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GARAGE

Bodies and Emotions Collide in Dara Friedman's Miami Survey



Head over heels: Dara Friedman, *Rite*, 2014. © Dara Friedman, courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

The German-born, Miami-based filmmaker Dara Friedman has spent nearly three decades making intimate works that emphasize the body as its own language. Her subjects, often strangers, cuddle (*Play*), dance through the streets (*Dancer*), or jump, shirtless and youthful, into Biscayne Bay (*Government Cut Freestyle*), their physicality expressing tenderness and a connection with the landscape.

Now Pérez Art Museum Miami is hosting *Perfect Stranger*, Friedman's first mid-career survey and the largest presentation of her work to date. Curated by René Morales, its fifteen works span over twenty years of production. On a break during its installation, GARAGE spoke to Friedman about staying true to her vision while connecting, wholeheartedly, with others.

GARAGE: How does it feel to see your work in a survey of this size?

Dara Friedman: When you're making work and living your life moment to moment, the fact that anyone else is paying attention feels like a miracle. From the very beginning, I've had to be my own best audience of one, and to hear that people have been following the work is really moving and a surprise, actually. Creating this exhibition, I'm thinking about time, the notion that we're wedded to the linearity of time—but it's not like that. People pop in and out of time, and they're present with you at the point that they appear. You remember how much you actually love them.

Your filmmaking and audition process emphasizes empathy, even among strangers.

I think of this Aesop's fable: the wind and the sun are looking at a shepherd and say, "Who can get his jacket off faster?" The wind blows and blows; the shepherd holds his coat tighter. The sun just goes hot; within two seconds, he takes off his coat. What's the quickest, most effective way of getting what you really desire? It's probably by going gently, yet keeping your eye on the ball because you really want it. It's not about being right or wrong; it's about ending up where you want to go. Oftentimes, other people can help you go there. They can have a real economy you hadn't thought of.



Dara Friedman, *Mother Drum*, 2016. © Dara Friedman, courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

You've also discussed the importance of active listening in creating your work.

It's about listening, but it's also about asking the right questions. A lot of it comes back to structure, choosing your words carefully, being careful what you wish for. Magical incantations are simply words put in the proper order, asking and saying something as accurately or obliquely as possible. It's powerful. We've come into a political time where words no longer have meaning—a dangerous place that becomes *beyond meaning*. It's a muddy gray zone, because words are our tools. If they become blunt and not used properly, they're no longer effective. They're really precious.

What did you learn when you made *Dichter*, which focused on poetic language as expressed by the body?

Daniela Marcozzi, an Italian actress, auditioned, and she had an advanced degree in biology. She was involved with the teachings of Candace Pert, who wrote *Molecules of Emotion*. It's proven your emotions are bound into your molecules, and they get stuck. You need to physically move them out, creating open channels so you're not physically and emotionally ill.



Dara Friedman, *Play (Parts 1 & 2)*, 2013. © Dara Friedman, courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

Daniela hosted a workshop for all the actors, which ended up in the piece. It reinforced what I'd learned while making *Mother Drum*, with the Jingle Dress Dance, which is not really a dance—it's a physical prayer. It taught me that it's a practice to trust your body's wisdom. If something feels wrong, it doesn't matter how much you can explain it away. That's when words become sort of superfluous. No amount of talk is going to make something feel *right*.

How did you select the title, *Perfect Stranger*, for your exhibition?

I had a slogan one of my daughters said when she was maybe eight: "I am the moon; you cannot resist me." It sounded a little too egomaniacal, though that's not how it was meant. I imagined the works would be different planets, each one a complete world unto themselves, all part of the same cosmos.

René Morales came up with *Perfect Stranger*. I thought it was perfect, and it was strange. There are people I work with who I don't know that well, yet we get involved in these very intimate, intense sessions where we make things. They're all perfect strangers. They're perfect.

— Monica Uszerowicz