

Warrior Woman of Wynwood

by Nancy Jones

[Interview with Dina Mitrani](#)

DINA MITRANI GALLERY

2620 NW 2nd Avenue, Miami, FL 33127

February 21, 2010 - March 7, 2010



Dina Mitrani settles in behind her desk at her Miami Wynwood gallery for an interview. “Would you like to sit here on the couch?” she says. “No, wait, that doesn’t look comfortable. How about this chair over here near me.”

“Oh that’s good,” I say. “This is closer.”

For weeks as a South Florida transplant from New York, I’ve been hoping to investigate this art hot-spot called Wynwood and get some perspective from a pioneer. Luckily I find one of those born-and-bred-in-Miami, flees-for-years to New York-Paris-Madrid, then-returns-to-Miami types. From our first meeting at her gallery, where I’m given a tour of her latest show of photographs by Marina Font, I label Mitrani as my go-to guide of choice. She appears at once thoughtful, modest, energetic and full of ideas.



She also has two photographs hanging in her office I’d like to rip off the walls and take home.

One is a riff on the famous photo of the iconic H O L L Y W O O D Sign set up 87 years ago as a billboard for a housing project. In this photo the sign spells out W Y N W O O D and instead of the Hollywood Hills as a backdrop, it’s set upon a gigantic hill of trash. Worth a chuckle, for sure.

But poignant too, given the less-than-fragrant streets of Wynwood in 2002 before art really broke loose here.

NANCY JONES: *You opened your gallery in November, 2008 but from what I’ve read, you’ve known this area well.*

DINA MITRANI: Oh yes, I was born here in Miami. We lived in Miami Beach. My gallery in this building is where my parents had their clothing business for 40 years. From the Garment District to the Art District. I certainly do know the area well. Wynwood’s grown from about 30 galleries in 2002 to nearly 100 today.

NJ : *But what took you away?*

DM: Curiosity I suppose. My background is Sephardic, Eastern European. My father's of Turkish descent. He was born in Cuba. My mother was born in Argentina. I've always wanted to see what else was out there. For a variety of reasons I chose the University of Michigan to get my Bachelor's in Art History. I had a sojourn in Paris. Then I moved to New York and joined Christie's Latin American Client Services Department, working part time and getting my Masters at Hunter. I had great training at two Manhattan galleries specializing in Latin American art and photography and all the time was writing my thesis on the work of a little-known German photographer Gisele Freund.

NJ: *And what brought you back?*

DM: Well, since college I'd always had the dream of opening a gallery. But in 1998 it seemed as if everybody in the art world was in Coral Gables. At the same time, things had been brewing in this part of town for six or seven years, thanks to the Rubells, Martin Margulies and other dynamic collectors. I began work with my sister Rhonda, a video artist and filmmaker, to create a sort of artist's colony right here in this building.

NJ: *And what happened?*

DM: Today we have five artists' studios upstairs in my father's old factory space and four gallery spaces downstairs. I also married a Spanish artist from Valencia. We met here in Miami and have two young daughters 18 months apart.

NJ: *You have about a dozen photographers in your stable. Do you have certain criteria for the choices you make? Would you say there's an overriding aesthetic?*

DM: I've been asked why I specifically chose to open a photography gallery in the first place. Why not include paintings and installations? Well, if photography's my passion and there's only one other gallery here dedicated to photography, there's plenty of room for both of us. As far as my aesthetic goes, you might say Minimal or Conceptual. And always, somehow, there's a poetic sensibility at play. Mario Algaze's work is particular striking for this. Also, I tend to lean toward work with feminine subject matter –Peggy Levison Nolan's splendid photographs, for example.

NJ: *Any heroes from the past?*

DM: You mean like Tina Modotti, or Man Ray or Stieglitz? Sure.

NJ: *And your plans for the future?*

DM: I see the gallery growing as a resource for photographers, for collectors –with lectures, seminars, photo books. You name it. The ICP of the South! Why not?

NJ: *Have I forgotten anything?*

DM: Yes. Something I'm proud to be part of. It's called WOW! The Women of Wynwood. Nina Johnson, Thea Goldman, Yvette Garcia, my sister Rhonda and I started a special program empowering women through educational and work opportunities here in Wynwood. You've seen them with their walkie-talkies on the streets in their hot pink uniforms handing out maps and acting as good will ambassadors. They all come from Lotus House, a women's homeless shelter. They've done so much to make our streets safe and to promote Wynwood as a local community and international art destination.

NJ: *Do you have any issues at all today that worry you?*

DM: Well, maybe one. The weather. It's too nice here.

NJ: *OK then, one last thing. That photograph there behind your desk. Who's the dreamily handsome young man? I can't take my eyes off him. That's not F. Scott Fitzgerald is it?*

DM: Oh no! That's Duchamp!

NJ: *Ah, of course! Perfect choice.*

Images: Pancho Luna, *Wynwood* (2007);
Alfred Stieglitz, *Marcel Duchamp* (1921).
Courtesy Dina Mitrani Gallery.



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