



OPEN SPACE

Interview: Rosana Castrillo Díaz & Janet Bishop

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The new bridge to the rooftop garden, and Rosana Castrillo Díaz's mural.

Untitled, 2009. Photo: Don Ross

For the opening of SFMOMA's new Rooftop Garden, Bay Area artist Rosana Castrillo Díaz was commissioned to create a mural painting on the bridge leading to the new outdoor space. Rosana was a recipient of the 2004 SECA Art Award &, if you're a local reader, you might remember the wall drawing she created on the museum's third-floor landing: it was made entirely of cellophane tape. The new bridge mural is painted in shades of white, using reflective mica paint to take advantage of the light flooding into the glass-walled bridge. While Rosana was here working on the installation back in April, we asked her to take some time out to sit down and talk with painting and sculpture curator Janet Bishop, who worked with the artist on both the SECA show and the new commission, about her work.

JANET BISHOP: Thank you for coming in, and taking time away from the mural to talk a little bit about it now. When you and I last worked together, about four years ago, you were one of the SECA Art Award winners, and you made an extraordinarily beautiful large wall relief, a very subtle cloud made of looped Scotch tape. One of the remarkable things I remember about that was, because it was not only the opening of the SECA Art Award exhibition, but also SFMOMA's tenth anniversary in this building, Mario Botta, our architect, was here. He said that your tape drawing was the most sympathetic piece he'd ever seen in this building.

Since that time, you've continued to make works on paper in a very intimate scale, and also some very large-scale pieces, including [a project at UCSF](#). I wonder if you can start by telling us a little bit about some of the works that led to the work you're doing on the commission at SFMOMA now.



Rosana Castrillo
Diaz, *Tape Drawing*
(detail). 2004

ROSANA CASTRILLO DÍAZ: In the white-on-white drawings, and the tape piece, my interest is in quiet, in simplicity, and in the kind of space that is in the periphery and is not quite there, or you don't know whether it's there or not.

JB: I remember you said about the tape piece that it wasn't even so important to you whether people even saw it. I think that most people probably did see it, but it required careful looking, a slow experience of the piece.

RCD: Right. Or for example, I did a show at Mills College, where they have a big skylight on top of the building. It was kind of like the bridge here. The light was intense and very diffuse, and you approached the piece frontally, so many people just missed it. Which is fine. I like that. I think the piece did what it needed to do, which was to surprise you in passing.

The UCSF project [in the Legoretta building on the Mission Bay campus] which you mentioned is in a long dark hallway. The hallway ends with a window, however, and I was very attracted to the light from that window. I thought I could use reflectivity to bring some of that light in, and use the length of the passageway so people might see the light changing. At the same time, at the studio, I was playing with mica. I was fascinated with it as a material.

JB: Was the UCSF piece the first time you worked directly on the wall?

RCD: One of the first. A couple years before that I was in a show at the Drawing Center where I was drawing on the wall.

JB: Using what material?



Rosana Castrillo Diaz,
Untitled, 2004. Graphite on

paper. Collection SFMOMA

RCD: Just pencil. But again, it was very small, very detailed work that you could miss very easily. It was work that required you to walk around slowly, or to be nearby to spot it. One of the drawings was a book, just the outline of it. And another was a little piece of a photocopy from a book. The open pages of the book were made out of the shadow around it, and almost nothing more.

JB: I wonder if you can talk a little bit about the development of your ideas for the design of the bridge mural. It relates in such an interesting way to the fact that the Rooftop Garden will be used primarily for sculpture. The design has an incredible sense of movement. The imagery seems to relate to, say, folds of drapery in classical sculpture.

RCD: I would like to be able to tell you that I thought, "Oh, a rooftop garden, of course, sculpture!" But actually, I thought first about the palette and the reflectivity that I wanted to be there, and how I wanted something really white or light. And if I could've gone with values that were even a touch lighter, I would have. But it would have lost reflectivity, which is a key to the overall design and to having the work be extremely white when light hits. I also thought about Renaissance marbles, and turn-of-the-century Camille Claudel marbles, and the way that light models marble and is reflected by marble. And I wanted a design that would have a downward flow to it. As I went back and looked into imagery of marbles, draperies just kept coming out.

JB: Did part of your wish to have some kind of flow have to do with the fact that the bridge is a passageway and a ramp?

RCD: It's a passageway, and the ramp is long. I knew that as you walked down it, the way you saw the design would change. I felt it needed to flow like water.



Rosana Castrillo Díaz, *Untitled*, 2009.
Photo: Ian Reeves.

JB: Yesterday we were looking at it and remarking upon the fact that when you're at one vantage point, you see the different values of the whites very distinctly. But if you look at the very same spot on the wall from another vantage point, they collapse into each other and you don't see the distinctions at all.

RCD: I love that moment when they collapse into each other and it just disappears. It comes to completion, in a way. It's fabulous.

JB: How would you describe the four different paints that you are using? At UCSF, the entire piece was done with mica, right?



The UCSF mural. *Untitled*, April 5, 2007. Rosana Castrillo Diaz, 2007.

RCD: It was mica. I mixed the mica in different percentages until I came up with one that gave the most reflectivity. For this project, my goodness, I went through so many micas. I went through commercial micas, like Benjamin Moore reflectives, and through artist paints of all sorts—You're not going to believe much money I spent on just trying the right micas, the right whites. I wanted micas that would have a neutral palette to them and I tried to come up with values that were at a distance from each other that I was comfortable with, not too separate in value; but not too close, either.

JB: And did you determine the background paint? Or is that just "SFMOMA white"?

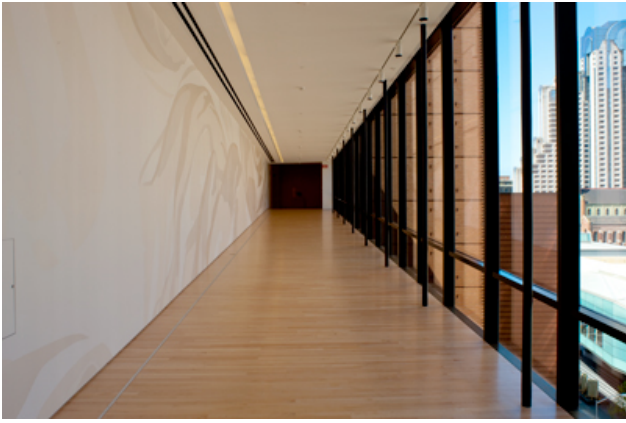
RCD: I just worked with SFMOMA's white. I also tried it on super white, but it was too cold.

JB: It's also nice the way it blends at the edges and at the top into the rest of the space.

RCD: What I learned from all of my research was that, while I first thought the highlights would be the lightest value, as it turns out I had to paint the design in reverse, in negative. So actually the highlights are the darkest color, because that paint is the most reflective. So there was an element of surprise there. Luckily, it works.

For me the painting has two sides to it. There's the reflective side, and there is the concrete side to it. There's the side where the piece is playing with the light and is all about reflectivity, and the side where you see the actual paint on the wall. I think it works both ways, but that was a great risk for me, painting it in reverse. It was not comfortable. Because you really don't know what it's going to look like until it's up there. I tried to mimic the effect on the computer, I tried to mimic it on my wall. And then I thought, Should I do this? Should I paint the highlights dark gray? Or dark mica? And then I thought, let's go for it, and if it doesn't work, we'll just have to change it.

JB: It seems like it's working.



The mural from the other direction. Rosana Castrillo Díaz, *Untitled*, 2009.

RCD: You know, it's working perfectly. I am very happy with it. I'm not sure how much can you read "fold" or "drapery" from the design, but because it's so large it doesn't matter what is negative or positive.

JB: Another issue I know has been a big one as you've been developing this project is, how to make the piece in such a way that it can be redone at some point in the future. Since the museum is hoping to acquire the piece for the collection, but not necessarily planning to keep it up indefinitely (as there really isn't anything here that's permanent), we would want to be able to install it again. So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about some of the things you had to think about, given that it's not necessarily just a one-time installation, but something that we're hoping could be repeated,, like the wall drawings that we own by Sol LeWitt, for instance.

RCD: I've been trying to think all along about how I can make it easier for you to reinstall this. I think it would be key to be able to project it, and I think you could, by just making a simple grid on the wall. But that is like having a hard copy of it. I would have projected the whole thing at the start, but I thought it would be interesting to have a hard copy of the original design, with any last-minute changes added to the hard copy as we were working. Then you would have a basic record or template you could always go back to and say, Well, this is how she did it. There was also an issue of the hand of the artist. Amanda, one of the conservators, asked "How are we going to draw this? It won't be you." If the museum ever works with it again and they have to draw it themselves on the wall, I'm okay with it. Somebody else's hand, well- it would still be handmade, and that interests me much more than, Okay, that's my hand.

JB: And you do have quite a few hands involved in the making of this piece, right? You have a group of people that are helping.

RCD: Right. I have six people helping. It's actually quite nice to have all those people involved and having these all hands—it ultimately kind of proves that we're not that important. [laughs] You know, I'm from Spain, where artists are appreciated but not revered. It's very interesting to be in this culture, where if you say you're an artist, there's all this awe and hush. And on the other hand, the museum does have to be true to what the artist's intent was. But it's also really nice to know that you can involve several people and still have a work that is by you.



Janet Bishop & Rosana Castrillo Diaz

JB: It's almost like being a composer.

RCD: Right.

JB: You write a piece that will be performed in the future, and it will be different every single time, but it will still be the piece.

RCD: Right. And I was afraid that the tape used to mask out the piece would make it cold, but everything's working well. It's not—the lines are not cold or tape-like.

JB: Well, it's great to have you back at SFMOMA for the installation, and congratulations in advance. The piece is—already, even in its incomplete state—a really wonderful work of art.

RCD: Thank you.

[And some pleasant news: The mural was unanimously approved by SFMOMA's accessions committee on May 13th. Do come down and see it, and many thanks to Janet & Rosana for talking about it here.]