

# The Wedding Thrasher

*The converted garage that serves as the Carol Jazzar art gallery felt like a chapel on the opening night for Marry Me - Western Union from artist David Rohn. In fact, the garage and its huge tropical backyard became part of the performance and show — one that delighted or confused the night's art crowd, depending on who was asked.*

*Written by Anne Tschida*

**In the quiet of the “chapel,” Rohn sat high on a pedestal, draped in** a traditional wedding gown and veil, holding a bouquet. In the gallery were photographs of the urban “intervention” he had done decked out in this costume, where he wandered into public spaces and caught the reactions with a camera. Bookending the photographs were mounted nun dolls.

Outside, a video projection of the artist was shown on the garage wall, in front of which was a microphone. Audience members were encouraged to ask questions of the bride, who could only hear the participants but not see them. At first people were hesitant, but once at the microphone, the conversations could turn intensely intimate as they were asked to explore issues of marriage, union and communion with the artist-bride.

Very subtly in the background, there was a recorded message from the bride, reading works of St. Teresa d'Ávila, a 16th-century virgin who was pierced with a “dart of love” from an angel and proclaimed herself the spouse of God. Certainly a different take on marriage.

Rohn is a painter and sculptor, but is best known for his performances like this latest one, where he challenges the art world to think about aspects of the work itself, as well as space and those we share it with.

Like back in 2001, when he transformed into the real estate agent Gretchen Bender, selling a crack house in Wynwood. He decorated the dilapidated house (owned by gallerist Brook Dorsch) with art pieces such as “his” and “hers” chairs, named it “Le Chateau del Pueblo,” and then tried to market it to gallery hoppers. It was obviously no chateau and Gretchen was most likely no woman (though some were perplexed about this one). But along with being witty, it was also a prescient show for an area that would experience a real estate explosion soon after.

Or the next year when he morphed into a “famous” German art collector, owner of the “Katzenjammer Kollektion,” which only includes works from artists whose names start with K. (They were Rohn's works, but he was riffing on the randomness of many self-important collections. Is it really more random to collect K names than artists dubbed “emerging”?)



David Rohn in costume.

He has had many other performances in different venues, such as motels, incorporating varied accents and personas. But one aspect remains constant: for the duration of the show, Rohn stays fully and firmly in character, not leaving it for a second or even cracking a smile.

*Marry Me* was no exception. Although the gallery space was hot and up at his level, cramped, he faithfully remained the bride for hours as people lined up to tell him about ex-wives or failed marriages.

Afterward, he explained that this latest concept is centered around the iconic white dress. “It addresses so much on so many levels,” Rohn says, in T-shirt and pants on this day, and going by David. “There’s this idea of waiting and hoping, that’s what the bride does. She’s all wrapped up in this dress, waiting to be unwrapped and married, like she’s a Christmas present that only a man can release. And it’s such a universal image.”

So when a man dons the gender-specific outfit and walks out into the street, it’s bound to provoke reactions. He photographed those interactions and hung them on the gallery walls. “The purpose has been to try to in some way to



Rohn hits the streets in a wedding dress for his "intervention."

"The purpose has been to try to in some way to bridge back to the world; to bring contemporary art to the non-involved public, and report back to the 'art world' a bit of what's going on out there beyond the museums and galleries."



bridge back to the world; to bring contemporary art to the non-involved public, and report back to the art world a bit of what's going on out there beyond the museums and galleries," he says.

The interaction with space and people continued, however, at Jazzart's gallery, a unique exhibition space in Miami, where patrons spend as much time in the backyard as in the gallery itself, intermingling and flowing from indoor to outdoor and back again. As the bride named

Esperanza (Spanish for "hope") answered questions about the nature of Western unions and where she got her bouquet on the screen outdoors, others encountered the nun dolls indoors and maybe contemplated the life of St. Teresa and her marriage to God. The story has it that after the dedicated virgin died, the Carmelite nuns dug up her body and discovered a decayed dress, but fresh body. Even more miraculous, they could see the wound from the

angel's arrow in her heart.

Apparently visitors, too, can see it if making a pilgrimage to the Carmelite monastery in Spain where the heart is enshrined. But for the less religiously inclined, it might be just as heavenly to wait for another provocative performance from David Rohn.

**It's a great day for a white wedding at [www.cjazzart.com](http://www.cjazzart.com)**