

# Rocio Rodriguez's Purge, a Dialogue with the Past

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Rocio Rodriguez, *Purge*, installation view. Photo courtesy Sandler Hudson Gallery. Click the image above to zoom.

*Purge*, a fearless wall installation by Atlanta-based artist [Rocio Rodriguez](#), reveals the artist's struggle as she questions the meaning of painting in a world saturated with images. In this hybrid work, which employs both drawing and painting, Rodriguez examines the process of painting, deconstructing and obliterating her own reliable language in a search for a new beginning. The installation, the signature work in the exhibition titled *Purge* at [Sandler Hudson Gallery](#) (closing this **Saturday, September 8**), is a transparent revelation of the artist's thinking at a crucial stage in her career.

Sprawling across two gallery walls, the monumental black-and-white installation contains traces of markings typically found in Rodriguez's abstract work: solid rectangles juxtaposed against flattened transparent forms and ghosts of rectangles hovering in the

distance. The work successfully merges painting and drawing in changing tonalities and densities applied through impulsive brushing, scribbling, scrubbing, stenciling, and erasure.

Dominant black forms created with aggressive gestures of paint and charcoal sit on the surface of the work, concealing the scribbles and dissolving forms that linger behind them. These ominous forms operate with different temperaments allowing us to see through the artist's eyes as she negotiates questions of meaning for her familiar language. A massive, flat black form asserts itself on the left, while on the right, wildly gestural, scrubbed and painted marks provide a counterbalance. In an almost operatic introduction, the central section of the painting presents characters in confrontation with impending annihilation. The iconography at the center of the work verges on collapse, a metaphor for the artist's confrontation with her visual language.

In a disruption of solemnity, Rodriguez humorously inserts a pair of eyes looking upward from under the large black form on the left. The eyes are an unmistakable nod to the cartoonish paintings of [Phillip Guston](#), a reference confirmed by Rodriguez during an interview. She further confided that her admiration for Guston was due to his willingness to turn his back on his own success to pursue a much riskier cartoon approach to painting. The cartoonish eyes are a proxy, a metaphor for the artist looking at the viability of painting from the inside as well as from the outside.



Rocio Rodriguez, July 18, 2011, pastel, oil pastel, pencil on paper. Image courtesy Sandler Hudson Gallery.

Drawing is the crucible for Rodriguez's ideas. "Drawings are the DNA of my paintings. If the studio was burning down, I would rescue my drawings," she commented during our interview. The dozen drawings from 2011 and 2012 reveal the artist's entanglement with her past. We can see the shift in her thinking through two works entitled *July 18, 2011*

and *may 15, 2012*. In the 2011 work, Rodriguez creates a dialectic between opacity and transparency, scribbling against solid rectangles, and between presence and erasure. In the 2012 work, the artist collapses these elements in a tight mass of conflicting marks. The rectangles disintegrate, overcome by knotted red-orange scribbles that mute the remnants of pink, gray, and yellow hovering in the background. The whole mass rests on spindly legs, threatening to cave under the weight of the entanglement.

If drawings are intimate skirmishes in the artist's process, then the wall installation, through scale and impermanence, is an explosive flight to freedom. When asked about the opportunity to work on the gallery wall, Rodriguez announced, "It was to get out of the studio and do something that was temporal (impermanent), on a larger scale—just for the doing of it."

Rodriguez's work preceding *Purge* is currently on view in a 25-year survey at [The Columbus Museum](#) (August 19–November 4, 2012) in Columbus, Georgia. The exhibition, titled *Divergent Fictions*, was organized by Deb Weidel, assistant curator of exhibitions, and traces Rodriguez's search for a viable painting language from figurative to fragmented realism and finally to abstraction. The arc

of Rodriguez's visual thinking is united by the drawings, while the selection of paintings confirms an authoritative match between ideas and material. The exhibitions at Sandler Hudson Gallery and The Columbus Museum furnish a narrative of a solo voice that embraces the unknown with intense ferocity.



Rocio Rodriguez, *may 15, 2012*, pastel, oil pastel, pencil on paper.  
Image courtesy Sandler Hudson Gallery.