

# SURFACE

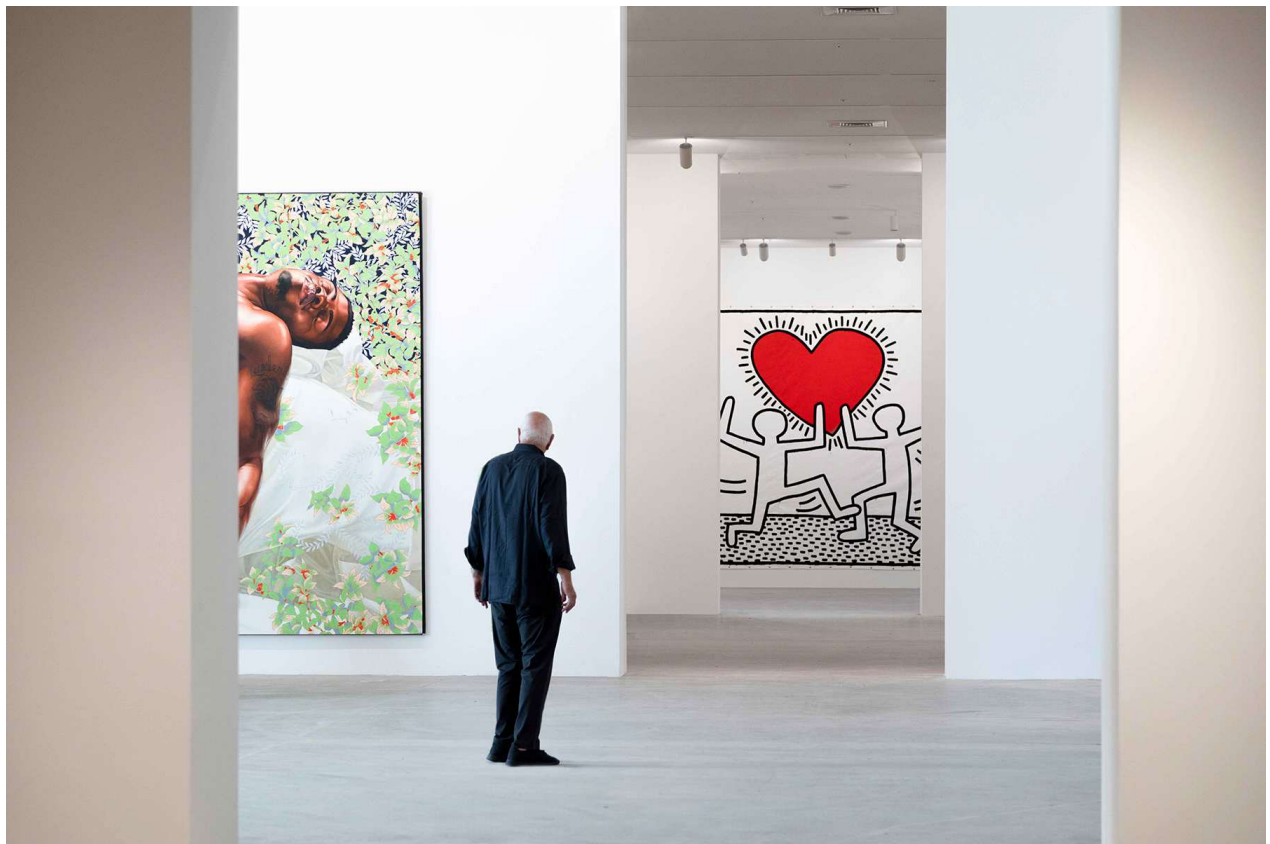
THE VANGUARD

## The Rubell Family Collection's Ambitious Next Chapter

**The new Rubell Museum in Miami proves that it's possible to go big and stay home.**

BY LAURA VAN STRAATEN

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Shot from the “spine” of the Rubell Museum, with view of Don Rubell, (left to right) Kehinde Wiley, *Sleep*, 2008, and Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1981. Works courtesy of the Rubell Museum. Photography by Nicholas Venezia, courtesy of Selldorf Architects.

Though they now travel the globe to discover artists, Mera and Don Rubell love to recall how their world-class collection began when they were newlyweds in New York City in the mid-1960s, he a medical student and she a teacher. Whatever they could spare, they spent on works from emerging artists like Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Cindy Sherman, often purchased on installment. As the couple built a fortune through real estate and hotel development, they traveled widely to cultivate relationships with artists around the world, often accompanied by their children, Jason and Jennifer.

When the family's art collection overwhelmed their New York townhouse — where, starting in the 1970s, they hosted a storied Whitney Biennial after-party — they moved to Miami. In 1993, they opened a home for the Rubell Family Collection in the once overlooked Wynwood area by converting a multistory former Drug Enforcement Administration warehouse. Don and Mera lived right next door, in a sparsely furnished home connected to the museum via their library. But the collecting didn't abate, and by 2016, with more than 7,200 works by more than 1,000 artists, "We needed space," Mera says. "We were desperate."



Exterior view of the Rubell Museum. Photography by Nicholas Venezia, courtesy of Selldorf Architects.

Before they knew it, they were engaged in the most ambitious undertaking of their lives: a sprawling new Miami home for their collection that, at 76,000 square feet, is nearly double the size of the old building. Located in Allapattah, a multiethnic working-class neighborhood just west of Wynwood, and designed by architect Annabelle Selldorf, it comes with a rebranded name: The Rubell Museum, which will open with much fanfare in early December.

Mera says the family felt impelled to change the name as a way to emphasize public engagement. “People were still calling us and saying, ‘Can you invite me...?’” Even though the Rubell Collection offered daily public viewing hours and had, in many ways, functioned like a cultural institution, people were often under the misapprehension that it was a private family affair that required an appointment to visit.



John Baldessari, Stake: Art is Food for Thought and Food Costs Money, 1985.



Kerry James Marshall, Untitled, 1998-1999.

One way the Rubells addressed the dilemma was through architecture. Taking the couple’s directive to heart, Selldorf—who has worked on her share of high-profile art institutions, including the Frick Collection, Neue Galerie, and Atlanta’s High Museum—placed an inviting courtyard garden right at the campus’s entrance. “It signals from the street that this is a place of welcome and gathering,” says Selldorf. “It conveys this sense of public museum versus private collection.”

Also enhancing public access is the fact that all the galleries (and there are 40 of them) are at ground level—which is rare for an urban museum of this scale. “Moving from gallery to gallery without having to traverse stairs or an elevator makes for a much more relaxed art experience,” says Selldorf. And adding to what the architect calls “a museal quality,” they made space to leave some pieces on permanent or semi-permanent view, which they had little room to do previously. To start, that will include installations and paintings by Cady Nolan, Kehinde Wiley, Marlene Dumas and Keith Haring.



Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #21, 1978.





Tschabalala Self, *Untitled*, 2017.

“It’s very powerful to leave artwork with people who come to see it year after year,” adds Mera. “That was really important to us.”

At the same time, however, the Rubells wanted their museum to retain the intimate family sensibility of their very personal collection. “It was important that the larger scale not result in a loss of their vision,” says Selldorf. And so she and the Rubells agreed on the need for spaces that “create a very spiritual zone for art to exist in,” as Mera puts it. “It’s like buying a dress that reveals who you are.” To that end, Selldorf says her team paid particular attention “to the quality of the galleries, their scale, proportions, and lighting.”

In fact, Don believes that the museum “will be much more like a family collection,” because the family can share more completely the scope of what they own from each artist. (Daughter Jennifer is an artist, and son Jason and daughter-in-law Michelle are both deeply involved in the family’s art acquisitions.) Indeed, the museum’s inaugural show of more than 300 works by 100 artists chronicles the history and highlights of the family’s collection. Jeff Koons, David Wojnarowicz, George Condo, Rosemarie Trockel, Richard Prince, David Hammons, Elizabeth Peyton, and Kerry James Marshall—all artists championed by the Rubells early on—are proudly on display. And Mera says she is especially thrilled to showcase work the family has commissioned from their artist-in-residence program by the likes of Sterling Ruby and Oscar Murillo. The inaugural show also includes three immersive installations by Yayoi Kusama.



Jonathan Lyndon Chase, 3 heads and 4 Lamps, 2018.



Neo Rauch, *Das Neue*, 2003; Thomas Schütte *Grosse Geister #2 (Big Spirit #2)*, 2003.

Though the new museum is less than a mile from Wynwood (“Just like Wynwood was, this is on the wrong side of the tracks,” Mera jokes), Selldorf believes the new location and its proximity to downtown Miami and public transportation will be “a game changer” in opening the collection to a diverse audience. And just as the family put Wynwood ~~on the map~~ as an arts district, this move is sure to do the same for Allapattah. Jorge Pérez, the billionaire developer behind the Pérez Art Museum Miami, recently announced he, too, is opening a new art space in Allapattah. Known as El Espacio 23, it is slated to open in time for early December.

“To the extent that we are an inspiration, I think that’s very flattering,” Mera says. “That’s what it’s about, right?”