

Rosa de la Cruz, Collector Who Shaped Miami's Art Scene, Dies at 81

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Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz. COURTESY THE DE LA CRUZ COLLECTION

Rosa de la Cruz, a collector whose holdings made her one of the key figures on Miami's art scene, has died at 81. A family spokesperson confirmed her death on Sunday, saying that she died of a long illness.

With her husband Carlos, de la Cruz amassed a rich collection of contemporary art that has been exhibited in its own 30,000-square-foot Miami museum since 2009. The annual exhibitions of works from the collection count among the top shows staged in the city each year, and are typically a major attraction during the Art Basel Miami Beach fair.

The collection, which repeatedly earned the de la Cruzes a **spot on the ARTnews Top 200 Collectors list**, is diverse, centering on work by German artists such as Albert Oehlen, Sigmar Polke, and Thomas Schutte, but with a focus also on younger painters, from Christina Quarles to Tauba Auerbach to Su Su.

Miami-based artists, from Eddie Arroyo to Consuelo Castañeda, feature in the collection alongside internationally recognized figures, from Glenn Ligon to Wade Guyton. And artists of the past are represented too: Wifredo Lam, Ana Mendieta, Salvador Dalí, Felix Gonzalez-Torres. That last artist was one the de la Cruzes knew personally; they own an untitled billboard featuring a flying bird, and have put that work on permanent display.

“Our exhibitions are a collective effort that build new possibilities by creating a platform for the artists’ vision,” Rosa de la Cruz said in a 2020 statement. “We have deliberately focused on art that questions issues relevant today.”

De de la Cruz was born in Havana, and met Carlos there when she was 13. They came to the United States together as teenagers in 1960 after Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba. They married two years later, and lived first in Philadelphia, where Carlos attended the Wharton business school. Then they moved to New York, followed by Madrid. Finally, they relocated to Miami in 1975.

The first work they acquired was a piece by Rufino Tamayo, a famed Mexican modernist, and Rosa initially had plans to grow a collection focused on Latin American artists. But they ended up broadening their scope, and went on to purchase works by Mark Bradford, Christopher Wool, Nate Lowman, and others of note.

Starting in 2002, the de la Cruzes began to exhibit their collection at their Miami home. They also started to host a dinner during Art Basel Miami Beach, a spot at which was highly coveted. The *New York Times* reported that 1,000 people even tried to crash the event one year.

Realizing that interest in the collection had exceeded the space they had on hand, the couple decided to open their own museum.

“Miami is the future. Miami is a frontier town,” Rosa **told *Artspace***. “As for the collections, Miami is not like other places, we don’t really define private and public. Private and public for us are the same. I think of my art space as private and public, and my house as private and public.”

Beyond buying art, the de la Cruzes undertook various philanthropic ventures, including a program that allowed a select group of students at the School of Visual Arts to attend summer classes for free. And Rosa was also director and treasurer of CC1 Companies, a Coca-Cola bottling company that operates in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean; Carlos served as the company’s chairman.

Rosa is survived by her husband, as well as her five children.

As she prepared to open her museum in 2009, she **told the *New York Times*** that the institution would provide the public with a valuable look inside her vast holdings.

“Every collector needs to realize you can’t take it with you,” she said. “The works will either go to an institution, which might not be able to show them; to your kids, who might not want them; or to an auction house. So why wait? I want to organize it all and show it now.”