

ARTFORUM

On the Ground: Miami

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Aranguren & Gallegos's preliminary rendering of the new Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, in the Design District. Photo: Aranguren & Gallegos.

SOUTH FLORIDA has always been friendly to topless beachgoers. This past year, though, the city's art museums gave new meaning to being topless in Miami. Four were without directors at some point: **the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (ICA Miami)**; **the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM)**; **the Patricia & Phillip Frost Museum**; and **the Wolfsonian-Florida International University Museum**. All of the positions have now been filled, but it will be several years before it's clear how the newbies' visions will shape programming. Meanwhile, the **Bass Museum of Art** closed for renovations in mid-May (although it did open a pop-up space at the Miami Beach Regional Library across the street) while the **Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) in North Miami** and the ICA Miami are just finding their footing after last year's debacle that resulted in the exodus of the former's board and the birth of the latter. All of the above put at a standstill—though not a screeching halt—the hopes of those here who are invested in maintaining a lively and intellectually rigorous discourse around art all year long.

Still, there were highlights: The ICA's deep pockets often go toward inviting artist's artists like Richard Tuttle to give lectures, while PAMM's programming has been rock solid as its curatorial team begins to operate like a well-oiled machine, producing one great exhibition after another. MoCA's stunning group show "Autonomous Zones" was theoretically rigorous while showing the depth of work being made by artists who happen to be primarily based in South Florida. A number of smaller organizations also stepped up to the plate. The downtown **Cannonball** stands out for its series of "Wavemaker" grants to local artists and cultural producers. (Although it just lost its director, too!) The institution also launched the **alternative school r.a.d. (research.art.dialogue)** that has been popular with artists. Indeed, hungry for intellectual debate, a group of intrepid artists fundraised and put together the ambitious program "Fall Semester," a two-day event that brought together artists and thinkers.

But one wonders what happened to all the rancor regarding the naming of PAMM several years earlier. Let me help jog your memory: \$100 million dollars of taxpayer dollars went toward construction of the new Herzog & de Meuron building of the institution formerly known as Miami Art Museum (MAM). However, when board member Jorge A. Pérez, a real-estate developer, pledged \$20 million in cash (to be given over a ten year period) and part of his collection (valued at \$20 million), the museum's name was changed to the Jorge A. Pérez Art Museum of Miami-Dade County. This led to the resignations of four board members who felt that the museum should reflect the city's name. Perhaps the larger issue is a cultural climate overwhelmingly shaped by a coterie of collectors. In fact, the construction of the new ICA Miami building, slated to open in 2016, is being underwritten completely by the collectors Norma and Irma Braman, although they have not stipulated their names be attached to the building. Underlying the PAMM naming controversy and the more recent surreal drama regarding the ICA and MoCA North Miami are deep divisions along class lines.



Art in the Age of Technological Resurrection seminar led by Anton Vidokle at r.a.d (research.art.dialogue), Miami, November 2015.

In the commercial art world, the big news is that most galleries have fled from Wynwood, which has now become thoroughly gentrified, and many have moved to the Little River/Haiti area. **David Castillo Gallery**, one of the first to set up shop in Wynwood, was one of the first to leave: He opted to move to Lincoln Road in Miami Beach. Sociologists coming to Miami to witness another cycle of gentrification, take note: There is a lack of a core gallery center in terms of density—and this is probably a good thing for residents already living in these areas. That is, while Brent Sokol's recent *New York Times* article is correct about a decampment of galleries, **The Screening Room** and **Dina Mitrani Gallery**, focused on video art and photography respectively, as well as the **Bakehouse Art Complex** (to name a few), ensure that we still need to visit Wynwood.

The *Times* article also indicates that the board of the nonprofit **ArtCenter South Florida**, known for providing affordable spaces for artists to live and work, is debating between moving forward with plans to develop a space in Wynwood or Little River/Haiti, where it recently opened a temporary exhibition space. However, as María del Valle, ArtCenter's director, explained to me via email, this is not the case. There has been no decision of any kind and certainly not one that seems to pit one area over another. This false binary is an oversimplification of the topography of the Miami art scene, just as the article in the *Times* last year regarding the exodus of artists to Los Angeles is overly dramatized.

Maybe I began with something of a red herring. The aforementioned ArtCenter South Florida sold one of its holdings for \$88 million, resulting in an endowment that is larger than any of the major institutions in the region, and it has the potential to stabilize this area for artists who otherwise will likely be driven out. Perhaps more so than the ICA, PAMM, and MoCA—or any other institution with an acronym or one attached to a major collector or university—what the ArtCenter does and does not do will have major ramifications for the cultural landscape of Miami. While I do not want to imply that it can single-handedly remedy or counterbalance the influence of the market and sway of collectors, it can certainly provide a push in the right direction toward the creation of an art scene that is not only multipronged (it already is) but also one in which power is distributed, if not evenly, at least in a less one-sided fashion. Otherwise, the Miami art world is destined to be distilled to nothing more than the origin myth that everything leads back to **Art Basel** (and you thought I would forget to mention it!).

PS: I encourage everyone to visit the group exhibition **“100+ Degrees in the Shade.”** curated by Jane Hart. This roundup of artists based in South Florida has received tremendous buzz and promises to be one not to miss. Since the exhibition is scattered across various spaces in the city, it will also get you off the beach to get to know the larger Miami art scene.

— **Alpesh Kantilal Patel**