



All In

With the Rubell Family Collection's new all-female show, curator Tanya Selvaratnam describes how this seminal exhibition was born and its long-term significance.

On December 2, the Rubell Family Collection in Miami's Wynwood district opens "No Man's Land," an exhibition featuring the work of more than 70 artists, who range in age from 32 (Njideka Akunyili Crosby) to 86 (Yayoi Kusama). Represented by paintings, photographs, sculptures, and video installations, and spanning different generations, cultures, and disciplines, they share one powerful unifier: All of them are female.

When Mera Rubell was asked if a show like this would have been possible 50 years ago when she and her husband, Don, began collecting, she said, "Inconceivable." She elaborates: "We're all victims of the marketplace," and back then in the 1960s, galleries didn't often represent female artists, and curators didn't often include their work in museum shows.

Cut to 2015, when women's leadership is front and center in all arenas: families, universities, boardrooms, and possibly all the way to the highest office in the land. Over the last few decades, society has been evolving with regard to acknowledging the power, accomplishments, and abilities of women. And for the Rubells, this show is a "natural progression," in sync with the tenor of the times.

But how much have times really changed when you look at the numbers? Earlier this year at Abrons Arts Center in New York, I attended the 30-year retrospective of the Guerrilla Girls, the artist collective "reinventing the 'f' word: feminism!" Their earliest poster campaigns were placed side-by-side with their more recent ones. In 1985, the Guerrilla Girls listed 18 top-tier galleries, including Pace,

Mary Boone, and Marian Goodman, which showed no more than 10 percent women artists or none at all. In 2014, many of those same galleries showed no more than 20 percent women artists or none at all. In another campaign, the Guerrilla Girls pointed out that the Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum, and Whitney Museum of American Art had zero one-person exhibitions by women artists in 1985, while in 2014 each institution had one solo show by a woman artist. Progress? A little, but far from enough.

For the Rubells, though, presenting

Mira Dancy, Snake Rose OBE, 2014. Dancy is one of the more emerging artists in the all-female "No Man's Land" on view at the Rubell Family Collection.

a women-only show is not a political act on their part; they simply wanted to celebrate their commitment to collecting female artists. (This exhibition also has echoes of two of the Collection's past shows—"30 Americans" and "28 Chinese.") As Mera explains, with these types of exhibitions, the Rubells are saying, "This is what we collect, and the reason to do this show is to dig deeper and understand more about how and what we're collecting."

In "No Man's Land," about 40 of the works have never been shown before; a few are special commissions, such as four large-scale paintings by Jennifer Guidi and an installation by Sonia Gomes. Some individual rooms have thematic groupings, including Appropriation and Nudes; other rooms are reserved for single artists,

such as Solange Pessoa. But works by other long-standing artists in the Collection will be on view as well, names such as Mickalene Thomas, Kara Walker, Cindy Sherman, Cecily Brown, Cady Noland, Barbara Kruger, Marlene Dumas, and Lisa Yuskavage.

Mira Dancy, one of the more emerging artists in “No Man’s Land,” believes that a women-only show has historical significance. “I am most excited by the quality rather than the exclusivity at play,” she says. “What I do see as significant, however, and what I appreciate—especially as my career is still in its very early stages compared to many of the heavy-hitters—is that the show itself demonstrates a commitment on the part of the Rubells to collect art made by women. And this platform will hopefully encourage other collectors



to do the same. The fact that art made by men still carries a higher cultural and capital value definitely persists, a condition that we must still collectively erode and erase.”

Isolde Brielmaier, an art historian and curator, argues that the mood is different today: “Feminism has made a comeback. The conversation is highly amplified at the moment about women—who we are, our diversity, the strides we’ve made and need to make.”

In a nod to Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* campaign, Brielmaier says, “We’re leaning in over a very antiquated system that is not quick to embrace women, people of color, and people

not from here. There is a loud conversation going on, and how does that translate to the art world?”

The youngest artist featured in the Rubell exhibition, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, says, “It is a great honor to have my work exhibited alongside that by such incredible artists, many of whom I have admired for years. Most young artists—myself included—think of the work we make as being in conversation with various works that came before. A multigenerational show like this affords a great opportunity to make connections within that conversation.”

Many of the younger artists have been directly influenced by their more established peers in “No Man’s Land.” For example, Akunyili Crosby says she received some of the best advice in graduate school from Deborah Kass, who urged her to strive for sincerity in her work, and she considers Mickalene Thomas a de facto mentor. Many of the artists also studied together—such as Dancy, Janine Antoni, Kara Walker, Dana Schutz, and Jutta Koether.

When I asked Thomas about her opinion of the show, she replied, “At the present time, exhibitions featuring all women artists or all African-American artists serve a crucial function. That being said, I look forward to the day when there’s no longer a need to define a show by the gender or race of its artists, but by the quality of their work.”

Antoni says about her participation, “Throughout history, there have been countless shows with only men artists and no self-consciousness at all. I am deeply honored to be considered part of a female lineage because I feel that women have made much-needed contributions to the art dialogue.” Those contributions will be at the fore for six months beginning this December in “No Man’s Land.” **ABMB**

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Other artists and their work represented in the exhibition include Mai-Thu Perret, *Apocalypse Ballet (Pink Ring)*, 2006; Lisa Yuskavage, *Northview*, 2000; Njideka Akunyili Crosby, *Efulefu: The Lost One*, 2011.

