

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

Palm Beach Illustrated  
Beth Rudin DeWoody on Her State of the Art Space  
Susie Stanton Staikos  
27 October 2020



## Beth Rudin DeWoody on Her State of the Art Space

Beth Rudin DeWoody's West Palm Beach art space, known as the Bunker, gives her vast collection room to breathe.



Image: Beth Rudin DeWoody in front of Moon River and Canoe House, Yann Gerstberger, 2017. Photography by Jerry Rabinowitz

The 1920s-era building at 444 Bunker Road in West Palm Beach has seen its share of uses: first a toy factory and later a munitions facility. But since late 2017, it has been home to the Bunker—two floors of spacious art galleries, an extensive library of art-related books, and storage for some of the 15,000 artworks in Beth Rudin DeWoody's eclectic collection.

But don't call the Bunker a museum. It's an extension of DeWoody's home; an art space where she can see and enjoy her collection and share it with others. "This is a great way to curate things from my collection, get it out of the warehouse, and just add to the art scene here," she says.



Image: Streaks, Emma Amos, 1983.

Though she maintains primary residences in New York and Los Angeles, DeWoody has been a keen observer of the South Florida art scene over the years. She purchased a home in West Palm Beach in 2000. Back then, DeWoody says, the local art offerings left her wanting more.



Image: Betty, Betty, Betty, Tony Berlant, 1963; Study of Warka (A12349), Frank Stella, 1973.

"The Norton always had an incredible collection, but it had missed the boat on a lot of contemporary art," she says. "It wasn't great and the building wasn't great, but I still loved going there." Then, she says, the tides turned with the arrival of a new director at the Norton Museum of Art. "When Hope Alswang came she was determined to get a new building for the Norton, and I think that was a big game changer for Palm Beach. Tim Wride, the photography curator, and Cheryl Brutvan, the contemporary art curator, were starting to bring in some really great contemporary art."

DeWoody has exhibited pieces from her collection at the Norton and has developed a close relationship with the organization in the process. She serves on the Photography Committee, and in 2012

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she established the bi-annual \$20,000 Rudin Prize for photography through the support of the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation. The prize, named in honor of Beth's father, Lewis Rudin, recognizes an emerging photographer who is on the leading edge of the field but has yet to land a solo museum show. "The first year there was Analisa Servan, who is now a very established artist," DeWoody says of the prize's first winner. This year, South African-born photographer Kristin-Lee Moolman was awarded. "It's so nice later to see how they develop," DeWoody adds.



Image: Soundsuit, Nick Cave, 2010; Tête-à-Tête low armless chairs, Nigel Coates and Barnaba Fornasetti, 2002; Geno Pheno Painting: The Preservation of Symmetry in The Annihilated Pair, Keith Tyson, 2005; Shoe Painting, Dona Nelson, 2011.

## Bunker Mentality

Unlike the Norton, where visitors can peruse art on display on a regular basis, those hoping to catch a glimpse of DeWoody's vast holdings at the Bunker are relegated to appointment-only visits on Fridays. Each year, house co-curators Laura Dvorkin and Maynard Monrow organize a new display. Guest curators are also invited to design exhibits in sections of the galleries. "It's become more successful than I dreamed," DeWoody says.

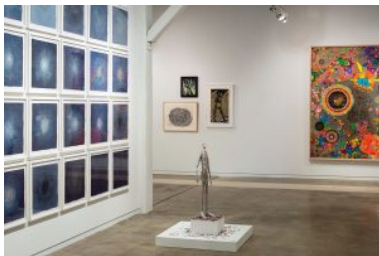


Image: Cycle 2, Ryan Wallace, 2010; Spiral Path, Robert Smithson, 1971; Eye Body #5, Carolee Schneemann, 1963-1973; Streep Tease, Mimmo Rotella, 1963; The Promised Land, Joseph Alvarez, 2013; Untitled (Looking Up), Tom Friedman, 2012.

DeWoody's annual Bunker shows have captured the attention of the South Florida art scene. The 2019-20 selections demonstrated the breadth of her collection, with photography making a considerable contribution. DeWoody's husband, photographer Firooz Zahedi, curated an exhibit titled "Art in Architecture," described as "a double dose of creative energy." A series of photographs by Julius Shulman, Ezra Stoller, Bevan Davis, and Pedro E. Guerrero artfully illustrate innovative architectural designs of buildings around the world—including the idiosyncratic styles of architects and artists like Oscar Niemeyer, Louis I. Kahn, Daniel Libeskind and Richard Neutra, Pablo Bernstein, and Louise Nevelson.



Image: Black Painting Part 2, Paulo Nimer Pjota, 2017; Geno Pheno Painting: The Preservation of Symmetry in the Annihilated Pair, Keith Tyson, 2005; left sculpture, Untitled (Looking Up), Tom Friedman, 2012; right sculpture, Untitled, Takuro Kuwata, 2018.

Another showstopper, the aptly titled "Herstorical Works on Paper" exhibit, featured pieces by women artists, including abstract expressionist Agnes Martin, Jamaican-born abstract painter and printmaker Mavis Pusey,

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abstract expressionist and figurative expressionist painter Elaine de Kooning, and photorealist and feminist artists Betty Tompkins and Judy Chicago.

Sexuality was fully visible in “Fatale Femme.” Set behind a velvet curtain reminiscent of a fairground peep show, the exhibit featured images of overtly shapely female bodies and caricatures, including figures by notable artists such as Man Ray, Harry Benson, Diane Arbus, Barbara T. Smith, and Mickalene Thomas.



Image: Untitled (Mullican Posters), Matt Mullican, 1982; sculpture, Topdog, Derek Fordjour, 2016.

In the first-floor gallery, Simon Watson’s “Inner Space/Outer Space” exhibit teased out the commonalities amid the diversity of DeWoody’s collections. He included more than 75 paintings, sculptures, and photographs that touched upon two interconnected themes: our inner world and the universe around us.

## Curating and Collecting

Even the themes in Watson’s Bunker exhibit don’t do justice to the vast array of works DeWoody has in her collection. A look at her eclectic assemblage makes it hard to spotlight just one genre or medium of art. “I do love drawings,” she admits when asked to play favorites. “My first real piece was a drawing. I love the hand of the artist early on when the ideas germinate. That’s always been appealing to me.”

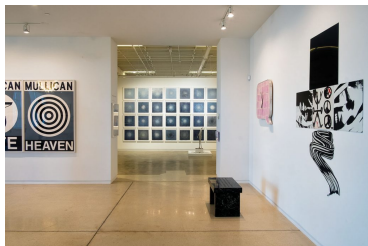


Image: Cycle 2, Ryan Wallace, 2010; Clock (Lavender), Liz Craft, 2016; From the Series: The Pleasure is Back, Gretchen Bender, 1982.

She still owns that first piece—a drawing of sharecroppers by Benny Andrews, an African American artist who is descended from a Southern sharecropping family. DeWoody was in the eleventh grade when Andrews taught art at The New School in New York City, and she enrolled in his class and later bought some of his drawings and paintings.

DeWoody has recently seen previously overlooked African American artists and African artists in the diaspora gaining more attention by way of a catch-up after years of not having their day—and she’s passionate about continuing to amplify those marginalized voices. As a follower and collector of the late African American artist Jack Whitten, DeWoody says she appreciates his innovative work across a career that spanned more than four decades.

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Image: Semi-Precious Bone, Kathleen Ryan, 2018

When the Taubman Museum in Roanoke, Virginia, proposed that DeWoody mount an exhibition of what she calls her “greatest hits,” she declined, suggesting an exhibition of artists of color from her collection instead. “When I collected, I had no idea what their color was, where they came from, and what their background was, only that I liked their work,” DeWoody recalls. After the success of the Taubman exhibit, she mounted a similar exhibition at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in October.

One of DeWoody’s passions is following emerging artists, particularly a growing base out of Los Angeles. “There are not as many as I’d like to see here in this area,” she laments. “There are some, like Phillip Estlund, who I’ve supported over the years through Sarah Gavlak’s gallery.” She says the closer you get to a large city like Miami, the more robust the community of up-and-coming artists. “As neighborhoods gentrify, traditional artists’ studios get replaced by developments that outprice the rents young artists can afford. But, if you are an artist, you have to figure it out.”

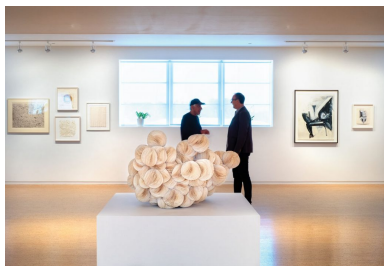


Image: Untitled (Desert), Vija Celmins, 1971; Pacific, Oregon, Michelle Stuart, 1990; Untitled, Howardena Pindell, 1976; Untitled, Eleanore Mikus, 1969; Untitled (Paper Plates), Tara Donovan, 2005; Study for Bride, Jay Defeo, 1986; Untitled (Tripod), Jay Defeo, 1975.

Regardless of location, DeWoody says anyone can collect art. She encourages young people to get involved. “A lot of younger people are intimidated going into galleries and reading about the prices of art.” She recommends going into galleries, speaking to the person behind the desk, asking questions, and attending art fairs. “There are affordable art fairs and young galleries where you can find art for under a thousand dollars. Don’t be intimidated. Just look, look, look, and discover things.”



Image: Vanilla Nightmares #46, Adrian Piper, 1986; Untitled C, Willem de Kooning, 1976.

At the Bunker, it’s clear that DeWoody’s vast collection is a product of a lifetime of looking and discovering. Beyond the curated exhibits is a massive storage area, housing more works that are just waiting for their chance to go on display—from stacks of carefully labeled crates with numbers and photographs identifying the treasures hidden within, to large paintings filed between a row of sliding screens.

For DeWoody, each piece is special. That’s why she encourages others to engage with art—even if they’re not destined to fill a bunker’s worth with their collections. “I think it’s wonderful that art has become recognized for its importance in peoples’ lives,” she says. “It’s fantastic, and it enriches all our lives.”