

ArtsBeat

Artist-Run Gallery Finds a Home on Miami Dade College Campus



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Frances Trombly and Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova in the new Miami Dade College building housing Dimensions Variable.

FRANCESCO CASALE

By **BRETT SOKOL**

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The wary tango between Miami artists and its real estate developers has welcomed a new dance partner. Dimensions Variable, a highly regarded artist-run alternative exhibition space, has ended its search for a fourth location in six years.

Its home come September will be the nearly 3,000 square foot Centre Gallery on the downtown campus of Miami Dade College, the largest community college in the country, with over 165,000 students. Its new agreement with Dimensions Variable includes an eight-year lease rent-free, as well as the promise of programming independence for the husband-and-wife duo, the artists Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova and Frances Trombly, who have run the venue since its beginnings in 2009.

“It’s not just about providing space, anyone can do that; it’s nurturing the arts,” Eduardo Padrón, the president of Miami Dade College, said. “Instead of Dimensions Variable having to move to an isolated place, they will be in the midst of thousands of students who will benefit from the exposure and all the new possibilities that result.”

Dr. Padrón said he believed the College’s rent-free deal could help anchor an increasingly atomized art scene, especially in Wynwood, a nearby neighborhood “with the rising rents and the total displacement of artists.” This model of an urban school pairing with local artists is one he hopes will spread far beyond South Florida.

Mr. Rodriguez-Casanova and Ms. Trombly said they were excited to have long-term security as they continued their mission of presenting work by both emerging international figures and Miami’s lesser-known but vital talent — an exhibition roster that has included the painters Lynne Golub Gelfman and Jenny Brillhart, and the performance artist Magnus Sigurdarson.

“Galleries are addressing the market directly,” Mr. Rodriguez-Casanova said. “Museums are also catering to larger interests, bringing in blockbusters and the big names collectors are already interested in.” But the artists that will one day show at the Pérez Art Museum Miami and “be represented at the biggest galleries have to come from somewhere,” he said. “They have to get a chance to experiment.”

During the comparatively sleepy cultural era of the 1970s and 1980s, long before Art Basel Miami Beach arrived, the college’s Centre Gallery was a focal point for the city’s homegrown artists then struggling for attention. This past is now literally being excavated. “You wouldn’t believe how many holes and old screws there are in the back of the walls,” Mr. Rodriguez-Casanova said of the Gallery’s evidence of long-ago hung artwork.

Dimensions Variable’s reopening will feature a show by the Colombian artist Leyla Cárdenas, who will use detritus from the space’s renovation to create an installation invoking the site’s history — and hopefully engaging with younger generations entirely unaware of it. “Dimensions Variable started with the premise that being an artist was about more than locking yourself in a room and creating something by yourself,” Ms. Trombly said. “There’s so many amazing, intimate things that happen when artists interact with other people — and when they get the support to do that.”