

CARLOS ROLÓN/DZINE

Oakland University Art Gallery





Detail: *Imperial Nail Salon*
(*My Parents' Living Room*, 1976), 2013
Mixed media | Photo: Nathan Keay

THE COMMONWEALTH OF CARLOS ROLÓN/DZINE

Carlos Rolón was born in Chicago of Puerto Rican parents in 1970, and the tendency has been to alight upon this fact as the single denominating characteristic of his work – like a headlining brand, if you will – but this identification does not fully capture the artist’s almost psychic ability to synthesize and fuse genres from a multitude of extant cultural sources. The potentiality, particularity and lushness of the subject matter he employs are drawn from a variety of experiences and places.

To suggest a pre-existing framework for consideration of Rolón’s work would be the antithesis of the pluralities that inform his art and subject matter. As such, Rolón operates as his own protagonist and is the author and conductor of these various trajectories that result in art objects and environments that allow us to enter (and be welcomed) into his world.

A quantum of his practice is deeply informed by a postcolonial vantage point, his sense of and relationship with the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, and a distinctive autobiography. The philosophical well of his work tells us that one’s commitment to one’s culture, which begins with family, is the only true driver in creating integrity and veracity. The emotional and intellectual substrate in his artistic practice is his personal history, which he makes universal through his work, and which is anything but ambiguous. Because of this, the work and its language are able to be understood on a global sphere.

Rolón’s promiscuous use of art history as a fountainhead to be collected from, appropriated and fragmented parallels and supports his way of working.

Personal connections and intimate histories, along with the materials and textures from periods of influence (often from the artist’s own life), perform as references that encourage the viewer to become at one with the enveloping non-linear narrative of his experience. He is committed to re-imagining and aligning ideas and cultures to a level of timeless luxury available to everyone.

Examining Rolón’s work in the context of the world as it exists in 2016 relies on implicit, subconscious information filtered from expansive cultures and civilizations. The fusing of thousands of years of art history, and in more contemporary times, the biography and work of previous generations of artists, and even commercial art, allows the viewer to travel, albeit unknowingly, all through time at once. This implies an evolution of thought that calls for a taxonomic knowledge of history, ethical consideration for the outcomes of such, and, ultimately, a desire for equality which is driven by scrupulous awareness of past injustices.

Using this dialectic surrounding the *Meta*, Rolón’s approach to art-making is embodied in his being extremely specific about each idea that interests him, and in seeing that idea through to materialization. It can be argued then, that one of the reasons that the casual dogma of ambiguity (so central to postmodernism) does not consistently exist in his work is because it is too unstable and unspecific a platform from which to launch. That is to say, an ambiguous artwork is a hermeneutic interface which can only reflect back the viewer’s subjective position. However, when a work’s position and intention are crystal clear, it forces change, crushes complacency and leads the viewer, educating them and showing them potentiality.

These considerations offer a means to look and think about contemporary art in a more contained, ordered, taxonomical way than the sweeping multifarious, miscellaneous viewpoints of postmodernism. Metamodernism, with its implied articulate vigilance,

is at once pluralistic and postcolonial in its outlook, while also containing within its sphere of ideas an articulate ethical approach to inclusivity, craft and ideology. These characteristic ingredients of ethical quality and pluralism are the most suitable entry points into examining the mechanics of Rolón’s oeuvre.

Rolón’s multidisciplinary art is, by its nature, figurative and specific. Even when a particular work at first appears to be abstract, further scrutiny will reveal the structure of a pattern that is in fact a trace back to a particular time, place or *objet de mémoire*. One is initially seduced by his exquisite finishes and intoxicating colors, but beyond this there exists a deep emotional connection with something far beyond materialism. This particularity is so specific that the way in which he manufactures his work drives a precise and meticulous artistic studio practice.

Having created multiple platforms of work, it is only appropriate that he works with a team of fabricators to facilitate his creations. His studio operates like a hi-tech production line, which reacts to the demands of his busy schedule of exhibitions. Visiting the studio, which occupies several thousand square feet across the tracks from Chicago’s Chinatown, seeing works in progress, one is acutely aware of entering a collaborative environment with a very strong leader.

One also immediately discovers that Rolón is a collector of objects. Whether it is boomboxes, masks or religious memorabilia from around the world, he is an artist immersed in the world that produced him, a world for which he has a great affection and respect. In turn, he has produced a shimmering, exacting mirror to reflect that world back to us. This mirror is real, and it projects a pure distillation, which is complete and authentic.

Rolón’s lush, dexterous, multicultural work delves into the rich traces of ancestry and the paradoxes imposed upon us by our patriarchal and/or matriarchal upbringing; Rolón gives equal time to both. He is unabashedly inclusive. This sharing is made manifest in his desire to transform or customize, or if you prefer, *personalize* sound systems, mirrors, fixtures, vessels, cars, bikes, boats – objects which stand for something because nothing is arbitrary in his work.



La Perla, 2008
Enamel, fiberglass, steel, mirror, audio and video
Deitch Projects, New York, New York | Photo: Tom Powell

He modifies objects, at times showy rococo platforms of taste, via an extreme longing made manifest in his enthusiasm for childhood recollections, remembrances of (faux) luxury and a frank, unironic affectionate retelling of what it was like, for him, growing up. Candid

enthusiasm and extreme perfectionism unite to summon works that encapsulate an entire culture unique to the artist. It is Puerto Rican. It is American. It is also a universal, international global perspective filtered through the eyes of a child growing up around the noisy rambunctiousness of his blue-collar Chicago home-away-from-home.



Trophy Room (*My Father's Basement*), 2014
Mixed media | Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, New York | Photo: Jeff Elstone

In channeling the tchotchkes, ornaments, mass-produced faux *objets d’art* – vases, light fixtures, wallpapers and textiles all remembered from childhood – which in themselves were channeling a kind of luxury attainable only via mimetic, ersatz imitations of aristocratic decoration, he has become a meticulous connoisseur of these taxonomic subgenres. And it is never a one-way street. Each time Rolón customizes an object, there is an exchange whereby he possesses the familiarity and acuity to modify any particular cultural experience. As such, he is a Kantian judge of what works in the realm of adaptation, assimilation and blending. He is in possession of the capability of revamping any cultural imperative that draws his attention.

Consider, for example, *Flea Market Botánica*, a site-specific installation and performance at the Zacheta, National Gallery of Art, Poland (2013). A botánica is a specific cultural, and for some, spiritual phenomenon. To simply call it a shop or place of commerce does not evoke the appropriate ethos, respect or understanding for the space. Usually the domain of women, mainly located within Hispanic and Latino communities, it is a place where candles of all color, featuring spiritual figures, can be acquired along with folk remedies, medicines and talismans. For an additional price one can receive a blessing, a prayer and a promise for favor in luck, love, health, protection – whatever you may need. *Flea Market Botánica*, with its pluralistic sweeping metamodern authority, is an installation, a shrine from which Rolón shares Hispanic American religious practices with the world. This concept easily crosses cultural boundaries.

Featured in his botánica are faux gilt-framed pictures of religious icons such as Jesus, Mother Mary and Pope John Paul II, tagged, wrapped in cellophane and seemingly ready for instantaneous purchase. Botánica prayer candles and other commercial objects such as T-shirts, plastic rosaries and pillows exist as comforting and familiar iconography that extend beyond a specific space or geographic culture; the Madonna and Child, the Sacred Heart and



Flea Market Botánica, 2013
Mixed media | Zacheta, National Gallery of Art, Poland
Photo: Maciej Landsberg

Christ as King operate in unison in all their bejeweled, sparkling and glittering glory.

The arrangement of the installation is composed with precise symmetry akin to an altarpiece. Fitting it is then, that the installation is focally centered on a singular plastic mass-produced sculpture of Christ in repose with live flowers flanking his head and feet. He creates this votive paradise as a visual/cultural interface that is not just for Catholics. All malefactors are welcome to explore the mystery of faith, hope and the lottery of salvation. In short, Rolón reveals the simplicity and complexity of placing one’s most sacred relationship (with one’s own God) in the hands of a shopkeeper selling wax saints with wicks coming out of their heads.

Exploring the polarity and duality of the patriarchal/matriarchal influence in Rolón’s work quickly traces to the roles played by his mother and father and his childhood home. These are particularly important sources which have not gone unacknowledged by the artist because he knows what a rich seam and fertile supply chain this has been. He has a writer’s sense that his formative years were more thematic, dramatic and exotic than those of his contemporaries, and like an omniscient protagonist he wants to share them because he knows how universally poignant and significant they are. The narrative entrails of his childhood and youth are enshrined in his objects and there is a feeling of melancholy in their embodiment; implicit in this is a conveyed feeling of the artist’s sense of loss. Often short of this loss, we, the viewer, are compelled to feel an almost inexplicable simpatico with the sentiment being conveyed. On the part of the artist, it is, in fact, a genuine attempt to share.

This sharing is manifest in Rolón’s recent pursuit of the exploration of subtle gender polarity and duality, enshrined in his masculine and/or feminine scenarios. It is exemplified in two specific areas of interest: nail culture and boxing. Nail salons, specifically pertaining to his mother’s influence, and professional boxing to his father’s. Originating from something affecting and personal, he is charged with the task of sharing these themes with the world. An important part of this process is locating how these phenomena relate contemporaneously and historically speaking to both society and art.

Rolón has created two books, one published in 2011 exploring the visual culture of nail art and the other that of boxing, printed in 2014. These demonstrate his acumen as a researcher, curator of

imagery and writer. In his second book, entitled *Boxed: A Visual History and the Art of Boxing*, he created objects and environments correlating to the theme of boxing at the Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York City, entitled *Dzine: Born Carlos Rolón, 1970*. The exhibition visually explored how the domestic and public spectacles of the sport interact.



Detail: **My Father’s Wishes**, 2014
Bronzed boxing gloves | Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, New York
Photo: Nathan Keay

At Paul Kasmin Gallery, a substantial portion of the gallery was transformed into a amalgamation of Rolón’s family’s 1970s basement recreation room, complete with shag carpet, console television and a prominent display of memorabilia, including a framed boxing robe featuring the Star of David with Hebrew text (a nod to the culture of *Marranos*, a secret society of Spanish Jews, essentially transforming a boxing robe into a Jewish prayer robe). A lone La-Z-Boy reclining chair sits beneath a chandelier, a half-gone six-pack its only adornment. It faces the television playing a loop of the iconic 1980 Roberto Durán versus Sugar Ray Leonard rematch in which the famed Panamanian (whose moniker translates into “Hands of Stone”) says “No Más” and prematurely ends the fight in the eighth round. While it is still disputed why he quit, at the time it seemed unfathomable that someone could or would walk away mid-fight. The installation enshrines how boxing can be embedded into a household setting, and it nods to the Proustian, anthropological act of making a specific cultural, historical re-creation. Seemingly perfect, and at the same time, an unbelievably shocking memory, it was re-creation in the context of Rolón’s remembrance of his and his father’s relationship and his father’s enthusiasm for the sport.

... it really wasn't so much about the sport, but rather a way to connect with my father and spend time with him. It was about being inspired by the energy and cultural identity he brought to the table. Even more so when my father's friends would visit for a cold Schlitz over well-placed vulgarities, quips and personal barbs that took place in the garage, the kitchen (my father's office) or the faux wood-paneled basement that hosted many gatherings throughout my youthful 1970s upbringing.

Carlos Rolón/Dzine: "Triumph, Failure, Beauty, Ego, Endurance, Combat and Love," *Boxed: A Visual History and the Art of Boxing*, 2014, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, New York, and Damiani Editore, Bologna, Italy, 2013 ISBN 978-88-6208-354-6

Rolón's first foray into publishing, *Nailed: The History of Nail Culture and Dzine*, came out three years prior to *Boxed*.

As a child of first-generation Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States, well paying jobs were scarce. So in order to supplement extra income, my mother created a bootleg salon in the home. I clearly remember the horrible smell of the chemicals but enjoyed hearing the women gossip about current events or personal issues while getting a makeover. I loved having people over to the house and the sense of community it created.

Carlos Rolón/Dzine, *Nailed: The History of Nail Culture and Dzine*, Standard Press, New York, New York, and Damiani Editore, Bologna, Italy, 2011 ISBN 978-88-6208-205-1



Black Widow, 2011
Acrylic, enamel on custom-crafted nails
Salon 94, New York, New York | Photo: Kai Regan

The effect of his mother's salon represents another archival trace. Rolón's nail study is both personal and historical. It intends to set the record straight. It takes into account that while nail varnishing and painting and manicures are as ubiquitously old as civilization, the subject has not enjoyed the same attentive academic coverage or the cultural gravitas as the history of boxing. Even though decisions are still argued, boxing's statistics are part of the historical record. Nails, on the other hand – and the technicians that perform the services, and their salons – until Rolón's scrutiny, had not been documented with such intimacy. As such, *Nailed* is a pluralistic introductory survey of the field, which inclines Philistines towards the possibility that nail art is indeed an art form.



Imperial Nail Salon (with Tilda Swinton), 2012
Art Basel Miami Beach, The Standard Hotel, Miami, Florida
Photo: Chris Mosier

Before popular nail trends like celebrity mani-cams or the explosion of nail selfies on Instagram, Rolón's *Imperial Nail Salon* made the theme of nail art manifest in an exhibition at Salon 94 and with his installation and performance *Imperial Nail Salon (My Parents' Living Room)*, 2012, at the Standard Hotel, Miami, during Art Basel Miami Beach, Rolón employed local nail technicians to adorn the nails of visitors in the installation (one being Academy Award-winner Tilda Swinton). Guests could customize their nails and immerse themselves in the salon-like atmosphere transformed from Rolón's childhood memory – thus, literally creating a bit of movie star glamour for everyone.

If the substrate of Rolón's work is family, personal history and the relationship it has with collective histories, intriguingly, the hard surfaces of his work suggest hardship. That is to say, the armor of the work parallels a thick skin concealing the hardships overcome by its protagonist. Nevertheless, these surfaces are intrinsically beautiful. His objects, highly enameled and hardened, are made universal through the elegant device, creating perfectly finished, reflective materials. This allows the artist to ostentatiously demonstrate his perfectionism and thereby show his commitment to only the highest standards of craftsmanship. The perfection of his craft is literally in the surface of the work itself.

It is here the artist delves into the metaphysics of quality. It is as if he dares himself to use impossibly difficult resources in order to

prove that he can excel, because with any such material, a single flaw would announce itself as a catastrophe. These gleaming and glittering finishes also allow Rolón to throw down the gauntlet in the face of conservative taste. Its irrepressibility is not to be ignored. He is smacking the face of moderation, making a propaganda statement for



Fine Regal China (Blue and White), 2014
Porcelain with hand-painted pattern | Pearl Lam Galleries, Singapore
Photo: Pearl Lam Galleries

the decorative and celebratory. Yet, paradoxically, while his work possesses the voluptuous allure of the carnival, at the same time it has the curious quality of restraint found in an epigraph lamenting the culture of diaspora and displacement; the pieces themselves are *aide mémoires* and they create an immediate short cut, a lightning rod connecting to paternal, maternal and sibling histories, reaching far into the past.

These days Rolón has exited home and hearth into a more cosmopolitan world, yet he still understands that everything connects to personal history. If *Flea Market Botánica* is a metonym for a spiritual, emotional transaction, a barbershop is a stand-in for a particularly masculine social/cultural exchange. True, the inner-city barbershop is a salon for cutting-edge embellishment, but more significantly it is an arena for masculine hierarchies and the exchange of social mores. A botánica is a semi-public place for private transactions, but a barbershop is for more public performances. Like boxing, it has rules of engagement, rules of respect and a sense of honor. And then there is the skill and artistry. But it is a place for bravado, panache, home truths, competitiveness, compassion, machismo and above all, wit. In short, it is the definitive microcosm of a particular masculine culture. Not every man boxes, but most every man gets a haircut.

Done by the right barber, one can immediately possess significant taxonomical semiotic octane. The shorn customer, a debonair figure,



Jack Delano, **Barbershop**, Bayamon, 1941 | Image: Courtesy of the Estate of Jack Delano



Bladez of Glory Barbershop, Chicago, Illinois, 2015 | Photo: Joey Garfield

proudly walks out onto the street crimped, primped and remade. Yet the experience of the actual haircut and the anthropological flair of the social interactions at play serve as a cultural initiation; the *coup de maître*, and the potential *coup de théâtre* of the affair, is in the barbershop seat, and it is the main event. The relational spectacle of Rolón's barbershop installation shares and makes universal the mores of a specific cultural experience. The installation overall offers the viewer a firsthand account of personal stories, behavior and free-flowing creativeness shared by an intimate faction of self-taught creators.

The artist's evolutionary trajectory – the combing of genres: boxing, manicures, haircuts – lies at the heart of his interest in identities and shows how blended identities are more egalitarian than monolithic ones. Such democratization of gender, geography, and economy – such evenhandedness – again traces Rolón's work back to the theory that metamodernism and work created therein possess an ethical imperative.

With his *Nomadic Habitat* (*Hustleman*) cart, Rolón again brings the urban street into the white cube by inserting a ready-made commercial enterprise into an audience environment. The vending cart acts as a means to connect to culture more than just visually. The viewer can be passive or active, engage the object or frame it in the mind's eye as either something imported from an alternative culture, or recognize it has something familiar, local and comforting. In actual fact, to be sure, the last thing Rolón wants is for people to interact with his work passively; he wants them to participate and be engaged and therefore be transformed by the experiences he has so carefully orchestrated and choreographed. An important source for the structure of the cart is the Habitat Marocain built in Casablanca in the mid-1950s in response to the urban expansion of Casablanca, then under French control. Swiss architects André Studer and Jean Hentsch believed that their specially designed housing plans were tailor-made for the indigenous population, taking into account their particular cultural requirements. The cart, then, and its utilitarian approach illuminate the extent of the same contradictions between the cultural assumptions of the architects and the actual ways of life of the inhabitants. The cart presents the ethnographic influences on the structural design of architecture used to create the housing projects, and it shows the different transformations created by the vendors who eventually sell their goods. Through this, the work exposes the



Nomadic Habitat (*Hustleman*), 2015
Arts and Public Life Incubator Space, Chicago, Illinois | Photo: Sara Pooley

complex relations between ethnographic imagination, design synthesis and subsequent informalization. In essence, Rolón used creation as a platform to create a base, an oasis and structure where Garland Gantt (aka Hustleman) and others can sell their goods, providing income, no matter what the items being sold are. At the same time, the cart creates a place where people can sit, gather and interact with one another to foster a sense of communal engagement.

Rolón's installations and objects operate as metonyms in this exhibition. Hence, a porcelain vase he has created as an *aide-mémoire* for his mother's collection of faux-porcelain is a configuration, a metonymic amalgamation of so many recalled vases. He has to have us involved, and he wants his work to have a positive reassuring effect. Above all, Rolón is a giving collaborative spirit.

Finally, there is his fluency of communication. Rolón's metonymic tropes do not place an esoteric symbolic or metaphorical barrier between us and the particular idea being conveyed. The transmission is direct and universal. His metamodern, culturally inflected, nostalgic-driven artifacts are, moreover, delivered to us in exquisitely fabricated, breathtaking modules which give their projection a unique, comforting, inclusive authoritative voice. A Puerto Rican golden mask, a barbershop chair, dynamic oversized hair-pick, deconstructed mirror or ornate Chinese porcelain vase invite us and initiate us into the *Commonwealth* of Carlos Rolón, engaging us into a richer, broader cultural exchange.

Dick Goody, April 2016



Detail: **Boricua Sound System**, 2014
Salon 94, New York, New York
Photo: Nathan Keay

OBJECTS



The Love Below, 2009
Vintage crystals, glass, quartz crystals, gold plating,
bicycle mirrors, fabric and car audio system
Vanmoerkerke Collection, Belgium

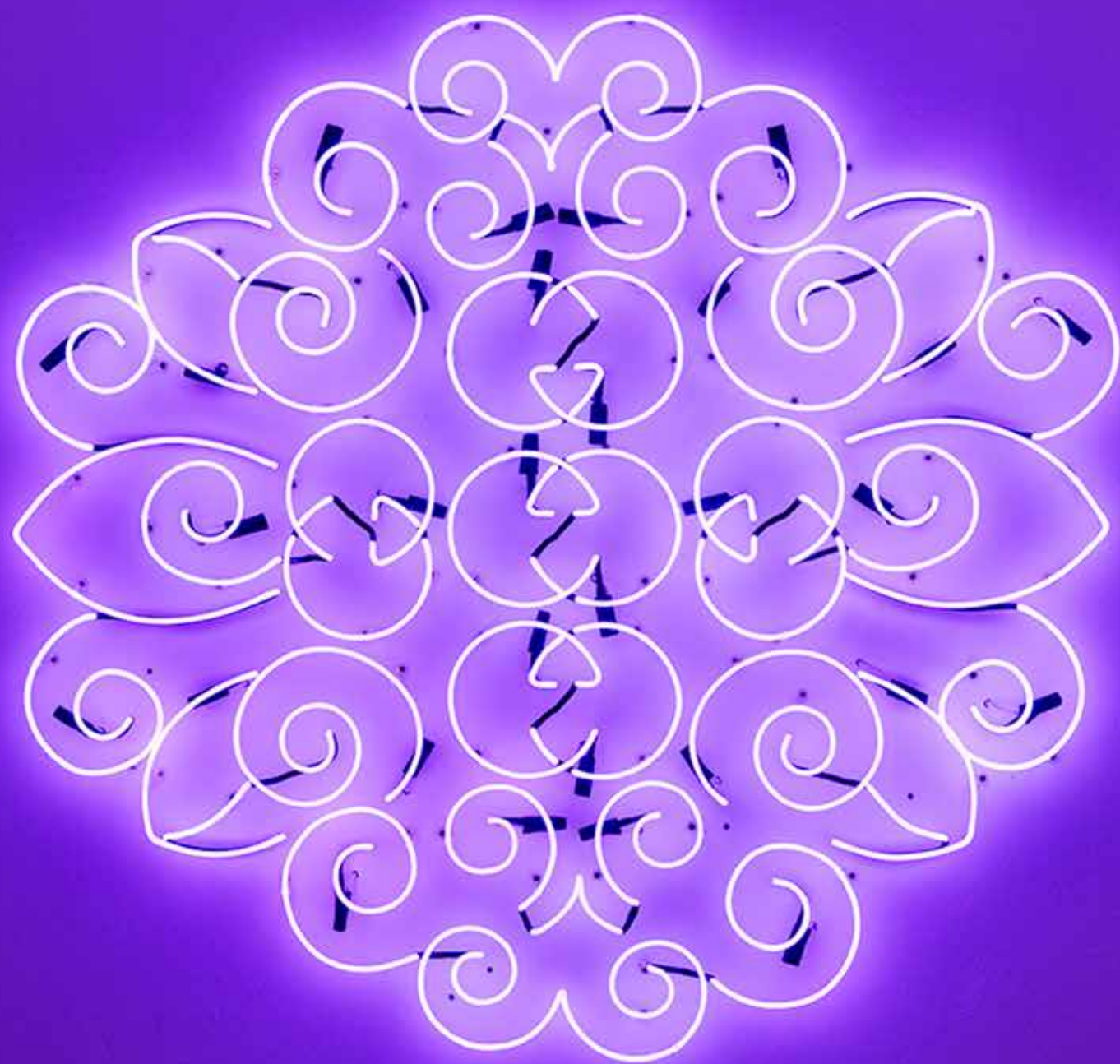


Luxembourg, 2011
Enamel, pearlized automotive paint, metal, fabric, quartz crystals, silver, 24-karat gold leaf, gold plating, hand engraving, glass, customized jewelry, mirror, wax and rubber

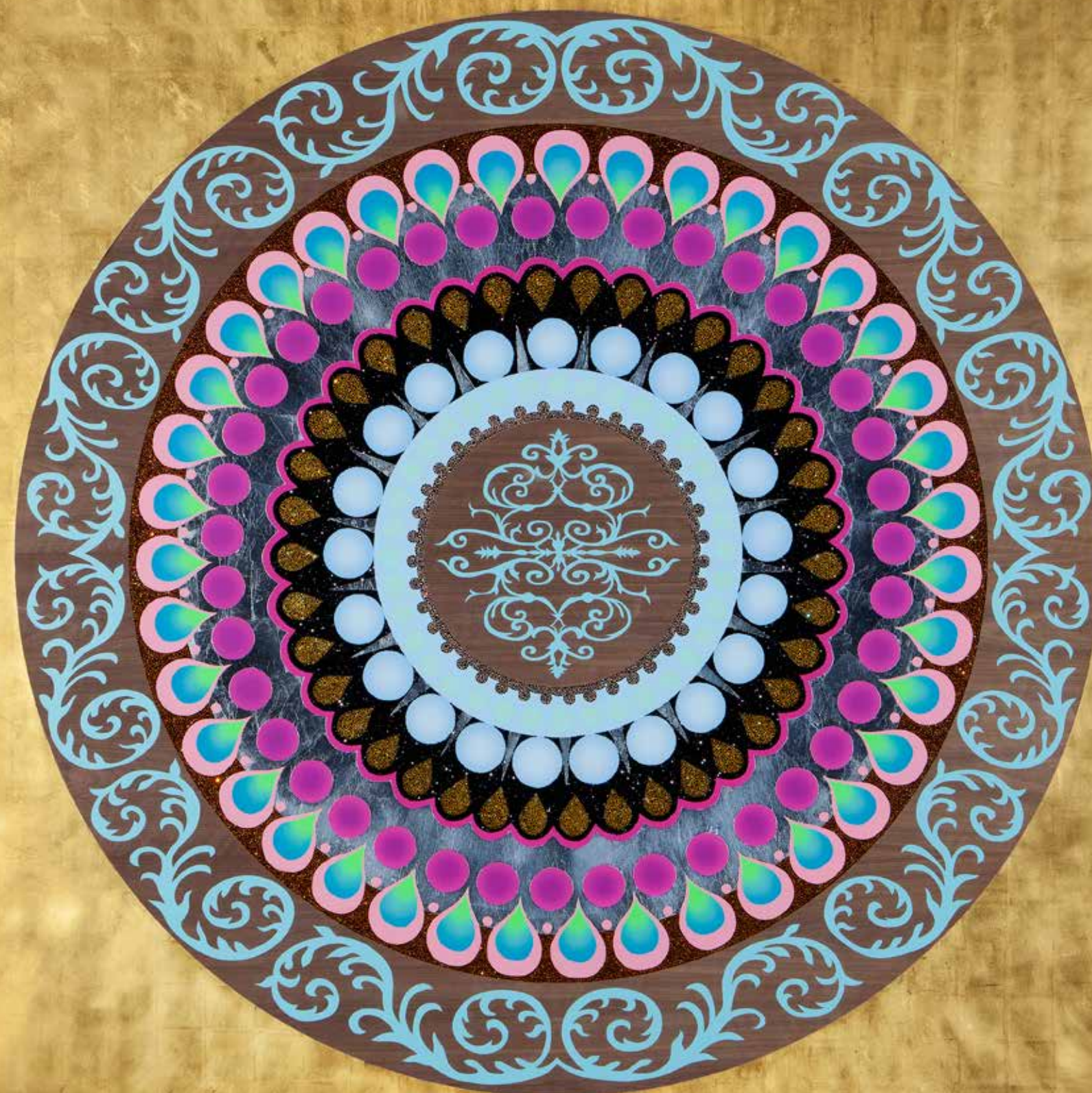


VOODOO, 2012
Metal, glitter, automotive clear coat, sequins, steel, vintage automobile emblems, quartz crystals, rubber, mirror, wood, silk flowers, gold-plated necklaces





Gucci Mandala, 2013
Neon | 60 inches in diameter



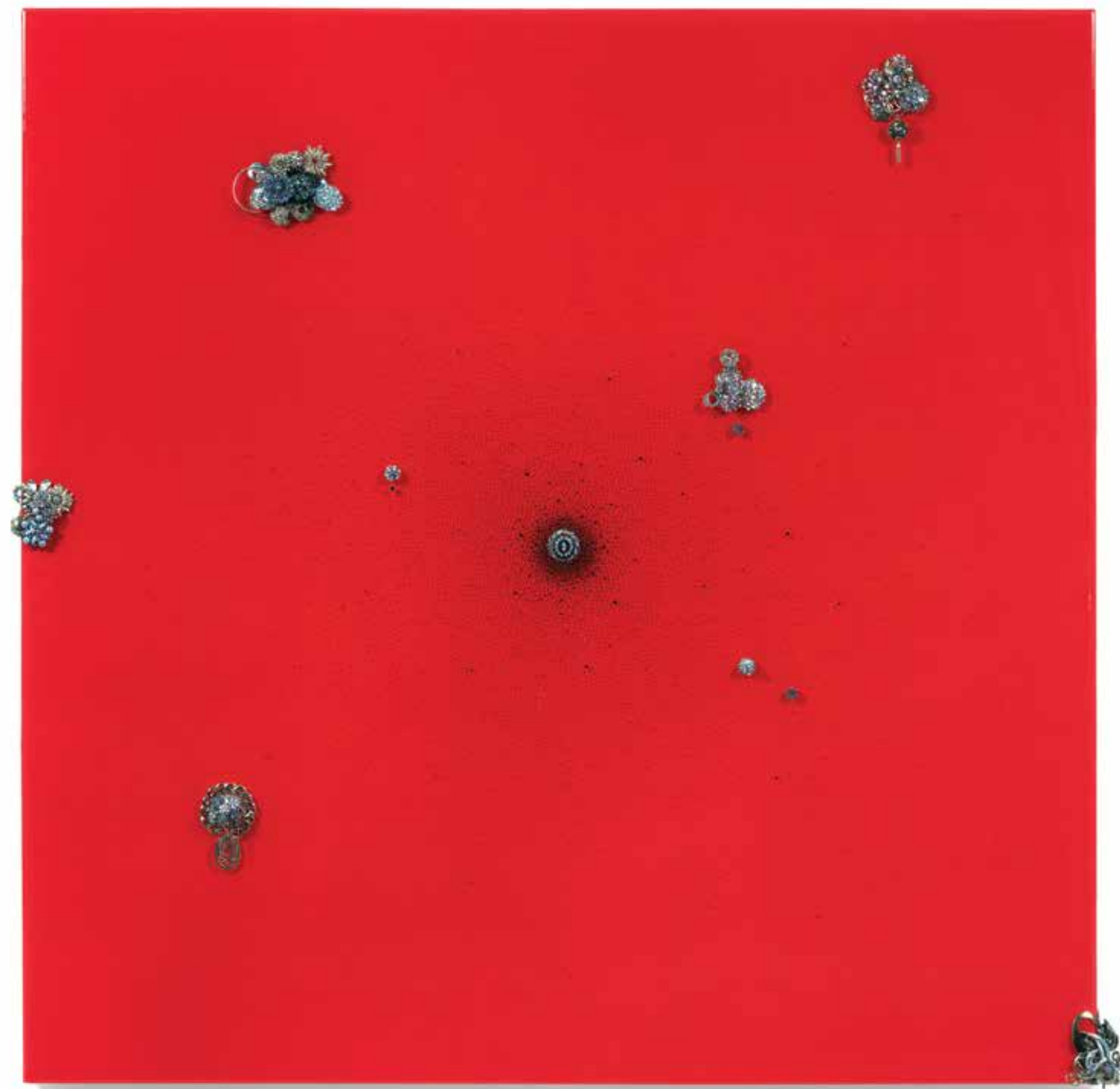
Untitled (Mandala crest), 2013
Acrylic, glitter, aluminum leaf, 24-karat gold
leaf, wood veneer and quartz crystals on
wood panel | 80 x 80 inches



Untitled (*Kay Amore*), 2011
Plastic, metal, 24-karat gold leaf, velvet, acrylic, glitter, water and quartz crystals



Untitled (*Custom Middle Finger Ring for Ex-Lovers*), 2011
Customized vintage jewelry, 24-karat gold leaf and quartz crystals



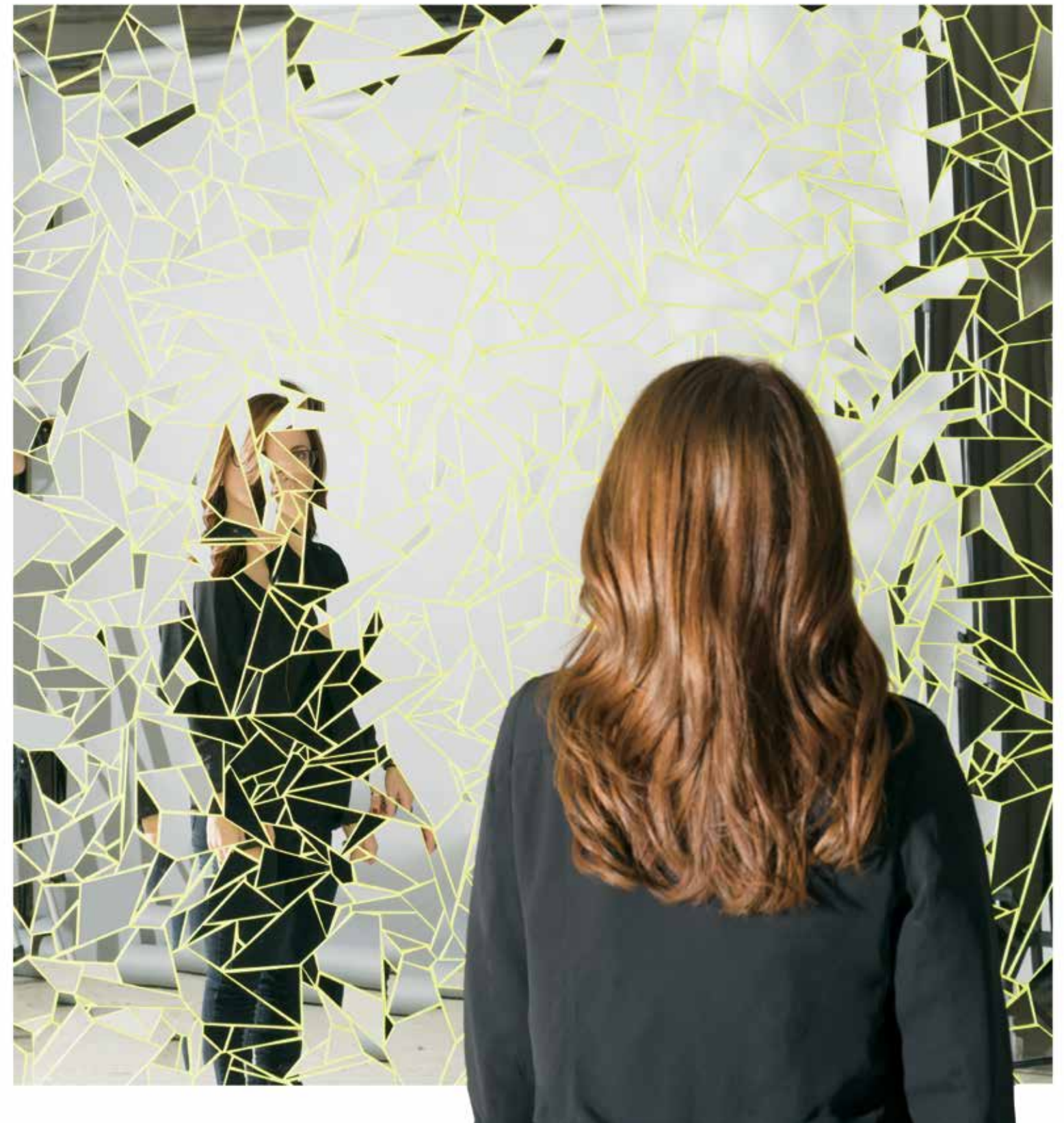
People of the Nai (Sain), 2011
Resin, customized vintage jewelry, quartz crystals, 24-karat gold leaf on wood panel | 70 x 70 inches



Untitled (Mr. Dapper Dan), 2011
Crushed velvet, enamel, hand-carved wood, vintage Gucci fabric | Dimensions variable



Untitled, 2016
Mirror, silicone, and crystalline on aluminum panel | 60 x 60 inches



Untitled (P.R. Yellow), 2014
Mirror, resin and crystalline on aluminum panel | 60 x 60 inches



Inner Shining (Tiffany yellow), 2015
Mirror, silicone and crystalline on aluminum panel | 60 x 60 inches



Untitled (BW #003), 2015
Mirror, resin and crystalline on aluminum panel | 56.5 x 56.5 inches

Untitled (*Blowtorch Mirror Painting*), 2015
Mirror, silicone and crystalline on aluminum panel | 48 x 36 inches
Right: Image showing reflection of model





Ponce (*Circle-Circle Fence – Study*), 2015
Bronze mirror and quartz crystals on aluminum panel | 30 x 30 inches



Calle Loiza (After Enoc), 2014
Hand-poured gold mirror and crystalline on wood panel | 30 x 30 inches
(Image showing reflection of model)



Crystal Street (1976), 2015
Handmade shell macramé, vegetation, light | Dimensions variable



Mundillo (Wallpaper Mandala), 2014
Acrylic on aluminum and MDF panel | 60 inches in diameter



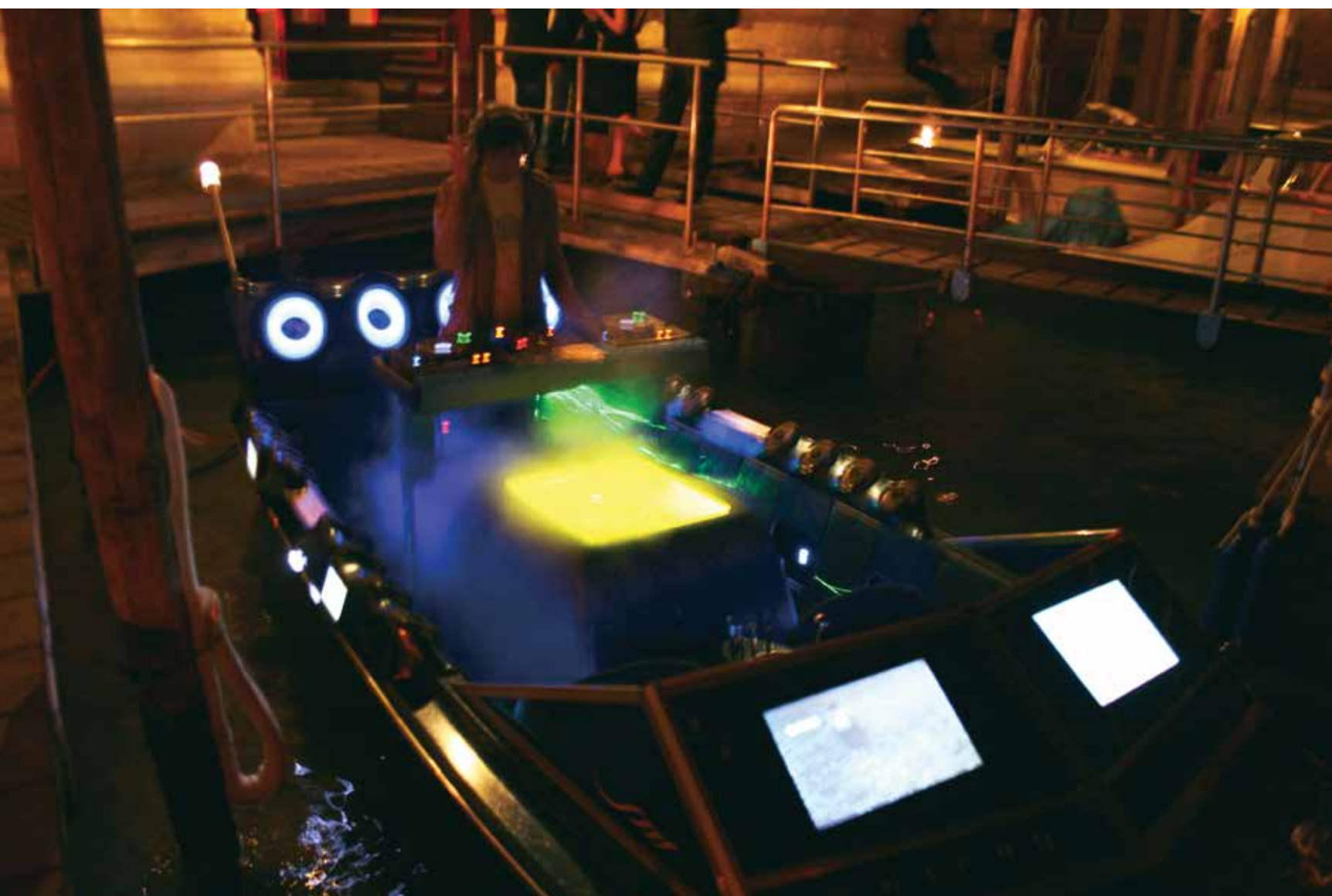
Untitled (Fine Regal China #1), 2014
Porcelain with hand-carved pattern | 11.8 x 11.8 x 23.6 inches



The Blissful Buddha (Sittin' on Chrome), 2010
Pearlized magenta auto-body paint, wood veneer, quartz crystal embellished resin flowers, fiberglass base with mounted speakers (with custom audio installation), fabric and mirror | 72 x 48 x 36



DNIPRO (Created for the Venice Biennale, Ukrainian Pavilion), 2007
LCD touch screens, car audio speakers, Chevy chrome engine, neon, vintage 1963 Cadillac chrome trim, vintage Chevy Impala mirrors, ostrich leather, laser lights, smoke machine and DJ mixing equipment



Emigrants/Immigrants (Mementos and Symbols for the Nuyoricans), 2013
Vintage trophies, velvet, quartz crystals, metal, sequins, marble, embroidery and gold-plated chains





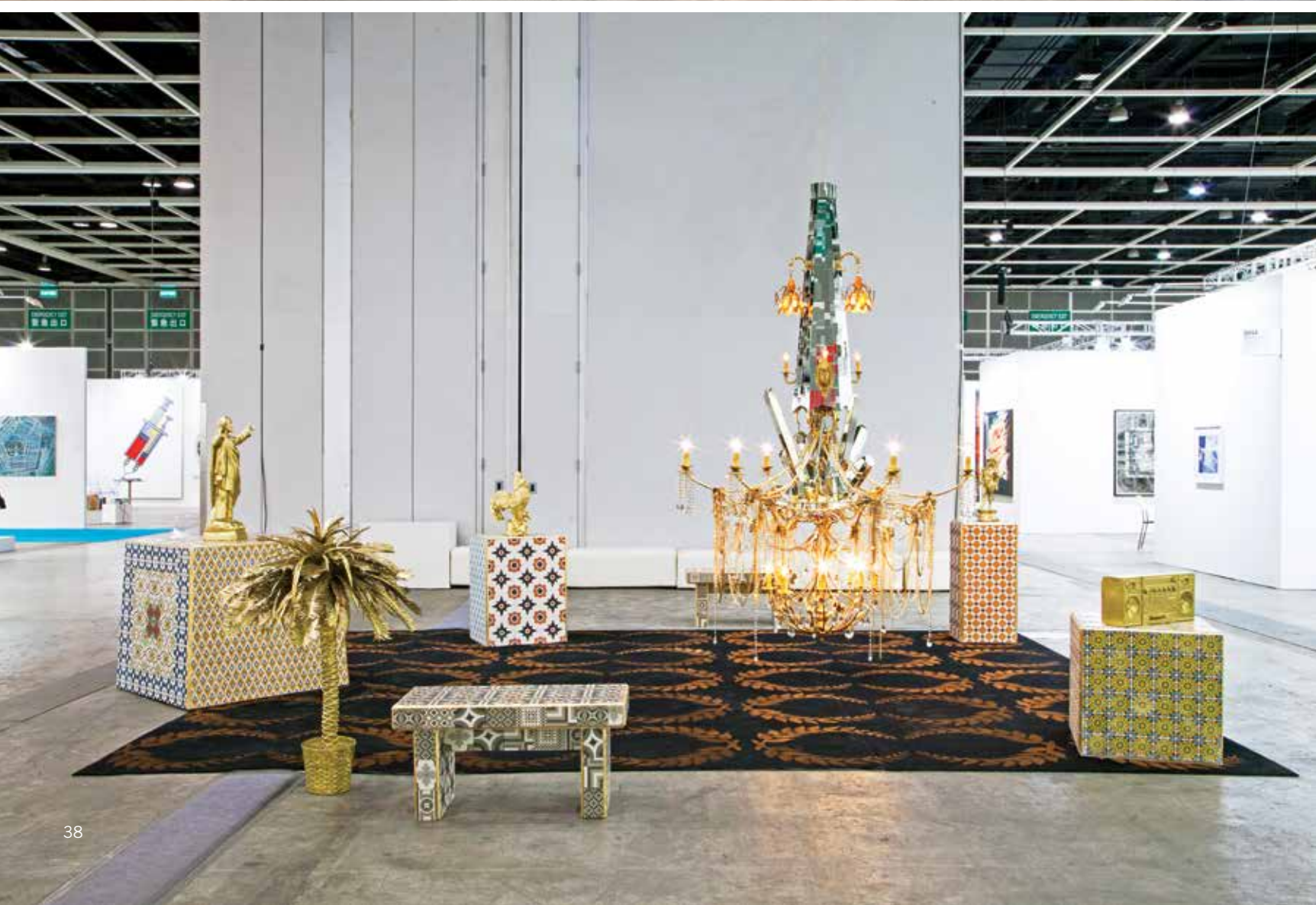
Pages 34 and 35 detail: *Ethiopian Mistress*, 2011
Crushed velvet, wood, mirror, speakers, audio, metal, gold-plated chains,
customized vintage jewelry, 23-karat gold leaf, glass, mirror and light
Collection: John and Amy Phelan, Aspen, Colorado



| SITE SPECIFIC |

Around the Way

Encounters – Invitational Sector,
Art Basel Hong Kong, China | 2015
Curated by Alexie Glass-Kantor



Ghost Stories

Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, Illinois | 2014
Curated by Carrie Johnson





Trophy Den

Collaborations – Invitational Sector, Art Cologne, Germany | 2014
Curated by New Art Dealers Alliance

Imperial Nail Salon (My Parents' Living Room, 1976)
Homebodies exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, Illinois | 2013 | Curated by Naomi Beckwith



The Majestic (For Louise)

La Fabrique Sonore, Expérience
Pommery #9, Domaine Pommery,
Reims, France | 2011
Curated by Claire Staebler and
Charles Carcopino



Chrome Lotus

VICTORY, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, Texas | 2013
Curated by Peter Doroshenko

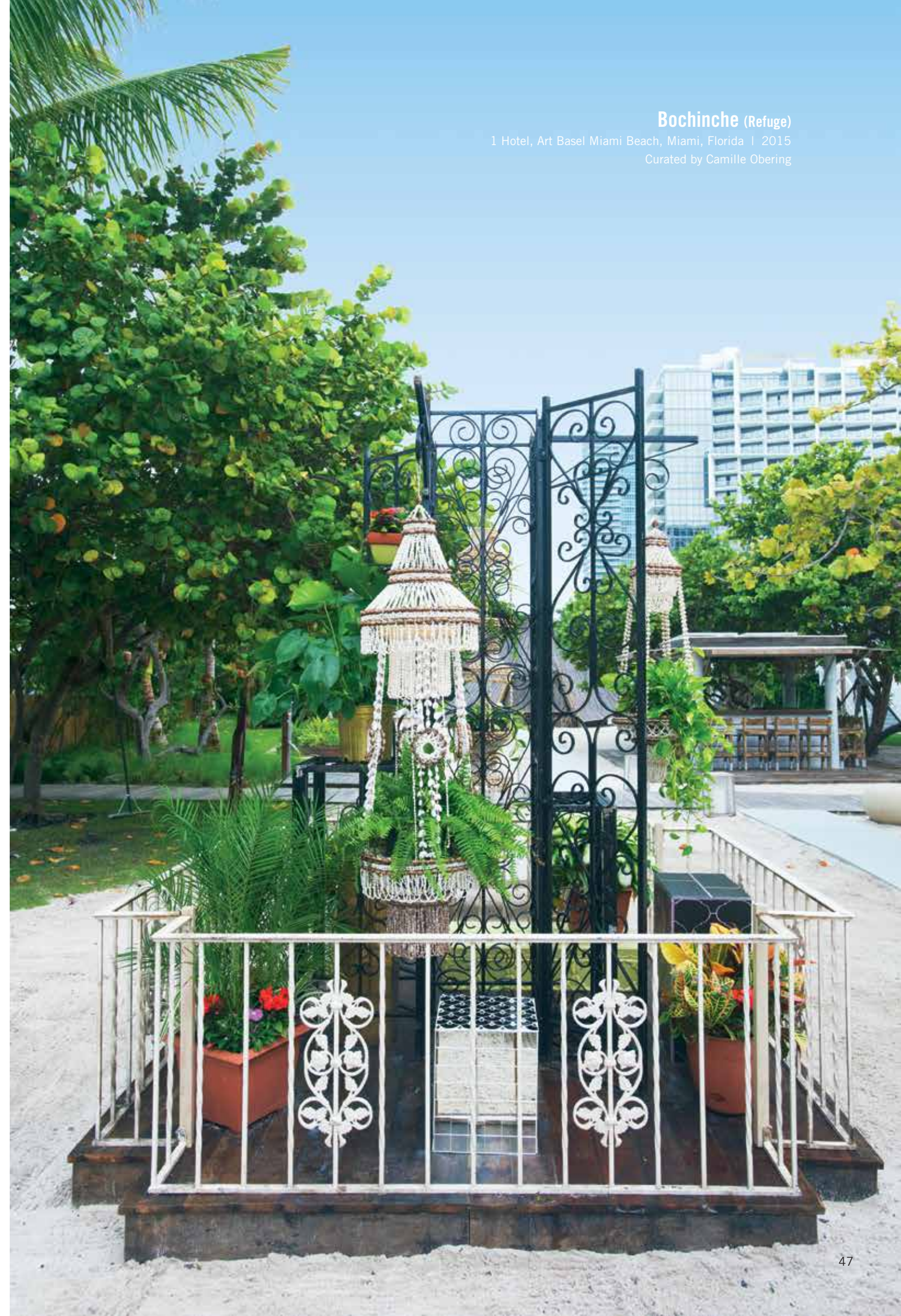
The Cave and the Kingdom

Ten Museum Park
Miami Beach, Florida | 2012
Commissioned by Bonafida Design



Bochinche (Refuge)

1 Hotel, Art Basel Miami Beach, Miami, Florida | 2015
Curated by Camille Obering



SOCIAL PRACTICE

The Hard Work of Carlos Rolón

by Theaster Gates, Jr.

The cart was a challenge and inspiration. It had the same feel as my studio practice and was true to what I do, but the piece could actually be out in the real world.

Carlos Rolón/Dzine

Hustle

- verb (used without object), **hustled**, **hustling**.
1. to proceed or work rapidly or energetically: *to hustle about putting a house in order.*

2. to push or force one’s way; jostle or shove.

3. to be aggressive, especially in business or other financial dealings.

4. *Slang.* to earn one’s living by illicit or unethical means.

5. *Slang.* (of a prostitute) to solicit clients.
- verb (used with object), **hustled**, **hustling**.
6. to convey or cause to move, especially to leave, roughly or hurriedly: *They hustled him out of the bar.*

7. to pressure or coerce (a person) to buy or do something: to hustle the customers into buying more drinks.

8. to urge, prod, or speed up: *Hustle your work along.*

9. to obtain by aggressive or illicit means: *He could always hustle a buck or two from some sucker.*

10. to beg; solicit.

11. to sell in or work (an area), especially by high-pressure tactics: *The souvenir vendors began hustling the town at dawn.*

12. to sell aggressively: to hustle souvenirs.
- noun
17. energetic activity, as in work.

18. discourteous shoving, pushing, or jostling.

19. *Slang.*

a. an inducing by fraud, pressure, or deception, especially of inexperienced or uninformed persons, to buy something, to participate in an illicit scheme, dishonest gambling game, etc.

b. such a product, scheme, gambling game, etc.

20. Informal. a competitive struggle: *the hustle to earn a living.*

21. a fast, lively, popular ballroom dance evolving from Latin American, swing, rock, and disco dance styles, with a strong basic rhythm and simple step pattern augmented by strenuous turns, breaks, etc.

hustle. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged. Retrieved January 23, 2016 from Dictionary.com website <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hustle>

I knew his work because he was ahead of us.

He knew he was an artist when we were still just doing poetry as part of the Milwaukee Avenue, old school poetry scene.

Carlos or rather Dzine, as he was known on the street, was making it shine already, with big projects and lots of glitter and confidence. We looked up to him because Carlos was living a life we didn’t know at all. From the outside, it was a life of possibility and smiles, but he was never brazen about it – but he was ahead of us. He has always been known for his ambition and work, but it feels like the ambition of 1997 is very different from work that is created now. When Carlos was a young maker, the notoriety and presence of the market meant something that should be pounced on: seize the moment, ride the wave, etc. He continues to be an inspiration, and through his engagement with Arts and Public Life at the University of Chicago, he is showing his commitment to practices that straddle the possibility for a more complicated engagement with urbanism, economy and form.

Over the past several years, under the innovative and caring leadership of Tempestt Hazel, at the Arts and Public Life organization, through its residencies, public programs and exhibitions, he has worked with artists who share a deep knowledge and commitment to the richness of Chicago’s south side, bringing it to the fore. Through direct engagement and participatory acts, and also time alone in the studio, artists are able to be present on the south side and engage the Washington Park community in ways that town hall meetings and community check-ins simply can not.

For this project, Carlos began working with a brother known locally as Hustleman, a Washington Park resident recognized for his generous and affordable mobile market that sells everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to on-boarding train riders, to purses, jewelry and other things that speak to the hearts of the consuming passers-by. Hustleman: he hustles and becomes patron saint to the possibilities within black space. The hustle that is energy to start things when there is nothing available to you, to sell aggressively and push forward an orange, a banana, a fruit basket, a cigarette, anything that might allow for the hustler to make ends meet.

As Carlos and I talked more, it became evident that one is sometimes forced to hustle, and the energy of hustling has the potential to go in a bad way. Hustling could quickly move from innovation to incarceration. So there are times when we all must pause from the game and ask bigger questions about what matters. The pause also allows for space to ask about the aesthetics of hustle. Who has the ability to move the hustle from a purely economic imperative to one that is concerned with affect, flavor, style, charm, all adding to the

possibility of the passer-by not being moved purely by appetite, but also by poetry? This is where Carlos’ clarity of poetic form meets the everyday possibilities inherent in black space.

He met Hustleman; they talked plans and ambitions and function, sharing sketches back and forth and texting each other about what the cart should feel like and look like. They became comrades in the possibility of hustle, giving new power to all things left behind, dismembered, broke-down. The artist, who has always looked at the everyday through nail salons and afro picks, through fences that mark Moorish presence in Old San Juan, to forts built by the Spanish that pre-date the two flats on Spanish-speaking streets, has found poetry on the south side and all of sudden, the word hustle shifts its connotation and Hustleman, the lowly street seller of ripened fruit, is finally lauded for being the high priest of 55th Street.

I have learned that hustling requires insider knowledge and that it is a world inside of worlds that not everyone on the outside understands. It is this inner world of action and action-ing – of manifesting energy to get something started – that allows for dignity in the absence of opportunity and beauty in the face of adversity and value when all those from outside say there is none.

Hustleman is my patron saint, and Carlos, the willing worker, builder, friend and listener who can see a real seer. Carlos helps us see. The cart, the relationship, the shifting of commerce from the street to the Arts Incubator exhibition space, to the cultural center, to Oakland University, all demonstrating that there is possibility in them streets. Hustleman, like Rick Ross, knows that it is the everyday walk that makes the accumulated hustle part of what Antonio Negri would offer as the beautiful. A collective liberation, a total work of art, and an all-day hustle is what leads to an exceedingly abundant life. Carlos brings us to attention and focus – a lightning rod to the true art in this cruel world. Channeling ordinary materials into intricate constructions, he seeks hope and abundance in overlooked cultures, in the carts, the nail salons, in the everyday hustle. I pray that he finds it.

Theaster Gates, Jr.
Artist, Professor, Department of Visual Arts (DoVA) and the College Director, Arts + Public Life
University of Chicago

Nomadic Habitat (Hustleman)

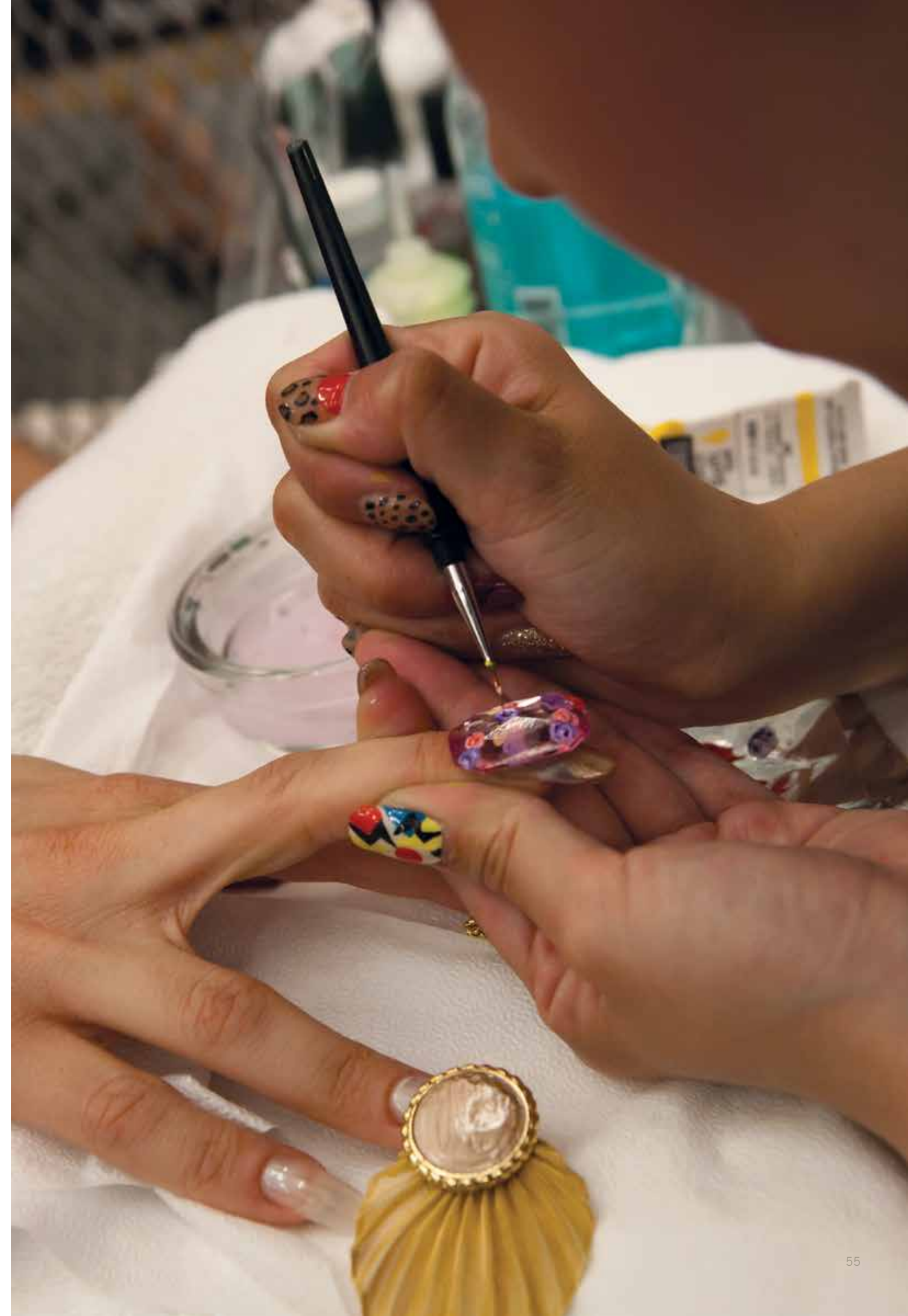
Public Intervention, Arts and Public Life, University of Chicago/Chicago Architectural Biennial, Chicago, Illinois | 2015





Imperial Nail Salon (Installation and Performance with Tilda Swinton)
Standard Hotel, Art Basel Miami Beach, Florida | 2012





Get Nailed

Public intervention and performance, New Museum, New York, New York | 2011



Nailed, The History of Nail Cultures and Dzine
 Excerpt from the publication | Paris and Puerto Rico | 2011



Artist in Residency

Instituto Buena Vista, Curaçao Center for Contemporary Art, Curaçao | 2010



Barbershop

Oakland University Art Gallery
Rochester, Michigan | 2016

Top left and bottom right: Video still from the film
Bladez of Glory | Top right and bottom left:
Performance, Oakland University Art Gallery



Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art

Brooklyn Museum, New York, New York | 2007
Curated by Tumelo Mosaka



EXHIBITIONS





Bass Museum of Art

Miami Beach, Florida | 2009

Curated Silvia Karman Cubiñá



Dzine (b. Cirrus Polon) is a Chicago-based artist who appropriates elements from popular culture, Baroque design and the Arts and Crafts movement to develop his own language which he translates into sculpture, painting and large-scale installation. Drawing in large part from Custom Culture and his own Puerto Rican background, Dzine creates ornate handmade custom bicycles and objects to explore the relationship between culture and beauty, the studio and the street and the cross-section of high- and low-brow forms of creating art. His paintings and installations highlight materials and textures he favors such as resin, Swarovski crystals and 24-carat gold. His sculptural works employ tropes of "Chicano Lowriders", a form of vernacular art developed in the 1970s by Mexican-Americans, which Dzine reinterprets to develop his own ornate bicycles, cars, plaques and more, resulting in some of the most definitive masterworks of the genre. He continues to introduce a fresh new language that is finding its place in the contemporary art discourse.

Dzine's work blends extreme aesthetics: 70s retro chic, culture kitsch and modern design, while executed with the precious craft found in medieval illumination or Tibetan mandalas.

Dzine is a recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation award for Painting and Sculpture. His work has been included in exhibitions and in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Collection Vanmoerkecke, Oostende, Belgium; Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev; Museo de Bello, NY and Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan. He has participated in retrospectives at The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, United Kingdom and presented Bambi Drawings, introducing the new sculptural work influenced by the Chicano Lowrider culture at Art Basel Miami Beach. This followed the success of his presentation at Room of an Island Sea, Ukrainian Pavilion, 52nd Biennale di Venezia.

His customized powerboat, La Perla, was exhibited in his first solo show in New York in the fall of 2008 at Deitch Studios in Long Island City.

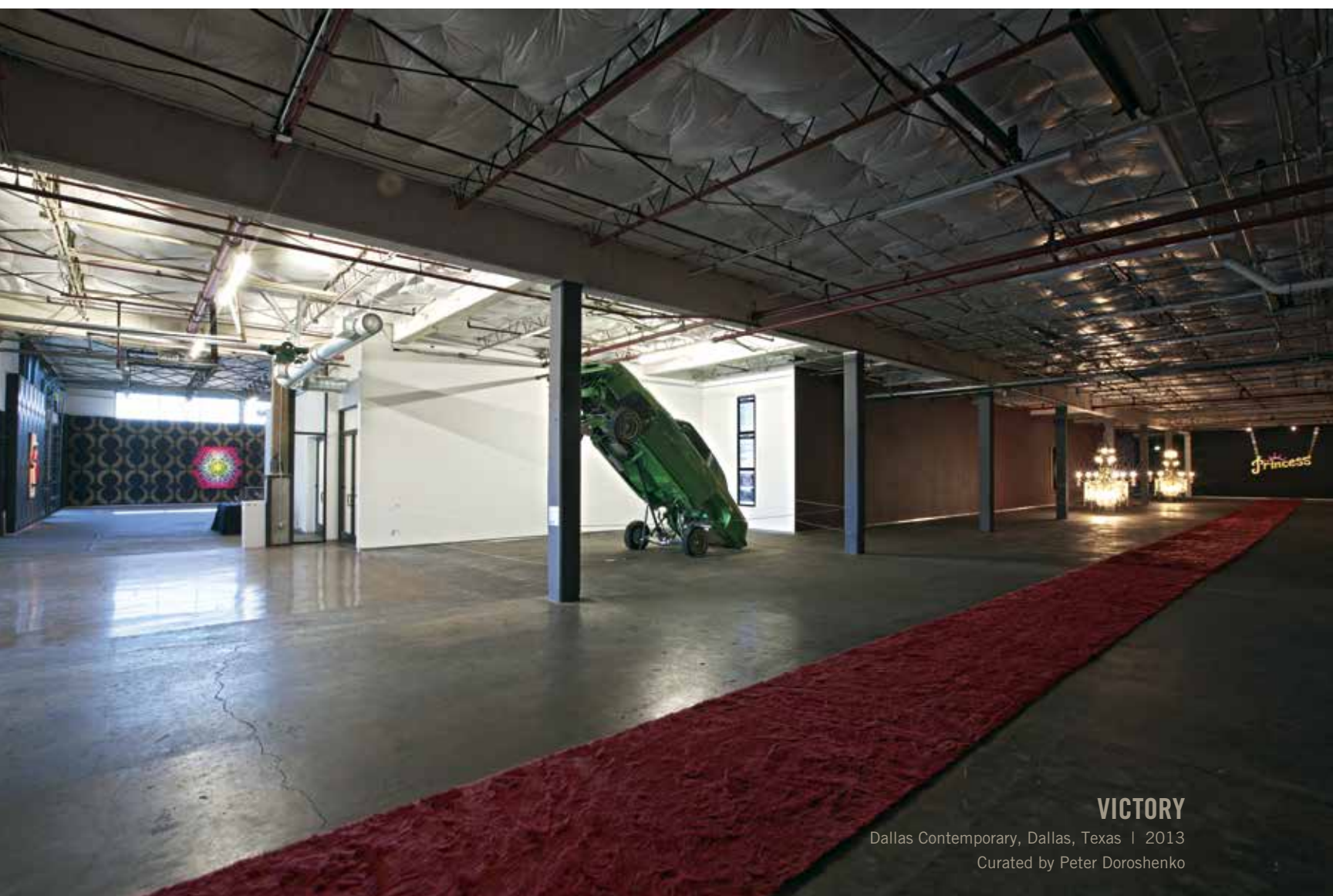




Viva La Revolución

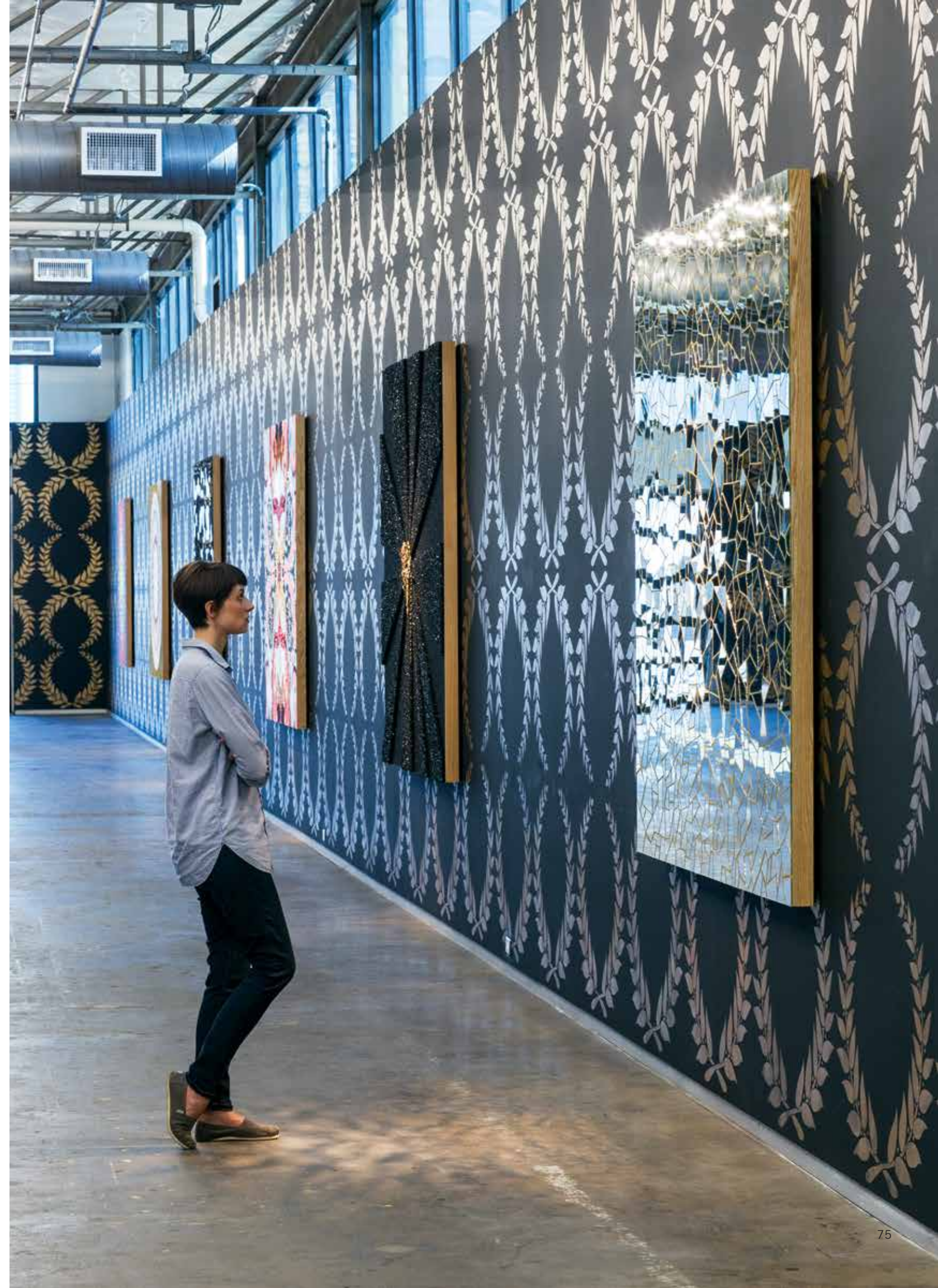
Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, California | 2010
Curated by Pedro Alonzo





VICTORY
 Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, Texas | 2013
 Curated by Peter Doroshenko







Dzine: Born, Carlos Rolón, 1970
 SALON 94, New York, New York | 2014



Tunnel Vision

Space K, Gwangju, South Korea | 2014
Curated by Jang-Uk Lee





Left image: Detail: *Casa de Mi Abuela* (Customized Bicycle)
 Top: *Fresh Bally Boots and Benzes* | Courtesy Leeahn Gallery, South Korea

Mi Casa

Pearl Lam Galleries, Singapore | 2015



COMMONWEALTH

noun com·mon·wealth \- welth also - weltth\

One founded on law and united by compact or tacit agreement of the people for the common good

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN



Commonwealth

Oakland University Art Gallery, Rochester, Michigan | 2016
Curated by Dick Goody









¡siempre pa'lante!





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My heartfelt thanks to my family, friends and colleagues who add light when in darkness, provide support and inspiration when in doubt, and remind me to allow the universe to work as it should.

Carlos Rolón/Dzine

COMMONWEALTH | January 16 – April 3, 2016 | Curated by Dick Goody | OUAG



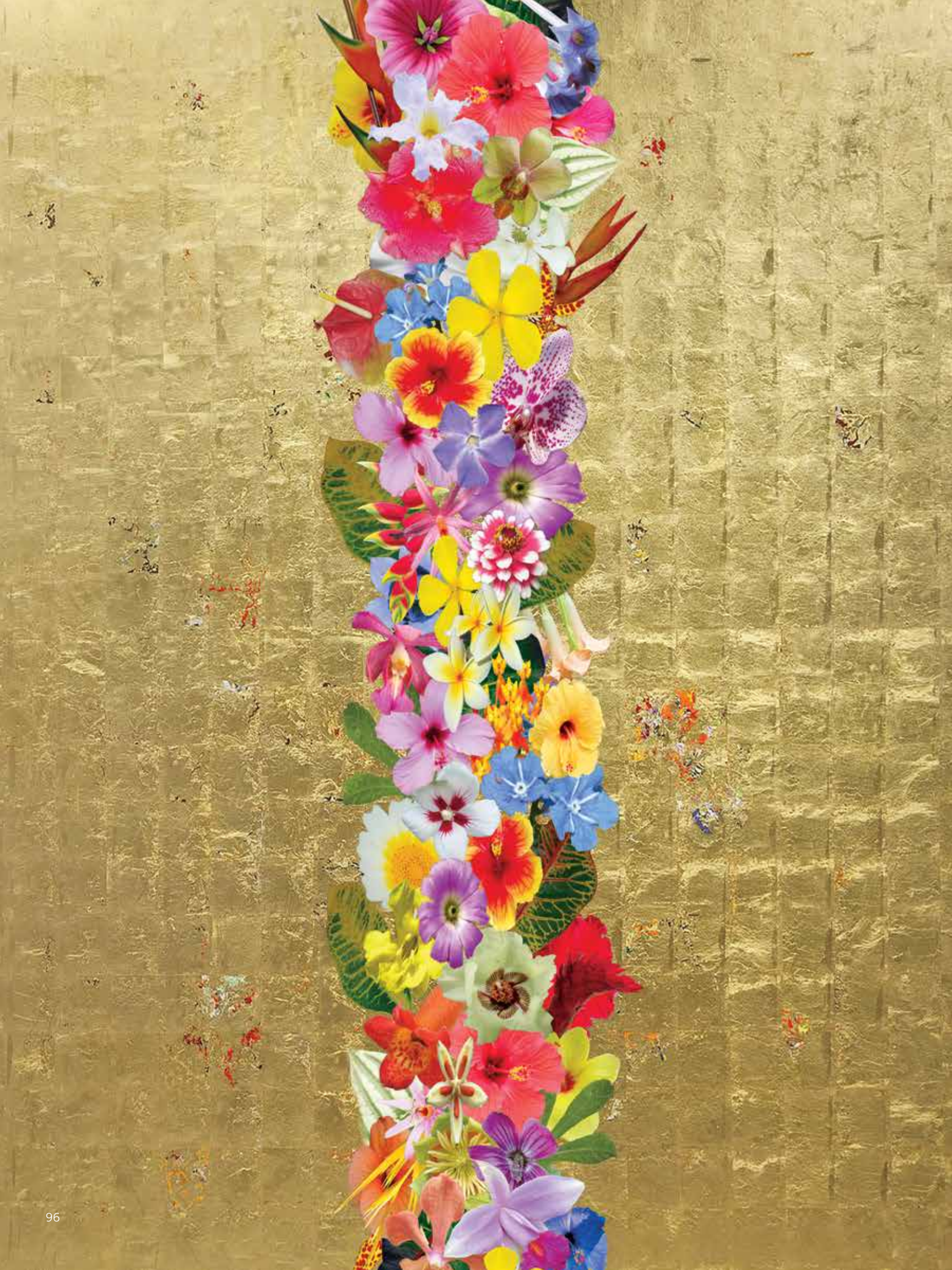
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Left:
Gild the Lily (*Decadence Upon Decadence*), 2015
 Digital rendering for realized painting
 80 x 110 x 2 inches

Detail back cover:
Untitled (*Fine Regal China #1*), 2014
 Porcelain with carved pattern
 11.8 x 11.8 x 23.6 inches

