



SALON 94

Rubell Family Collection Might Not Leave Wynwood After All

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Even locals who don't know squat about Miami Art Week can tell you about the old Drug Enforcement Administration warehouse on NW 29th Street, stacked year-round with contemporary artworks. The Rubell family has housed its extensive collection of contemporary art there for a quarter-century. But that era is coming to an end. Two years after the Rubell Family Collection (RFC) announced its intention to relocate to Allapattah in 2019, this December's exhibit could be the last in its storied space.

Then again, RFC might not shutter those Wynwood warehouse doors for good.

"There is a chance that we may be able to continue, at least for a while, and present exhibitions here [in Wynwood] as well, so have two exhibitions concurrent with each other — one here and the other in Allapattah," museum director Juan Roselione-Valadez says. "What we'd love to do here is present single-artist surveys and retrospectives in this building." Roselione-Valadez is quick to clarify that nothing is confirmed yet, other than this year's exhibition will run through June 2019 and the new museum plans to open next fall.

The history of the Rubell collection stretches back 25 years. In 2002, when Art Basel chose Miami Beach to debut its American offshoot of the international contemporary art fair, a community of 180 exhibitors placed their art on display. Among those exhibitors was the Rubell Family Collection, with founders Mera and Don Rubell [credited](#) as one of the primary reasons the festival selected Miami. At the time of that first Miami-based Basel, the Rubell Family Collection, founded in 1993, was nine years old. Mera remembers what it felt like to gaze up at that 45,000-square-foot dilapidated warehouse. "We couldn't believe that we would ever fill that building," she says. "And now we've outgrown it."

From its conception, the collection has amassed size and spectacularity. Mera and Don, alongside their children Jason and Jennifer, have been instrumental in [supporting](#) young artists worldwide through their collection and hailed as one of the [most powerful](#) families in South Florida. Resident artists such as Tomm El-Saieh, who will be featured in the collection's upcoming exhibition, praise the magnitude of RFC's positive influence: "I have been nourished by their extensive holdings and always expected with huge curiosity what they were going to present next." El-Saieh says he's honored to be included in this season's show. "Their exhibitions introduced me to a group of emerging artists from around the globe whose works I couldn't have [otherwise] seen all at once."

Ambitious, thematic exhibits have been a hallmark of RFC's offerings through the years. "No Man's Land: Woman Artists From the Rubell Collection" filled the exhibition space with art created by women in 2015, when issues of female representation in museums and galleries were coming to a head. In 2008, "30 Americans" concentrated on works by black artists; today the show has traveled to more than a dozen museums and continues to tour, with dates reaching into the year 2020.

"That show has transformed our understanding of our relationship to presenting art to the public," Mera says. "It has taught us about the responsibility and impact that art can have."

This year, the Rubells are celebrating their quarter-century of exhibitions at the warehouse by shining a spotlight on local art hero Purvis Young. "Art saved Purvis, and Purvis saved art," says Mera, whose collection contains more than 3,000 of the artist's paintings. "He taught us what art is, which is just the

absolute depth of what we share as human beings. We share sorrow, pain, love of family, hope — it's all in his work."

In his lifetime, Young became a local celebrity and fixture in contemporary art. After spending three years in prison as a teenager, which was where he stumbled across art books in the library, the Miami native went on to produce his first protest-art-inspired mural and captured the attention of the art world. Young died in 2010 at the age of 67.

As much an activist as an artist, Young was passionate about using his craft to send messages of sociopolitical dissent. More than 100 of his works sit in RFC awaiting the December launch and unveiling of never-before-seen work by the acclaimed painter.

"Purvis Young and New Acquisitions" is the first time all seven of RFC's first-floor galleries will be devoted to a single artist. "We needed the space to really illustrate all of his really pressing and really moving concerns, be it refugees or mass incarceration or drug abuse or the need for civil protest," Roselione-Valadez says.

Admiration for Young runs deep in the RFC team. "We think he's just unparalleled here as an artist — really so, so significant. So many people in Miami and abroad have his work too, which is special," Roselione-Valadez says. "It was work that was and that is accessible to acquire, and his voice is really widespread."

Young's legacy is timely too. "When you think about when he left jail in the early '60s, it was the time of all of these antiwar protests, the civil rights movement," RFC's registrar, Laura Randall, says. "You'll see these themes are just as relevant today as they were then."



Original artwork by Purvis Young.

"Purvis and New Acquisitions" will run through June 2019. Moving to Allapattah is next on the horizon; Roselione-Valadez says they expect to open the first exhibition there next November.

Then, Mera Rubell says, anything can happen. In light of RFC's past success, it wouldn't be too wild to wonder if the 100,000-square-foot Allapattah building might one day surpass capacity.

"Twenty-five years later, a building which we thought was beyond our imagination to fill, we filled. And now the building in Allapattah is beyond our imagination," the collector says. "At the moment, I

can't imagine that we would ever need more space than what we've just committed to. But the journey is long, and who knows where we'll be 25 years from now."

"Purvis Young and New Acquisitions." *Monday, December 3, through June 29, 2019, at the Rubell Family Collection, 95 NW 29th St., Miami; 305-573-6090; rfc.museum. General admission costs \$10 for adults and \$5 for students and seniors (65 and up); those under 18 and members of the U.S. military get in free. During Miami Art Week, the collection is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Sunday.*