

# The Miami Herald

#MeToo is as Old as the Bible.

This Show Proves It.

By Siobhan Morrissey, *Special to the Miami Herald*

May 13, 2018 07:00 AM

Updated May 11, 2018 02:09 PM

They warned her she would be ruined if she breathed a word about what they had done to her. When she refused their demands and denounced the two old men for attacking her in her own bathroom, she was the one sentenced to death for adultery.

While the incident reportedly happened in Babylon in sixth century B.C. and is recorded in the Old Testament Book of Daniel, Baroque painter Sisto Badalocchio's depiction of events is just as timely today. One need look no further than the rampant allegations of abuse recently reported by women the world over via #MeToo.

In Badalocchio's "Susannah and the Elders," the victim is seen cowering and clutching a sheet to her naked breast while two fully clothed men hover over her. One holds a finger to his mouth in an effort to make her complicit through her silence, while the other appears ready to carry her off. (Spoiler alert: young Daniel witnessed what happened and after he spoke up, Susannah avoided execution.)



"Salome" by Robert Henri (1909), oil on canvas. From the show "Dangerous Women" at the Frost Art Museum at Florida International Museum through May 20, 2018.

**Courtesy of Frost Art Museum**

The painting, which is on loan from Sarasota's John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, is part of the "Dangerous Women" exhibition on view through May 20 at the Frost Art Museum.

"It's very timely," says Frost Museum Director Jordana Pomeroy. "I actually thought of date rape, since we're on a campus. This whole idea of she seduced me, she wanted it — this is an age-old story between men and women."

Pomeroy says the idea for the exhibition grew out of a desire to bring Old Masters paintings to Miami.

"I can't afford to borrow works from Europe or The Met (in New York)," she said. So, she called The Ringling. Circus impresario and art collector John Ringling, at the time of his death in 1936, had amassed an art collection then worth \$20 million – and was believed to have assembled the finest collection in the world of paintings by Baroque master Peter Paul Rubens. Fortunately for the Frost, the curator at The Ringling had the germ of an idea for the exhibition and the artwork became available when the museum underwent renovations.

The collection – and exhibition – includes sexually suggestive art, where women often are portrayed as the temptress who overpowers men with sexuality, intellect and beauty. "It's an old story about sometimes uncomfortable relationships between men and women and sexuality and how it's played a part in stories told about women in the Bible and in classical antiquity," Pomeroy says.

Throughout history, men have claimed to be overwhelmed by women, blaming their own bad behavior on their attraction to women, further victimizing and stigmatizing women in the process.

Often, physical beauty is the least compelling component of the relationship, says Pomeroy. "It's not just that she's beautiful. She's powerful. She's manipulative. Her feminine wiles, which might or might not include beauty, (are alluded to in the artwork on display). She's distracting me. She got me drunk."



Fede Galizia. "Judith with the Head of Holofernes," 1596. Oil on canvas; gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Polak, From the show "Dangerous Women" at the Frost Art Museum at Florida International Museum through May 20, 2018.

**Courtesy of Frost Art Museum.**

It's no coincidence that all but two of the paintings and prints featured in the exhibitions were created by male artists. The women artists – Fede Galizia of 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy and Mickalene Thomas, a contemporary American artist – opted to show their female subjects in control.

While the other works portray women with alabaster skin as the sole source of dissonance between the sexes,

Thomas's 2010 "Portrait of Mama Bush I," dispels that notion. The painting is a tribute to her mother, Sandra "Mama" Bush, a former fashion model who battled

drug addiction and sickle-cell anemia. Thomas presents her mother as a sensual odalisque, lounging provocatively in a chaise, with her breasts exposed and her right hand languorously propping up her head. It is the only woman of color in the show.

Galizia, on the other hand, shows how a man can literally lose his head when smitten by a beautiful woman.

Her oil painting from 1596 titled "Judith with the Head of Holofernes," recalls how the Assyrian general Holofernes became besotted with Judith.

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Holofernes needed to work on his seduction technique, however. He was a little drunk when he invited Judith to his tent. Judith and her maidservant seized the opportunity to decapitate him with his own sword. According to the Old Testament, Judith not only avoided a night of sloppy sex, but also liberated her people in the process.



Mickalene Thomas, "Portrait of Mamma Bush." On loan from the private collection of Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz. From the show "Dangerous Women" at the Frost Art Museum at Florida International Museum through May 20, 2018.

**Courtesy of the Frost Art Museum.**

Two other versions of the headless Holofernes appear in the show. Francesco Cairo's oil painting shows Judith looking straight at the viewer while her right hand rests on the sword that is plunged through the general's throat. Vincenzo Damini has his Judith looking heavenward while holding the head aloft and exposing a neck gushing with blood.

John the Baptist's severed head also makes three appearances in the show. As the Old Testament story goes, Salome bewitched King Herod with her sinuous and seductive dancing. As a reward, the king, who was also her stepfather, granted Salome one wish. She chose John's head as her prize.

In Bartolomeo Coriolano's 1631 woodcut depiction, Salome and her mother pose behind a platter where the head rests as if it were an exotic entrée. Palma Vecchio puts Salome's mother, Herodias, in the forefront of his painting and keeps the young dancer in the shadows, portraying John's death as payback for his criticism of Herodias' marriage to King Harod. Guido Reni, on the other hand, puts Salome front and center, with her right hand firmly grasping John's hair while a page boy offers up the head on a gold platter.

American artist Robert Henri erases any pretext as to naivete on the part of Salome. Henri shows Salome with a bare mid-drift and sheer black maxi skirt, in full stride with the arrogance and elegance of youth. A tribute to Richard Strauss's opera "Salome," which was based on Oscar Wilde's play and banned after one show, Henri's 1909 painting highlights Salome's sexuality and cruel indifference. Although unable to see the solo performance, Henri invited the star of the show, Mademoiselle Voclezca, to

reenact the Dance of the Seven Veils while he painted her portrait in his studio.

## **OUTSIDER ART SHOW**



Jorge Alberto Hernandez Cadi (El Buzo), Untitled, no date. From "Outsider Artists from Havana" at the Frost Art Museum through June 3, 2018.

**Courtesy of Frost Art Museum**

While "Dangerous Women" on the second floor is the headliner exhibit at the Frost, any visitor would be well served to take in the remaining two shows on the first and third floors.

"Outsider Artists from Havana" on the first floor is a delightful show featuring two Cuban artists recognized for their excellence in outsider art: Misleidys Castillo and Jorge Alberto Hernández Cadi.

Art critic Roger Cardinal coined the term "outsider art" in 1972 to reflect those works created outside the mainstream art world, typically by untrained individuals. The artists in this instance is akin to an aeolian harp that seemingly channels creativity from a universal source.

"With these two artists, they're actually fairly well-known both in Havana and elsewhere," Pomeroy says.

In fact, Castillo has shown at NADA during Art Basel. "When you look at it, if you didn't read the text, it looks like a lot of contemporary art. It doesn't scream 'outsider' or self-taught," Pomeroy says.

Castillo is reportedly deaf, mute and autistic. Hernández, who is known as *El Buzo* – which, depending on the translation, can mean diver, frogman, scavenger or boiler suit – was reportedly diagnosed as bipolar and schizophrenic. Their show, which runs through June 3, was produced in conjunction with the National Art Exhibitions of the Mentally Ill Foundation, the Frost Art Museum and FIU the psychiatry department.

Castillo creates cartoonish figural renderings in bright, cheerful colors. They are instantly recognizable in that often depict body-builders in briefs and the artist uses numerous strips of tan tape to hold the images in place.

Hernández, on the other hand, meticulously cuts out heads and eyes from black-and-white photographs. He creates curio boxes that include these



pasted images on the covers or tucked away inside. Sometimes he stitches thread around these images or draws a companion image, such as a shadow, devil horns or forked tongues.

## LAURA AGUILAR



"Plush Pony #15," 1992. From "Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell" at the Frost Art Museum through June 3, 2018.  
Courtesy of Frost Art Museum.

This show will blow you away. Not only is it the artist's swan song – she died on April 25 in a California nursing home – but also it is a poignant retrospective spanning some three decades.

A fifth-generation Chicana, Aguilar also exhibited at the Venice Biennale, the Smithsonian Institution and the International Center of Photography. She was 58.

Large, lesbian and Latina, Aguilar captured the essence of isolation in

her stark black-and-white portraits, both of herself and others in the

LGBTQ community. But as with all great art, her images transcend those portrayed and touch on the universal theme of the need to be connected to others in life. This is a show for anyone who has ever felt remotely alienated in this world. At one time or another, that's just about all of us.

"Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell" heart-breakingly showcases people who once felt less than worthy because of the color of their skin, their nationality, their body shape or size, their gender, their sexuality.

Included in the more than 100 black-and-white photographs produced over three decades is a video in which Aguilar speaks so openly of the psychic pain caused by the simple yearning for human touch. One is reminded of the elderly or shut-ins that no one visits, the refrain from "Eleanor Rigby" regarding all the lonely people or Hank Williams warbling *"I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry."*

Aguilar was morbidly obese, and one gets the sense that she believed she lost all value as a person in a society obsessed with outer beauty. Worse, she seemed to have internalized that lack of value.

And yet, when Aguilar immersed her naked self into nature, her beauty became unmistakable. As she huddled into the fetal position, her body mimicked surrounding desert boulders.

She was one with the earth.



Laura Aguilar, "At Home with the Nortés," 1990. From "Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell" at the Frost Art Museum through June 3, 2018.

**Courtesy of Frost Art Museum**

## **IF YOU GO**

**What:** "Dangerous Women, Selections from the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art" of Sarasota, in collaboration with the Frost Art Museum in Miami and the Cornell Fine Arts Museum in Winter Park. Through May 20.

"Outsider Artists from Havana," a project managed by the National Art Exhibitions of the Mentally Ill Foundation in collaboration with the Frost Art Museum and the administrative staff from the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Health at FIU, and curated by Claudia Taboada in collaboration with NAEMI. Through June 3.

"Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell," a retrospective of the photographer's work organized by the Vincent Price Art Museum in collaboration with the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, and guest curated by Sybil Venegas. Through June 3.

**Where:** The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum at Florida International University, [10975 SW 17<sup>th</sup> Street](#), Miami.

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. ,Tuesday-Saturday; Noon-5 p.m. on Sunday. Free.

**Info:** 305-348-2890; [www.thefrost.fiu.edu](http://www.thefrost.fiu.edu)



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