

Bloomberg.com, 22 Nov 2013

# Perez Goes Tropical With \$131 Million Art Oasis in Miami

*By James S. Russell*



An installation, "For Those in Peril on the Sea," by artist Hew Locke, suspends model boats from the lobby ceiling of the Perez Art Museum Miami. It will introduce visitors to art immediately upon entering the new building for the museum. Source: Perez Miami Art Museum/Daniel Azoulay via Bloomberg



An acrylic work, "Continas de Bano," by Oscar Munoz, hangs in front of gallery windows in the Perez Miami Art Museum. The broad overhanging roof makes possible the entry of controlled light into galleries, so that city views echo works on display. Source: Perez Miami Art Museum/Daniel Azoulay via Bloomberg



A detail construction view of the overhanging roof of the Perez Art Museum Miami, which opens Dec. 4. Architect Herzog & de Meuron hung the roof with vertical hanging plants (which will grow into a much softer, shaggier shape) to create an inviting 80,000 square foot public terrace outside the museum. Source: Perez Miami Art Museum/Daniel Azoulay via Bloomberg



A view of the north side of the Perez Art Museum in downtown Miami, Florida. Gallery spaces appear as blocks that project over the first floor lobby yet are sheltered by a broad roof. The architect is Herzog & de Meuron of Switzerland. Source: Perez Miami Art Museum/Daniel Azoulay via Bloomberg

The Swiss architecture firm [Herzog & de Meuron](#) went tropical to design an alluring home for a museum long stifled by a bad building in an unfortunate location. The Perez now has a shot at establishing itself as a major destination.

When the \$131-million new museum building opens on Dec. 4, visitors will feel the way it vibrates with the energy of this urban cultural crossroads.

The opening is timed to seduce the hordes lured to the [Art Basel Miami Beach](#) showcase. (The Swiss home of the art fair and the architect is coincidental.)

The museum opened in the downtown Miami-Dade Cultural Center, a 1983 Spanish-style barn amateurishly concocted by [Philip Johnson](#). It attracted derelicts and repelled almost everyone else.

While a \$100-million [bond issue](#) for the new buildings was approved in 2004, past public-building debacles and the brutal crash of the local economy emboldened skeptics. A couple of the city's prominent private collectors called for its cancelation.

In the meantime, the Art Basel Miami fair had inspired a year-round gallery and studio scene in nearby [Wynwood](#), the Design District, and now downtown.

With cost cutting that retained the building's most important features, construction began in 2010.

## **Budget Endowment**

The museum says it is on budget, and has raised \$76 million privately to fund the balance of construction and enlarge a minuscule endowment toward an ultimate goal of \$220 million.

That includes a \$40 million gift of cash and art by Jorge M. Perez, a local real-estate developer, who thus got his name on the building (annoying those, including board members, who disagreed with naming a largely publicly financed building for a private donor).

The overhang, resting atop tall skinny columns, forms a trellis of thin concrete beams layered with overlapping wood rafters. It sheds dappled sunlight on an 80,000 square foot (7,432 square meters) raised terrace.

It is both majestic and welcoming -- a neat trick.

Planting beds and trees add an understory to the hanging plants (installed by the guru of planted walls, Patrick Blanc).

## City Oasis

The terrace can be programmed with sculptures, dance, or talk. It's also an oasis scaled to the city that possesses few places for public enjoyment. Too bad the museum has no street presence, since it is tucked behind a science museum that's under construction.

Rows of colorful ship models suspended from the ceiling by Guyana-born British artist [Hew Locke](#) greet visitors in the lobby. It will resonate with many Miamians who remember the 1980 exodus of Cuban refugees to [Florida](#) on dangerously overcrowded boats.

Stairs along the wide oak terraces of an auditorium become the chief means up to second-floor galleries. Thick, sound-absorbing curtains theatrically cordon off one large or two small areas of the stair for programs. Removable bench seating is improbably upholstered in cork, which feels like hide.

Working with curators, the Herzog & de Meuron team, led by partner Christine Binswanger, developed a complex hierarchy of galleries some of which float like islands in a sea of informal display areas.

## Long Vistas

The arrangement invites a wandering itinerary where I found myself slipping imperceptibly from one gallery into another. Long vistas open unexpectedly to windowed views of plants, bay, and city.

A suite of generous galleries permits a thematic display of the museum's collection, which has a strong focus on Latin American and local artists.

Other gallery suites open with traveling exhibitions on Ai Weiwei and Caribbean art. Special glass, shades, and the deep sheltering porch allow full-height bands of glass or monumental windows to light many of these spaces.

Otherwise you get clinically even light delivered by strips of fluorescent tubes -- a style preferred in [Europe](#) -- though spotlights can also be used.

Single-subject Focus galleries highlight a collection or work of one artist, such as the luscious modernist paintings from pre-Castro Cuba by [Amelia Pelaez](#). Project galleries display commissioned works, like [Monika Sosnowska's](#) bent-wire construction that clings spiderlike to the ceiling of a tall room.

The diversity of display styles suits a young institution that lacks deep holdings of major figures. Instead the museum layout convenes a conversation among local artists and global ones. That's just perfect for Miami, the restless nexus of the Americas and Europe.

The Perez Art Museum Miami is at 1103 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, FL 33132.  
Information: <http://www.pamm.org/>