

Wynwood's Rubell Family Collection opens door to women's rooms

Wynwood's Rubell Family Collection show is 'No Man's Land'

Provokes the question, 'What would happen if major institutions removed works by men?'

Works shown are rotated to accommodate the bounty







Isa Genzken's "Schauspieler," 2013. Mannequin, wig, glasses, lacquer, felt pen, leather gloves, ceramic figurines, metal and plastic glass. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York. At the Rubell Family Collection, Miami, fall-winter 2016.

Mera and Don Rubell, founders of the Rubell Family Collection, in front of Kerstin Brätsch's painting "When You See Me Again It Wont Be Me" (from Broadwaybratsch/Corporate Abstraction series), 2010.

1 of 3

Mera and Don Rubell, founders of the Rubell Family Collection, in front of Kerstin Brätsch's painting "When You See Me Again It Wont Be Me" (from Broadwaybratsch/Corporate Abstraction series), 2010.

By Anne TschidaSpecial to the Miami Herald

No Man's Land, this season's exhibit at the Rubell Family Collection (RFC) in Wynwood, is a complex show, and that's an understatement. It asks a lot of its art audience: to examine the place of women in art,

and to do so in a non-linear form that can be both exhilarating and confounding. The experience often leaves us with more questions than answers. But that's what a good exhibit demands.

The title itself lets us know this is an all-woman show, no man's work here. The aggressive title also references that space most commonly remembered from World War I, the space that two enemies do not occupy. To stretch metaphors further, this is contested terrain.

There is an on-going debate in art circles over the validity of labeling and categorizing. For instance, does an all-Latin artist show make sense today? Or an exhibit of, say, all-27-year-olds? Their art will likely be so diverse as to have no theme or thread.

So here we have an exhibit of more than 100 artists from 28 countries, all of them women. Is there a need to divide genders, in a world where even gender lines are blurring by the year? The answer at the Rubells is yes.

ADVERTISING

3

There is some history to this: over the years, the Rubells have produced critically praised, incredibly successful exhibits with clear categorizations. *Thirty Americans*, which debuted at RFC in 2008, is comprised of African-American artists; the spectacular show has been travelling ever since to major museums. Last year, the Rubells put an another impressive exhibit, *28 Chinese*.

What sets these shows apart is that they are all works from this private collection, works that the Rubell Family, headed by Don and Mera, have purchase since the 1970s. They have developed an eye for artists that much of the art world follows, and have become some of the most important trend setters. So in fact, these categorized exhibits *do* have a theme — the particular aesthetic taste of the Rubells.

Which brings us to *No Man's Land*, another show chock full of great art. Though women make up half the globe's population, art made by women has been woefully neglected throughout most of history. As the anonymous feminist collective the Guerrilla Girls first pointed out in the 1980s with their slogan, "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met?," only 5 percent of the modern artists with work owned by New York's hallowed Metropolitan Museum of Art at the time were women, while 85 percent of the artwork featuring nudes were female. The Guerilla Girls returned last month to reach a larger audience on Stephen Colbert's *Late Show*, reminding us that little has changed.

At the Rubell show, 100 percent of the nudes and otherwise were made by women. This truly is remarkable, points out director Juan Roselione-Valadez. When they started peeling off the works by men to organize the exhibit, he said they were extremely pleased to see the exhibition take shape without the ubiquitous "big name" male artists. What would happen, they asked, if major collections and institutions across the globe removed their male artists? Who would be left, and how many?

In the case of *No Man's Land*, a lot, although indeed many may not be household names. Yet.

Every genre, from painting to video and installation, is represented. Certain rooms have a loose theme, such as portraiture or textile works. The real thread is the Rubell eye. As the family writes in the introduction to extensive catalogue: “Sometimes what brings artists together in an exhibition has more to do with our own process, the way we think about art we’re looking at for the first time in the context of art we’ve been living with for decades.”

When moving through the galleries, a viewer is struck by the reality that if you were not told the gender of the artist, you would be hard pressed to figure it out. Some you might guess, because they generally are genres and materials more associated with women artists — new media, because contemporary art has not been so exclusive; and anything related to “craft.” But where would you place the gorgeous panels made of wool and wood from German artist Rosemarie Trockel? Their simple two-toned minimalist abstractions are timeless and faceless. The same goes for the small crisp works made from diamond dust, silkscreen ink and gesso on wood by American R.H. Quaytman. These works are not easily pigeon-holed.

Two huge rooms on the second floor will likely leave the most spectacular impression. After climbing the staircase you are surrounded by large paintings and photographs from women you *will* recognize, such as Cindy Sherman, Cecily Brown and Marlene Dumas. These are portraits of women by women, each one grabbing your attention.

In an adjoining room, with one of the few windows letting in natural light, hangs an amazing series of huge paintings from Dutch artist Natasja Kensmil. Awash in blues, black and an otherworldly light, figures seem to gather in the woods, maybe for a mid-night ritual — or something more sinister. The placement of the works in this room almost turn it into an installation, with an atmosphere all its own. Complementing them are three photographs by local artist Naomi Fisher, 1999’s “Assy Flora Suite” — image of bare female bottoms sprinkled with flowers.

Another series of stand-out paintings comes from Elizabeth Peyton; her 1995 portraits of former member of the Sex Pistols are surprisingly disarming in their depicted vulnerability.

The Rubells have had a reputation for unveiling brash, controversial art -- think Paul McCarthy and his suggestive father, son and a goat sculpture. But in *No Man’s Land*, some of the most notable and indelible pieces are muted, at times almost receding into the white walls behind them. There’s the ever-so-quiet 2006 watercolor *A Girl Like You* from Silke Otto-Knapp, where featureless figures lightly practice dance steps, outlined in dim gray and off-white coloring. Or the moving paintings of Celia Paul, in which the images emerge from a murky background.

While there are “big names” here, it’s also refreshing to walk through an exhibition and take in art from people you may not know but now can discover. And the diversity of art work is impressive.

The sculpture is not particularly strong (the tempura-fried flowers from Anicka Yi, 2015, are a wonderful exception), but there is a nice sampling of video, including from Sigalit Landau, Patty Chang and Dara Friedman. Unfortunately all are unspooling in one room, so you have to wait for each video.

But maybe they had to be stacked, as there is so much art here — so much in fact that works will be rotated in the next several months. The Rubell Collection incorporates far more female artists than are currently being shown, so in March some of the work will be replaced.

That's a great punctuation mark to *No Man's Land*. And a little hard to follow. Some of the works on display today won't be there tomorrow, and conversely some of the artworks highlighted in the catalogue are not to be found now.

Yet the knowledge that there will be a part two of an all-woman show at such a respected collection does come full circle. What would we see if the Met or any other major museum showed only art by women? Hopefully we'll soon find out.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: “No Man's Land: Women Artists from the Rubell Collection”

WHERE: The Rubell Family Collection, 95 NW 29th St., Miami

WHEN: Through May 28

INFO: admission \$10; [//rfc.museum](http://rfc.museum)