

ARTFORUM

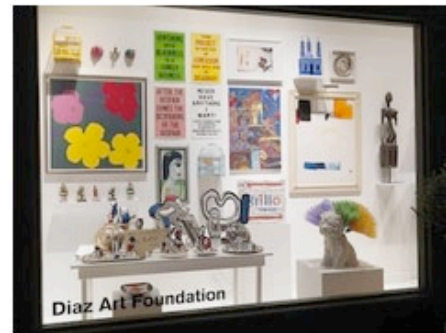
CRITICS' PICKS

Providence

Alejandro Diaz

MUSEUM OF ART - RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN (RISD)
224 Benefit Street
November 16–June 9

Appearing to be made of cardboard and permanent marker, Alejandro Diaz's cast resin and hand-painted signs, as well as his upcycled and "off-the-shelf" sculpture and a selection of objects from his eclectic art collection populate this exhibition. While many of the works reference movements and artists who famously fused "high" with "low"—Arte Povera, Warhol, Koons—the show smartly refutes that now haggard binary. Instead, Diaz seems to argue that today such hodgepoding is no longer deviant, but rather suggests a framework for "progress" within free enterprise's cycles of appropriation and assimilation. It also shows how the collapse of such binaries in art has done little to unite respective social classes: As the biting neon sign *No Shoes / No Shirt – You're Probably Rich*, 2009, implies the selective consumption of "the low" is a privilege of the few that is not reciprocally enjoyed.



Alejandro Diaz, *Diaz Art Foundation*, 2012, mixed media, dimensions variable.

"RISD Business: Sassy Signs & Sculptures" offers a contemporary counterpoint within the context of an academic institution whose collection spans centuries. *Cassandra*, 2012 is an eighteenth-century marble statue that tows plaid red market bags brimming with Diaz's cardboard signs. The work puts into question institutional practices of denominating treasures and ruins, and calls for a reexamination based on inclusive values. Meanwhile, a storefront window facade houses the site-specific installation *Diaz Art Foundation*, 2012. Its title puns on Dia, an organization that Diaz claims has done little to support Chicano/a artists despite its Texan roots. The artist-curated display of objects ranging from ca. 1500 to 2012 pairs ceramics and saints by "unknown Mexican artisans" with Carolee Schneemann and Roy Lichtenstein works on paper. Diaz's inclusion of a stoneware plate made by curator Judith Tannenbaum is yet another taboo breaker tied neatly into the arrangement, perhaps also serving as a salute to Tannenbaum's many years of service at the RISD Museum: This show is one of her last exhibitions as a full-time curator here.

— [Liz Munsell](#)