



Ai Weiwei and Contemporary Chinese Art Opens in Miami

December 6, 2013

by Sandra Hale Schulman

DISPATCH - DEC 6, 2013

MIAMI BEACH, FL-

Art Basel Miami Beach and its orbiting art world have turned their gaze eastward with an Asian presence cropping up in spots around Miami and Miami Beach. Following on the success of the 2013's inaugural Art Basel Hong Kong, there is a noticeable interest in far Eastern art in Miami this week, rejecting expectations of the expected lure of Latin American work in this heavily Latin American city.

Contemporary Chinese artists are featured in the unveiling of a major new art museum and a new show at the Rubell Family Collection. Works can also be found by Contemporary Asian artists at [Art Basel Miami Beach](#) and at the art fairs that make up Miami Art Week.

Timed to coincide with the arrival of Art Basel, the \$220 million dollar Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) inaugurated their stunning new bayfront Herzog & de Meuron-designed museum with the first major retrospective of the prolific and provocative Chinese artist [Ai Weiwei](#) in the exhibition [According to What?](#)



PAMM view from the water.

Hosting a grand opening on the eve of Art Basel Miami Beach, the construction crews were still frantically finishing the outside landscaping - literally moving in trees by crane while museum guests noshed on tacos and ceviche talking loudly over the beeping and din of front loaders and dozers.

But the inside was done to the nines, gleaming and glowing with the pink and yellow sunset of Biscayne Bay streaming through floor to ceiling windows. The museum was designed to maximize its unique location, literally yards from the water, with jaw dropping views of neon lit downtown Miami and the port with it's festive lineup of cruise ships. Water views are visible from nearly every room in the museum along with the soft Florida light.

Thom Collins, Director of PAMM stated “PAMM serves one of the most diverse and rapidly growing communities in the country. Weiwei’s focus on cultural identity, human rights, and the impact of social and economic instability draws direct parallels to the experiences of many people living in Miami. We are actively participating in a cultural dialogue that has impact here at home and around the world.”



Ai Weiwei self portrait.

Weiwei has emerged as a leader among Chinese artists and activists since returning to China in 1993, after spending a decade in the United States. He was arrested in 2011 for his activities, but has continued to create controversial work while under constant surveillance.

The wildly diverse work in the show - huge bronze Zodiac heads, photographs, wooden box sculptures, stacks of bicycle wheels, and two enormous bowls of pearls - comment on culture and class and abnormal use of everyday objects.

Wooden stools tumble into a giant wheel, holes cut into aligned boxes track the phases of the moon, stacks of rusted rebar rest in waves on the floor. But the materials take on an unexpected emotional resonance when they reveal themselves to be the stools of political prisoners, the view of the moon as seen through a jail cell, the steel rod remains of a school felled by an earthquake.



“Rebar” by Ai Weiwei.

The other half of the Chinese contemporary art invasion in Miami comes from the opening of [“28 Chinese” at the Rubell Family Collection](#) contemporary art foundation. The collection is housed in a 45,000 square foot building in the Wynwood arts district in Miami.

One of the biggest power couple collectors in the world, Mera and Don Rubell, unveiled a major exhibition of collected works by 28 contemporary Chinese artists. who were selected by the couple in a series of six research trips and around 100 studio visits that took place between 2001 and 2012.

Studios in Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Xi’an were visited in the Rubell’s quest to find emerging contemporary artists. Their acquisition alone brings these artist to international prominence or reinforces their position, such as in the case of Weiwei.

“28 Chinese” presents paintings, photographs, sculptures and video installations. This will be the first exhibition in North America for many of these artists. The oldest artist in the exhibition was

born in 1954 and the youngest was born in 1986.

“In China the gallery has been slow in coming around to representing artists, or the artist has been slow in recognizing the gallery’s role,” stated Mera Rubell. “For us, because the artist is so new we visit the studio as it represents the inner, inner sanctum of the artists practice and life. In order to collect Chinese art, it was essential for us to understand a new language and culture, but at the end of the day, the art must speak for itself.”

The new collection includes works by Weiwei, sculptor He Xiangyu who makes lifelike fiberglass people, and painter Wang Xingwei who creates fanciful female Communist soldiers.



“The Death of Marat” by He Xiangyu, 2011.

Contemporary Chinese art was also evident at inside the Art Basel Miami Convention Center. [Mary Boone Gallery](#) is exhibiting a smaller version of Weiwei’s wooden stool sculpture and his painted vases.

“We pay attention to what is going on with the auctions and interest globally,” said Mary Boone Gallery Director Ron Warren. “It determines what we show at this fair.” (Boone is also showing 3 new works by Hamptons-based [Eric Fischl](#), and a whole wall of [Barbara Kruger](#) text silkscreens. Kruger also has a home in the Hamptons.)



An Ai Weiwei stool sculpture, center, with new paintings by Eric Fischl at the Mary Boone Gallery booth at Art Basel Miami Beach. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

As for the art star Weiwei – whose work and image are featured all over this week’s Miami art fairs, exhibitions and international media – he is half a world away, prohibited from leaving China.

BASIC FACTS: “Ai Weiwei: According to What?” is exhibited from Dec. 4, 2013 to March 16, 2014 at the Perez Art Museum Miami, 1103 Biscayne Blvd., Miami, FL 33132. www.pamm.org

“28 Chinese” is exhibited at the Rubell Family Collection, 95 NW 29th Street, Miami, FL 33127. www.rfc.museum.