

Rosa de la Cruz, Who Helped Build Miami into an Art Destination, Dies at 81

She and her husband had built a vast contemporary art collection, starting in the 1980s.

by Brian Boucher February 26, 2024



Rosa de la Cruz. Photo: Zachary Balber.

Rosa de la Cruz, a major Miami contemporary art collector and patron, died on Sunday, February 27, at 81 years of age. She died peacefully at home, a family spokesman told the *Miami Herald*.

Havana-born de la Cruz collected along with her husband, Carlos, another Havana native. Both left Cuba for the U.S. when Fidel Castro came to power. The couple had lived in Philadelphia, New York, and Madrid before moving to Florida in 1975. She was an officer at CC1 Companies, a \$1 billion-a-year beverage distribution empire run by her husband.

The couple began collecting in 1998 with a work by Rufino Tamayo, but they began focusing on contemporary art four years later, when they brought home a Félix González-Torres. They amassed a collection of well over 1,000 works that is one of the most significant in the city.

Their collection includes works by artists such as Mark Bradford, Peter Doig, Isa Genzken, Wade Guyton, Rashid Johnson, Glenn Ligon, Nate Lowman, Ana Mendieta, Albert Oehlen, Gabriel Orozco, Christina Quarles, Xaviera Simmons, Vaughn Spann, and Christopher Wool.

They opened a 30,000-square-foot private museum in the Miami Design District in 2009 to display their holdings. It was an essential stop in the city, especially for the thousands of art pilgrims who attend the annual Art Basel Miami Beach fair, during which the couple typically hosted large lunch events. She had previously founded and run Moore Space, a nonprofit kunsthalle, also in the Design District.

“It’s hard to overestimate the influence and significance of Rosa, with her husband Carlos, on the arts in Miami and especially collecting,” said Franklin Sirmans, director of the Pérez Art Museum Miami, in an email. “Long before opening their substantial collection to the public in the Miami Design District, she played a role at most of Miami’s art institutions, including our own, where she joined trustees to help fund the very first acquisition of a work of art at PAMM, then called Miami Art Museum, a work by Lorna Simpson.”

Also focused on education, the couple sponsored various programs by which young people could be exposed to culture, including a program in New York whereby Miami high school students could spend a month in New York, as well as international travel for recent graduates and workshops for schoolchildren with local artists. Speaking of these programs, she told [ArtSpace](#) in 2014 that “we’ve spent, I would say, a lot of money,” adding, “we’re trying to make Miami more of an intellectual city. Art Basel is not enough—Art Basel is great, but it’s only five days.”

She is survived by her husband, five children, 17 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, according to an Instagram post by the collection, which specifies that in lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to The Miami Foundation.