

CULTURE INDEX



SHOWSPACES

The Not-So-Private Collectors

Why the best contemporary art in town may not be in museums. **BY SUE HOSTETLER**

The best counterargument to the outdated canard that Miami is a sun-swept cultural desert is the passion of its private art collectors. Their contemporary holdings are arguably more comprehensive than the local museums' collections—thankfully, many of them have dedicated spaces to show them off to the public—and their stamp of approval can help turn an emerging artist into a global star practically overnight (as Don and Mera Rubell did with Oscar Murillo). If Art Basel Miami Beach (see “Art Basel: An Oral History,” page 149) is widely regarded as the catalyst behind South Florida’s cultural renaissance, it was these collectors who laid the groundwork for it. In the pages that follow, Miami’s most influential patrons open their doors.

Us, 2013, by Rob Pruitt, displayed on the third floor of Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz’s contemporary art space



1 CARLOS AND ROSA DE LA CRUZ

“We have to remember Miami used to be a beach resort, and we are always trying to compare it to other cities with a rich history of museums and cultural institutions,” says Rosa de la Cruz. Ironically, her world-class collection and vociferous support of the contemporary art scene in Miami are among the reasons such comparisons are increasingly apt.

Rosa and her husband, Carlos, met as teenagers in their native Cuba. They left for Spain just after the revolution to seek political asylum. In 1975 they settled in Miami, where Carlos made his fortune in beverage distribution. The couple began collecting contemporary art about 25 years ago to decorate a new home, without ever dreaming it would turn into the full-fledged passion that it has.

Recently, the de la Cruzes have been taking local

cultural institutions to task for becoming “banquet halls and country clubs” prizing elitist social functions over bringing art to the community. “The collectors in Miami realize the importance of opening our spaces to the public,” Rosa says.

For years they allowed visitors into their art-filled Key Biscayne mansion during Art Basel for legendary dinner parties. In 2009 the collection outgrew the home, and the couple opened the 30,000-square-foot de la Cruz Collection Contemporary Art Space in the Design District. Open year-round and free of charge, the space hosts rotating exhibitions from their stellar collection (including names like Isa Genzken, Christopher Wool and Dana Schutz). “Our space is an extension of our home,” Rosa says. “No room is private. I like when visitors tell me they would love to live there!”

For Rosa, the acquisition of works is less rewarding than the ability to foster a thriving local arts culture. With that in mind, the de la Cruzes have also established residencies for artists and invited them to create site-specific installations. At 23 NE 41st St.; delacruzcollection.org.

From left: Works by Mark Bradford, Dan Colen and Rudolf Stingel

3 MARTIN MARGULIES

“I don’t drink wine, so that wasn’t an option [to collect],” says Martin “Marty” Margulies. “And I don’t want to be reminded that time is constantly going by, so watches were out, too. I relate to the visual arts because of the great imprint art makes on your mind.”

Raised in Washington Heights, New York, Margulies moved to Miami in his late twenties after serving in the army and attending Wharton Business School to capitalize on the “virgin” real estate market and be near his retired parents. He began collecting modern and contemporary art in the ‘70s and photography

in the ‘90s. The collection eventually grew so large that “my curator, Katherine Hinds, pointed out that we were running out of space in the apartment,” Margulies recalls. So, in 1998, The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse was born.

Creating the 45,000-square-foot, Wynwood-based space accomplished two important objectives: “It allowed the collection to expand into new areas such as large-scale installations and video,” he says, “and we were able to use the Warehouse as a vehicle to educate young people.” He is particularly dedicated to opening the space to Miami-Dade County public-school students. As Hinds says, “Today contemporary art originates

from every corner of the globe. The firsthand exposure to different cultures through great art is valuable and not available in the schools.”

Margulies feels that Art Basel’s coming to Miami was a no-brainer. “In the early days I got a call from the mayor of Miami Beach saying he was taking suggestions about the fair coming to town,” he recalls. “My response was, ‘Don’t listen to any suggestions, because Art Basel is the Super Bowl of the art world.’” Margulies doesn’t think that the subsequent cultural revitalization has been fully realized, though. “The current art scene here, contrary to public perception, is still in the very early stages,” he says. At 591 NW 27th St.; margulieswarehouse.com.



Dan Flavin’s *Untitled, in Memory of Harold Jachim, 1977*

2 DENNIS AND DEBRA SCHOLL

On their first day of law school at the University of Miami, in 1978, Dennis and Debra (née Schwartz) Scholl were seated next to each other, per the class’s alphabetical arrangement. Their foray into collecting began just as fortuitously as that first meeting. “During law school we needed a job,” recalls Dennis, “so we both worked in a gallery that sold art that matched your sofa!”

The Scholls in front of *Marawa*, 2012, by Australian Aboriginal artist Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri



But that allowed us to learn a lot about what makes a great piece of art.”

Both practiced law, though Debra made a name for herself as one of the first historic developers of Art Deco buildings in South Beach, completing more than 20 restorations.

For 35 years the Scholls have earned recognition for their experimental collection and their generosity. Most recently they donated more than 300 works to the Pérez Art Museum Miami—with an emphasis on sculpture by artists like Olafur Eliasson and photography by Catherine Opie and Anna Gaskell.

Each year the couple selects a young guest curator

to reinstall work from their 1,000-plus-piece collection during Art Basel, then opens their South Beach apartment to thousands of visitors. “Miami has a very committed group of collectors who are willing to turn their collections outward,” says Dennis, who is now the vice president of arts for the Knight Foundation.

Debra, who is the chair of the board of directors for one of the coolest alternative arts spaces in town—Locust Projects—finds Miami singular for its utter lack of pretense. “Miami is a very open city—you don’t have to be fifth generation to get involved on the highest level.” *Collection viewing by invitation only.*

4 NORMAN AND IRMA BRAMAN

Over the last 30 years, Norman and Irma Braman have watched Miami transform from a drug-fueled dystopia to a top cultural destination. “In the late ‘80s and ‘90s, Miami had a terrible reputation worldwide,” Norman says. “The racial difficulties and crime against tourists...Miami was ripped apart in a *Time* magazine article called ‘Paradise Lost?’ The art scene really was what revolutionized the city.”

As a major collector, Norman rightly claims some credit for that revolution. Both he and

his wife, Irma, believed early on that bringing Art Basel to Miami would not only help solve the city’s PR problem but would also be good for business. “We thought it could be a very successful enterprise,” he says. “We kept speaking to [former director of Art Basel] Lorenzo Rudolf, who, after careful analysis and deliberation, persuaded the board in Switzerland to come to Miami. And now it is by far the most important fair in the States.”

The 81-year-old made his fortune selling pharmaceuticals and cars—his name adorns dealerships around the city. Outside Miami, he’s best known as a former owner of the Philadelphia Eagles.

He and Irma began collecting in the late ‘70s after visiting the Maeght Foundation in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France. They were so entranced with the



works of Alexander Calder and Joan Miró that they returned five times in two years to see the changing exhibitions, finally deciding to buy a few Calders. Fast-forward nearly four decades, and their blue-chip collection—much of it on display at their spectacular Indian Creek Island residence—now includes the largest private holding of works by Calder. The 240-piece trove also contains works by Andy Warhol, Willem de Kooning and Jasper Johns.

Married for 58 years, the Bramans reportedly have \$900 million of their \$1.6 billion net worth invested in art. In 2011 the Bramans announced that they intended to sell their collection to fund medical research. *Collection viewing by invitation only.*

The Bramans own pieces like Jasper Johns’s *Diver*, 1962.



**5
DON AND
MERA RUBELL**

Perhaps no collectors loom larger on the Miami contemporary art landscape than Don and Mera Rubell. As they demonstrated in 2012, when they offered a residency to then-little-known Colombian artist Oscar Murillo—whose paintings now command hundreds of thousands—they have the power to anoint art royalty. (Murillo created 50 works during his five-week residency—the Rubells bought every one.)

The couple began collecting in the '60s in New York City while she was a schoolteacher (earning \$100 a week) and he was a medical student. "Our first impulse was to cover the holes in the walls of our Chelsea walk-up apartment with art posters rather than plaster and

paint," laughs Mera, who has maintained a teacher's ability to communicate passion. "We met young artists in the storefronts around our neighborhood who were happy to work out long-term payment schedules for their original works. For some years, it was literally \$5 per week per artist!"

The Rubells moved to Miami in 1992 because of the cheap and seemingly limitless real estate opportunities—and because their children were already there. "With little money, you could own amazing property," says Don. "Virtually every building in South Beach was for sale."

Mera continues, "As a collector, nothing is more frustrating than having your artwork in storage. The only way to experience our art was to follow it to places where it was being exhibited. Miami was such a wide-open frontier that we were able to buy a 45,000-square-foot former DEA facility," which they converted into the Rubell Family Collection, "for less than it cost to get a storage space in Manhattan." At 95 NW 29th St.; rfc.museum.com. ♦

Realism, 2011, by Yan Xing, from the Rubells' collection

**Bas Fisher Invitational
in
15
Minutes**



This decade-old contemporary space was cofounded by artists Hernan Bas and Naomi Fisher—"We liked how our names together sounded, like a fishing tournament," Fisher says.

BFI programs edgy and experimental work, whether visual, video or performance art. Spend 15 minutes inside the space to see whatever exhibition has taken over the gallery, then allow an afternoon to join a Weird Miami tour, Bas Fisher's signature series, in which an artist is given free rein to take visitors on a mystery tour through the city, helping them discover the forgotten, hidden or overlooked places and things that define Miami. At 100 NE 11th St.; basfisherinvitational.com. —Mark Ellwood

MUSIC

**Live from
Calle Ocho**

Musically speaking, Miami is a bit of a paradox: Latin rhythms infuse so much of daily life, yet venues featuring live bands are woefully scarce. "For me," says local branding executive and musician Bruce Turkel, "the best place to hear Latin music is when someone in my [Cuban] wife's family gets married and they have a band." With several storied spots closing in recent months—including The Vagabond, Van Dyke Café and the soon-to-be-shuttered Tobacco Road—the city's last great Latin music club is Little Havana's **Hoy Como Ayer**, on Calle Ocho (Eighth Street). The place made a cameo this year in Jon Favreau's Miami-set film *Chef*, putting off a Buena Vista Social Club vibe that is harder to find than outsiders might expect. Its name—translating to "Today Like Yesterday"—defines the mix of tradition and experimentation you'll hear inside.

On a recent Thursday, Andrew Yeomanson, aka DJ Le Spam, and the Spam AllStars, one of the joint's regular acts, took the stage with a trademark combination of horns and salsa beats over an electronic backbone. Couples bumped and wove through small, candlelit tables to get to the dance floor, their spontaneity matching the band's. It was well past midnight: As with Miami, it may feel like yesterday, but it's already tomorrow. At 2212 SW Eighth St.; 305-541-2631; hoycomoayer.us. —J.s.



BAS FISHER: NAOMI FISHER; HOY COMO AYER: ANIKA BURGESS