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The Pérez Art Museum Miami Is Closed, But It Still Went on a Buying Spree at Local Miami Art Galleries

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Myrlande Constant, *Exorcism* (1994–2019). Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami.

The lockdown era has put a strain on nearly every part of the art ecosystem. In Miami, one museum has developed a small but significant way to help shore up the artists and galleries in its own backyard.

The Pérez Art Museum Miami has just purchased eight artworks from local galleries for the museum's collection, beefing up its holdings of rising stars while offering a much-needed influx of cash to shuttered galleries and the artists they represent.

The acquisition, made by the museum's Collectors Council, represents the largest number of works purchased in a single session of the committee since its inception 15 years ago. (The committee typically meets three times a year to fund and discuss proposed acquisitions.)

The museum decided in mid-March, right around the time it closed its doors, that it would dedicate this round of acquisitions to local galleries. Many of the works were already on the curatorial staff's radar, but some required last-minute appointment viewings just as Miami was closing down. By the time the committee weighed in virtually, "all the curators had seen everything, and I had seen a few," Franklin Sirmans, the Pérez Art Museum's director, told Artnet News.

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The participating patrons were thoroughly convinced. “We went into the meeting with a budget of \$105,000 and walked out with \$145,000 worth of artwork,” Sirmans said.

The acquisitions were made from Miami galleries including Spinello Projects, Central Fine, and Nina Johnson. The haul comprises a 2019 multimedia assemblage by Miami-based artist Yanira Collado; an adorned flag by Myrlande Constant, whose work blends Haitian Vodou myths with contemporary concerns; a large sculpture by Lucia Hierro that addresses the political, economic, and social history of sugar; a musical sculpture by Naama Tsabar; and works by Conrad Egyir, Viktor El-Saieh, Kelley Johnson, and Eamon Oré-Girón.

The museum has had to make some difficult decisions of its own during the lockdown. Last month, 15 of the museum’s 120 full- and part-time employees were terminated and another 54 were furloughed. The remaining 49 staff members are taking five to 15 percent salary cuts. The museum estimates it will lose between \$3 million and \$5 million in revenue this year (about 20 to 30 percent of its annual total). It currently expects to reopen in September.