

VISUAL ARTS



AT THE FROST ART MUSEUM: Ursula von Rydingsvard's 'Weeping Plates' (2005).

MICHAEL BODYCOMB

THE BIG PICTURE

THREE SHOWS IN SOUTH FLORIDA AIM TO CAST A WIDE NET

BY TOM AUSTIN
Special to The Miami Herald

Art is always a proposition of outsize ambition, and three exhibitions currently on view in South Florida address big-picture issues, from the natural phenomena of earth to the contemporary pervasiveness of the Internet.

At the Frost Art Museum, the new *Ursula von Rydingsvard: Sculpture* show, which originated at SculptureCenter in New York, is both philosophically and literally big. The first room of the exhibition space is dominated by the knock-'em-dead opener *Halo with a Straight Line*, (2010), a 15-foot-tall cedar piece that resembles a fissure carved out of a seaside cliff by wind and tidal surges. It's imposing and yet embracing; Gallery-goers often stand inside the sculpture for keepsake photo-ops.

An old pro, the New York-based Rydingsvard has stayed with her style of working for more than 30 years, constructing monumental sculpture made of cedar blocks. She cuts, shapes, glues and generally transmogrifies cedar into sculpture that is, at once, utterly contemporary and yet timeless, creations that could have been made by the ancients. The work feels like it has always existed and will, likely as not, also endure forever.

To the left in the first exhibition room is another monumental effort, *Krasawica II*, (1998-2001) five voluptuous six-foot-high bowls lined up along the wall. Of Polish and Ukrainian descent, Rydingsvard has named this piece after the Ukrainian term for a beautiful young woman.

The second room is anchored by *Ocean Floor*, 1996, a shallow, 13-foot-across bowl comprised of cedar, graphite, and cow intestines.

The interior space entails concentric rings of sliced and glued-together cedar pieces; graphite worked into the wood adds a primal, sinister touch. Around the perimeter, tucked into crevices carved into the wood, are hanging intestine skins, stitched together and serving as visceral anchors. Rydingsvard is the daughter of poor farmers who used every part of slaughtered animals, and the use of animal intestines is a nod to her past. On the wall is *Weeping Plates*, (2005), slats of cedar forming plates, with cedar chunks — the tears of the piece — hanging underneath; the reference to domestic life is completed with *Finger Spoon, I* (2007), an eight-foot-long hanging spoon.

Rydingsvard was at the Frost recently, and chalked up much of her work — which feels almost geological — to cedar itself, "It's soft and sensuous, and nothing I know speaks more clearly as a raw material."

CHRISTY GAST

Across town, at Gallery Diet, Miami-based artist Christy Gast — a veteran of such group shows as MAM's *The Wilderness* and a highlight of the 2005 MoMA/P.S.1 *Performa* — has also mounted a show with a visceral edge. Her work often references the landscape of Florida, and in *Out of Place* — her second solo show at Diet — she uses burlap to add a note of strength and power. Gast



SILVIA ROS

AT GALLERY DIET: Christy Gast's 'Esterio' (2012).

also incorporates two unusual and seemingly contradictory departure points, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Daniel Buren's *The Function of the Studio*, which examines the notion of artists working outside their studios.

The pieces in the Gallery Diet are copies of smaller assemblages she has created in her own studio, with much of the work being drawn from real life locations. *Redland* (2012), is a burlap and cotton

piece, inspired by a feedbag Gast found in the Redlands. *Weeki Wachee* (2012) is a triangle-shaped piece, with outcroppings of cotton that resemble barnacles. *Walkabout* (2012) is a burlap, cotton, and newsprint piece that rises out of a burlap cowboy hat on the floor, a piece that brings to mind Florida Cracker life. Her inspirations outside the studio also include such far-flung locations as Tierra del Fuego: *Sarmiento* (2012), a hanging wall sculpture that has the contours of a hollow iceberg, is taken from a sighting of a mountain in Tierra del Fuego.

But Gast is ultimately a Florida girl, and *Esterio* (2012) a piece in the shape of an inverted triangle, sort of an abstract Virgin Mary, refers to a chunk of Florida lore, the cult Utopian community Koreshan Unity in Estero on the Gulf Coast, now the Koreshan State Historic Site. Founded in 1894 as a New Jerusalem by an odd assortment of artists, writers, and eccentrics the Koreshans were celibate, given to mounting curious performances, and believed in the idea that the earth was hollow: Mankind lived *inside* the earth.

For Gast, reached by telephone, the Koreshan artists were perfectly contemporary: "I loved their hubris, the notion that artists can turn everything that is commonly believed inside out."

JILLIAN MAYER

At Miami Beach's Bass Museum of Art, the Miami-based Jillian Mayer — a bright young thing in local video art circles — is showing *Erasey Page*. Mayer is adept at new media forums like YouTube: her short film *I Am Your Grandma*, with Mayer donning bizarre costumes, had more than a million views on the site. *Scenic Jogging*, a

video that entailed Mayer chasing projected screensavers in Wynwood, was in the Guggenheim show *YouTube Play*.

Erasey Page, done in collaboration with graphic designer Eric Schoenborn, is contained in a small alcove by the rear entrance of the Bass. In the interactive installation, Mayer bites the hand that feeds her. She casts herself on a wall-mounted screen as an Infomercial star ("... Do you dislike the idea of space and cyber?") and encourages viewers to type in any web address on the keyboard that's part of the installation. The respective web page comes up and then seems to fade away.

Despite all the jokes, Mayer is taking on a seriously outsize ambition, the role of virtual — as opposed to real — life in the modern world. The piece ends with Mayer's salute to gallery-goers for casting off the yoke of the Internet, though Mayer, interviewed via telephone, is interested in "technological singularity, this whole movement to Internet immersion, where no lines are drawn between off-line and on-line life. I have a natural fear of all that, but I like the idea of human upgrades."

If you go

'Ursula von Rydingsvard: Sculpture'

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Closed Monday, through Aug. 5.

Where: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum at Florida International University, 10975 SW 17th St., Miami

How much: Free
Info: 305-348-2890; www.thefrost.fiu.edu

'Christy Gast: Out of Place'

When: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, through May 12

Where: Gallery Diet, 174 NW 23rd St., Miami

How much: Free
Info: 305-571-2288; www.gallerydiet.com

'Erasey Page'

When: 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, through Aug. 12.

Where: Bass Museum of Art, 2100 Collins Ave, Miami Beach

How much: Adults, \$8; students and seniors, \$6
Info: 305-673-7530; www.bassmuseum.org



AT THE BASS MUSEUM: Jillian Mayer's 'Erasey Page' was created in collaboration with graphic designer Eric Schoenborn.