for so long. These two things balance each other out for us.”

Still, it’s hard not to notice that most of that messy emotion is contained in the work of the exhibition’s Miami painters. The more clinical stylists, and those who make art about art, are largely out-of-towners. “Could it be the lack of a hardcore MFA art program in Miami?” Scholl muses. **“It’s like going to law school—they beat any weakness out of you and you become what the art world wants you to become.** Miami has been more like a vacuum.... I’m troubled by the fact that there isn’t an MFA program here of note, but I wonder if it also isn’t a blessing that’s allowed Miami to be different.”

This is more than a merely academic question for Scholl. Since becoming vice president of the **Knight Foundation’s arts program** in 2009, he’s overseen the awarding of millions of dollars in grant money—including \$1.8 million set aside for Art + Research, a **Craig Robins-helmed (and still unopened) post-graduate art school** to be run out of Robins’ Design District properties under the auspices of the University of Miami.

SEE IT

 “Vanishing Points” runs through October 30 at the Bass Museum of Art, 2100 Collins Ave., Miami Beach. For more information, visit bassmuseum.org or call 305-673-7530.



Untitled, Michael Vasquez, 2007



Home, John Sanchez, 2006

Bass Museum volunteers install Zobop by hand.



“We’ve managed to keep our collecting experience segregated from what I do at the Knight,” Scholl says. “There’s no question I bring that experience to the process, but the only real impact it’s had on our collecting is time.” He continues with a sigh: “I work all the time. I love what I do—that’s not a complaint. It’s a huge opportunity to be impactful in the philanthropy of the art world. But I don’t get to look at art as much anymore.” The Scholls’ solution? “We’ve compartmentalized—all we’re collecting now is aboriginal art and drawings, nothing else.”

Well, *almost* nothing else. With a chuckle, Scholl recalls a recent visit to Chicago where the couple dropped in on the Kavi Gupta Gallery and a sculpture show by that city’s **Theaster Gates** riffing on the legacy of the ’60s civil rights movement. **“It was like getting hit by lightning!”** Scholl enthuses. “I looked at Debra and said, ‘This is it!’

“She said, ‘I know!’

“But we don’t collect sculpture anymore. We only collect contemporary drawings and aboriginal paintings.”

“I know!”

“So I asked her if she wanted to buy one or two.” **OD**

E-mail: brett@oceandrive.com

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