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Miami 2018: Purvis Young at the Rubell Family Collection

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Works by Purvis Young on view at the Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

Purvis Young (1943-2010) was an outsider artist who lived in the rough and tumble neighborhood of Liberty City, Miami. The paintings, at the Rubell Family Collection in the Wynwood Art District, appear, at first, to be haphazardly constructed and rather makeshift until they reveal themselves to be the workings of an artist of acute insight into the human condition. The exhibition's 14 sections delve his multiple and fierce obsessions which range from history and politics to the mystical realm of angels and holy men. Moved by the tragedies of his time, be it the civil rights movement, urban violence, drug use, social decay, Young made his materials from found objects, tape, doors, wood, anything he could lay his hands on. Every now and then, there are glimmers of pure mastery, like a small boat on the water, an allegorical doomsday that reminds me, in its textured darkness, of Albert Pinkham Ryder. Then there are the jail cells, which ingeniously meld minimal abstraction and social commentary along a singular and passionate plane.