



ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

# The Annabelle Selldorf–Designed Rubell Museum Opens in Miami

Just in time for Miami Art Week, a new home for one of the country's most impressive collections of contemporary art opens in Allapattah

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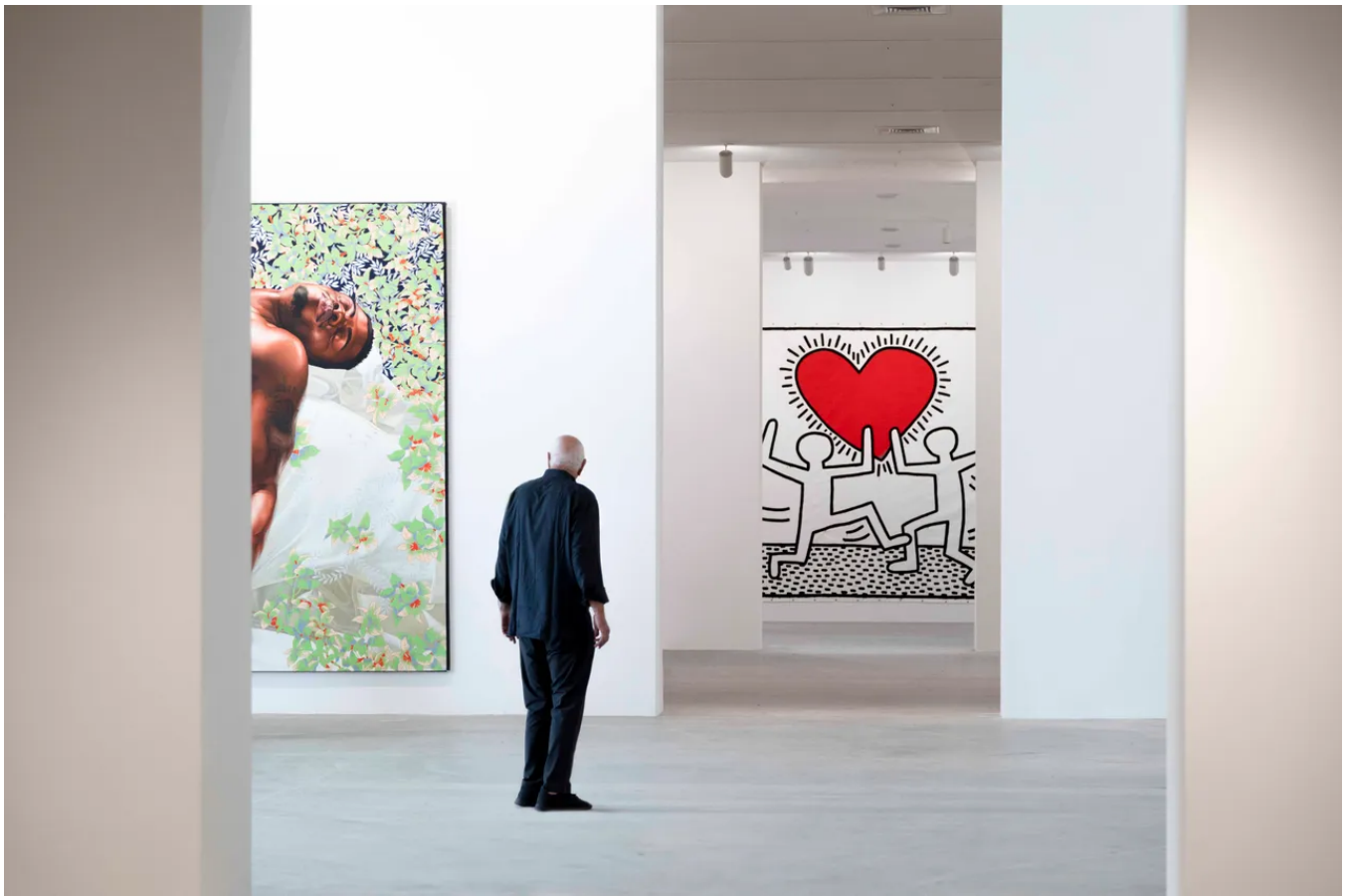
Ever since acquiring their first work in 1964, Don and Mera Rubell have made a name for themselves as some of the most respected contemporary art collectors in the U.S. To this day they rely only on their eye and intuition—no art advisers allowed—to guide their approach to collecting, which has got them in the door early with artists including Keith Haring, Jeff Koons, Yayoi Kusama, and Cady Nolan. For the past 23 years they have housed their collection of some 7,200 works by a thousand artists in a former Drug Enforcement Agency building that they turned into a public viewing space in the Wynwood district, but December 4 will mark a new era as the works move into a new Annabelle Selldorf–designed site, renamed the Rubell Museum, in the nearby Allapattah neighborhood.



The exterior of the new museum. Photo by Nicholas Venezia. Image courtesy of the Rubell Museum.

The Rubell Family Collection, as it was formerly known, is one of the largest private museums in the country, and a major art destination in the couple's adopted hometown of Miami. At its inauguration, the Rubell Museum will be the largest art opening in the city since the Pérez Art Museum opened in 2013. Along with the new building, the new name signals an expansion not only of resources and amenities but also of ambition as well, specifically designed to draw a larger public audience.

Timed during Miami Art Week when fairs such as Design Miami and Art Basel Miami Beach (of which Mera was a key figure in the move to bring the fair to South Florida), the museum's move happened in large part by happy accident. With hundreds of works in the collection returning from an international exhibition loan, the Rubells desperately sought storage in the Miami area. When they found the Allapattah warehouse, they were blown away by its abundance of column-free space and realized it would be a shame to waste it on storage. It was the perfect site for a museum, and so they began to imagine their collection in an entirely new context. "I think sometimes destiny finds you," says Mera. "[Don and I asked ourselves,] 'What if we were to begin again?'"



Don Rubell with *\*Sleep\**, 2008 by Kehinde Wiley (left), and *\*Untitled\**, 1981 by Keith Haring. Photo by Nicholas Venezia. Image courtesy of the Rubell Museum.

When it opens, the Rubell Museum will be home to an impressive 100,000-square-foot campus, 80,000 feet of which will be accessible to the public across 40 galleries, event spaces, a garden courtyard, an indoor-outdoor restaurant, and the largest art research library in South Florida. It is accessible from the public train system, as well as for bikers and pedestrians, because, as Mera notes, “millennials don’t own cars.”

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the museum is that all 100,000 square feet are across one level, with no elevators or staircases, save a single ramp. The 600-foot “internal spine” splits off into branches of galleries scaled to house different sizes of work, orienting the viewer with lights at the end of each hall. Hurricane-safe windows do not just attract light, they invite neighbors to look inside.



World-class architect Annabelle Selldorf and her namesake firm intrinsically understood the power of this linear museum. The German-born architect's distinctive style honors the beauty of the original structure, as has been proved with other celebrated museum projects, such as the heritage homes of the Neue Galerie and the forthcoming Frick Collection renovation.



Gallery view of \*Untitled\*, 1998-1999, by Kerry James Marshall. Photo by Nicholas Venezia. Image courtesy of the Rubell Museum.

“I don’t believe in chasing the ‘wow’—the thing that will make for a viral Instagram post,” Selldorf explains to *AD*. “I am more concerned with designing buildings and spaces that are imbued with beauty precisely because of how well they serve their purpose without being wasteful.”

For the past hundred years, Allapattah has been known for food distribution, and this particular factory was a former rice storage warehouse. Mera compared it to the transformation of New York’s Meatpacking District, honoring the evolution of a city. She spoke to the power of subliminal memory in contrast to more generic skyscrapers. “Leaving that industrial history behind adds a layer of complexity and memory,” Mera says. “I think it adds texture.” Adds Selldorf, “We wanted to stay true to that vernacular without fetishizing it.”



\*INFINITY MIRRORED ROOM—LET'S SURVIVE FOREVER\* 2017, by Yayoi Kusama. Photo by Chi Lam. Image courtesy of the Rubell Museum.

To this end, the space will be fixed, rather than reconfigured after each exhibition, preserving both the history of the storage warehouse and the prior showcase. This level of permanence in the engagement of the building, its audience, and the collection speaks to a sort of Rubell family signature. Being privately owned gives them the freedom to take risks that many public institutions cannot. Without an acquisitions committee or board vote, they can move faster and collect more broadly. Nevertheless, decades of family discussion have fostered a deep-seated need to expose new audiences to works of personal significance.

“Certain projects, particularly galleries and residences, are really a form of portraiture. They should reflect the personality and lifestyle of the client,” Selldorf says of the Rubells. But as a museum, it is not intended to have the intimacy of a home. “You are not being invited behind the curtain to see what is otherwise private,” she elaborates. “This is very much a public space that will welcome visitors from all over and will in many ways lead to the transformation of the neighborhood.”