

Rocío Rodríguez retrospective at MOCA GA is titled *Thirty Years*, but it feels timeless

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*Installation view of Rocío Rodríguez's *Thirty Years on Paper* (All photos by Reis Birdwhistell, courtesy of MOCA GA and the artist)*

Shelley Danzy March 7, 2019

Instinctive. Yes, it's instinctive for MOCA GA to be the principal gallery space for *Rocío Rodríguez: *Thirty Years on Paper**. The museum presents "dynamic, challenging and innovative" work, and this 1988–2018 retrospective, on display through April 6, is no exception. It features more than 100 works, many never before exhibited.

Rodríguez's drawings pull viewers in, as does the artist herself. We first see her in fast motion on a large video screen. She's creating, with gracious tenacity, lines and shapes in brief bursts of step-back-study-and-step-again energy.

"Given that the process of drawing has been central to my history as a painter," she says in exhibition materials, "I wanted to expose the thinking that was realized on the paper. I thought it important to highlight the essential, where the process of creativity begins."

It's obvious why she's one of 10 highly recognized recipients given a 2018 Anonymous Was a Woman Grant.

MOCA GA's space affords movement, so viewers can decide where to start. There's a delightful uncertainty about where Rodríguez's first stroke begins and the last ends, which is almost antithetical to the high-speed video. One of the more fascinating aspects of *Thirty Years* is the perception that Rodríguez's journey is one of exponential possibilities. Even the boundaries of paper can't confine it. The journey only grows livelier in time, with time.





February 22, 1999, charcoal pencil and pencil on paper, 17 x 21 inches

You'll likely want to focus on your personal connection to each piece and spend time with the specificity of the paper, which speaks to the liberties Rodríguez wants to communicate. From creases to blends of color to erasures to the imperfect perfection of sketched boxes, unclosed circles perpetuate an openness that can fade. Even tack holes reference the opening video — the quick movements and the stepping back just long enough to ponder.

If you're intrigued by movement — spoken and unspoken — you'll engage with each piece. They range in size and layout, from playfulness to masking, from out-of-body identifications to shapeshifting bodies, from abstractions to darkened detachments. The details are unmistakable and will often contradict your first reaction.



October 27, 2016, pastel and oil pastel on paper, 18 x 24 inches

Rodríguez's work expresses an awareness of her inner self in relation to the world around her. "Some of the drawings are tangential," she says in the exhibition materials, "such as the 'war drawings' that accompanied bodies of work in paintings that expressed diverse concerns and subject matter."

Rodríguez's *30 Days* (2018), which measures 11 inches by 308 inches, seems emblematic of her work here. It's a malleable depiction of time's resolve — how continually present and boundlessly fleeting it is. Its 22 pieces of paper — pastel, oil pastel and charcoal, and pencil on paper — prove that Rodríguez is an artist who won't be stifled by thoughts, deeds or consequences. There is a painstakingly effortless effort here, as if she's tag-teaming with herself. Another focal piece is *untitled* (2015), reprised in this exhibition in charcoal and graphite on vellum paper, and charcoal and acrylic paint on the wall.

Rodríguez, who's represented by Sandler Hudson Gallery, says she first encountered art was when she was 11. Her Cuban father shared illustrated art books — of Velazquez, Rembrandt and van Gogh — and she began drawing pictures from the World Book Encyclopedia's art section. Even her shift from studying political science in college to earning B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees in drawing and painting reflects her ability to find her own artistic path.

There are countless gems in this exhibition. If you make time to journey with Rodríguez, you may find yourself returning again and again.



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