



# MANOLIS PROJECTS

**Springing Forward: Manolis Projects Opens an Ambitious Group Show with an Emphasis on Argentinian painter Fernanda Lavera.**

## *Mr. Freak and Lucy* Show Review by Bruce Helander

After a year or so of dismal and unpredictable circumstances that had a particularly negative effect on the art world with cancelled shows across the board, it is indeed encouraging that positive signs on the horizon point to a blast of fresh enthusiasm and invention. Museums have finally opened and the galleries that have survived have a new positive outlook and energized creativity is bursting at the seams.

Most artists during this isolated period found an ironic solace in total immersion of studio activity with an uninterrupted concentration on developing a new series of works. Finally, a long-awaited window to display art is opening. The South Florida creative landscape is now clearly warming up after a perpetual season of limbo and isolation with dark clouds disappearing and our Florida sun seems to energize the creative process. The proof is in the pudding.

It has been said that April showers bring May flowers and after a particularly challenging winter the natural inclination to spring forward is more welcome this year than any in recent history. The Miami art scene is blossoming after a long hibernation period and one spot on the cultural map is the mighty Manolis Projects that has curated a remarkable exhibition that incorporates the core gallery stable of artists including a special showing of Argentinian neo-expressionist Fernanda Lavera.

Five years ago, the artist and entrepreneur J. Steven Manolis had the remarkable foresight and timing to acquire a 5000 sq. ft. ground floor space in Lemon City, a neighborhood that reminds me of the then undiscovered warehouse Tribeca neighborhood in Manhattan that eventually became a magnet for artists. Almost overnight Manolis' professionally curated exhibitions introducing talented artists became an important component in the explosive and lively Greater Miami art scene.

The highly anticipated spring exhibition brings together nearly 40 artists that clearly compliment the inventive paintings of Lavera. Manolis, working in conjunction with art agent Greg Schriefer who represents Lavera, has set up a clever synergy that allows an obvious interaction that benefits the overall visual energy that is at once noticeable upon entering this massive space.

The featured artist, Fernanda Lavera, displays an uncanny appreciation and understanding of the dynamic raw street aesthetic that gained attention and traction in the mid-70's with outlaw artists like Keith Haring, Banksy, Clash, TAKI 183, Futura 2000, Barry McGee, Blek le Rat and later Shepard Fairey and Mr. Brainwash, and of course Basquiat, among others. What is so ironic is that the street art aesthetic in its earliest form, originated at the dawn of humanity. It has been with us forever, but not recognized as legitimate art until the last few decades. Primitive humankind used sketches and

crude expressive drawing as far back at 13,000 B.C. to communicate with one another and now in a twist Lavera has taken a cue from the past and laid it down in the present with an intelligent twist.

The artist has clearly developed a unique form of visual language that is compelling to examine and interpret. Like so many artists that have come on the art scene with an accelerated jump into notoriety, this talented artist is making waves with a distinctive style that combines her colorful Argentinian background, with its vivid influences and rhythmic sensibility into a strong idiosyncratic neo-expressionist statement with a complex pictorial language that paraphrases juxtapositions of harmony and aesthetic principals of multiplicity. In this new series of works, including huge, captivating canvases that seem to explode with invention and fearlessness, the artist presents a novel vernacular that is overpowering and unforgettable. Perhaps the vitality evident here derives its energy from the basic white background that an artist often utilizes as a springboard like a dramatic stage set, for a cast of surreal characters that often seem like dreams coming true. The recognizable figures and oversize cartoonish heads, skulls and dashes of expressionist vigor are carefully placed on different levels of perception where the images begin to effortlessly float as if they might be balloon figures participating in the Macy's Day Parade.

Abstracted figurative and spirited amorphic forms in space are the recognizable common denominators that the artist so valiantly displays while combining street smart iconographic flavors where silhouettes and shadows come into focus that often seem like dancers following their own beat inebriated with a potion of exuberance and native pride. Intentional drips and touches of spray paint accentuate the color compositions that further cement her recognizable style. Once introduced to this chorus of eccentric personalities, the ambulatory forms become familiar, and it is impossible not to recognize the artist's totally unique style that is propelling this talented artist into a genuine art world contender.

Clive Davis, the legendary Grammy award winning producer, and noted art collector, has observed that, "When I first discovered Lavera's work in Buenos Aires in 2016, I immediately recognized her enormous talent accented with a distinctive feminine Latin twist. This artist is the real deal."

Complementing Lavera's display is the impressive roster of other artists on view who might share some DNA like Banksy's delightful *Princess Di-Faced Tenner*, Ron Burkhardt's scribbly Notism, Rauschenberg's compositional genius, Salvador Dalí's surrealist slant, and even Anthony Haden-Guest's cartoon depictions of curious personalities. Tom Otterness and Red Grooms bring more humor to the table as usual while Robert Berry's paintings bring a delightful perspective to great picture making. Jill Krutick adds another dimension with her swirling abstract expressionist compositions while Miles Slater contributes a wonderful narrative that always proposes an interesting story.

Artist Jojo Anavim adds a unique charm to this distinctive exhibition with his Pop Art flavored canvases that also recall early explorative works by James Rosenquist and David Salle. His former career as a graphic artist formally trained at Parsons has afforded a natural visual dialog that combines popular commercial imagery with a accomplished painters touch.

Another poetic aspect of this unusual group show is the fascinating constructivist works of J. Steven Manolis who began painting his large-scale abstract canvases in this very studio turned gallery. His works seem very much at home, literally, in this group exhibition environment. Manolis' work,

bright, geometric, constructivist, and consistently mesmerizing is a natural companion to the assorted painterly environment that he has curated with an eye for drama and innovation.

It takes a generous portion of genuine bravado and an artist's intuition to put together this complex and memorable exhibition and the timing is a perfect reception for a new art season which is now blossoming and finally moving ahead. This is an exposition that is not to be missed. This show will be exhibited from April 23 – July 31, 2021.

Florida Artists Hall of Famer Bruce Helander is the former Editor-in-Chief of the Art Economist and a former White House fellow of the NEA. He is a frequent contributor to the Huffington Post. His most recent book is Chihuly: An Artist Collects (Harry Abrams).