

Herzog & de Meuron Brings a New Museum to Miami

With the Pérez Art Museum Miami, architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron have built a major artistic destination for a rapidly changing city

By Alastair Gordon



ON THE WATERFRONT | The museum's design features hanging gardens and an open floor plan. © Herzog & de Meuron

WITH INLETS AND OCEAN on one side, sleek skyscrapers and sprawling urban infrastructure on the other, Miami's new Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) sits at a dynamic convergence of messy urban vitality and natural beauty. "Every place has extraordinary potential, and we have to figure out what that is," says Jacques Herzog, who, with fellow senior partners Pierre de Meuron and Christine Binswanger, sought inspiration in the local topography. The 200,000-square-foot modern and contemporary art center manages to meld into its surroundings, almost as if the architects had deconstructed a conventional museum and put it back together again, leaving only the most essential elements: a skeletal framework with columns around the perimeter supporting open-air terraces, an overhead trellis and galleries that float like independent volumes within. The outcome is a quietly iconic cultural hub for a city on the cusp of major change.

"This is a young city and while it's factionalized in many ways, it's also evolving faster than most American cities," says Thom Collins, director of PAMM. "It's become a design city, an art city." Over the past decade, new neighborhoods like the Design District and the Midtown and Wynwood areas sprang up in industrial hinterlands with dozens of galleries. Architecture has

followed suit, with Herzog & de Meuron leading the way. Their über parking structure at 1111 Lincoln Road, opened in 2010, became a symbolic landmark for the reinvigorated city. Other high-profile projects by brand-name architects include Frank Gehry's New World Center; a planned convention center by Rem Koolhaas; and an eventual 60-story 'exoskeleton' tower by Zaha Hadid ; not to mention the 57-story Jade Signature tower also designed by Herzog & de Meuron, scheduled to open in 2016. But for all the architectural pyrotechnics, there was no symbolic fulcrum for Miami's transformation from relative backwater to international art Mecca. This is the role that PAMM hopes to fulfill: a central destination in an otherwise un-centered place.

Herzog & de Meuron are suited for such a challenge. The Pritzker Prize-winning firm has years of experience working with complex urban conditions and has designed numerous art-related institutions around the world—14 in all—including the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis; the de Young Museum, in San Francisco; an exhibition hall in Basel, Switzerland; and, more recently, the Parrish Art Museum, in Water Mill, New York. There are never any repeat performances. Each building is designed to fit its unique setting—elongated barns for the Parrish, a twisted tower for the de Young—and they all share a similar sense of discovery. If Herzog & de Meuron have a consistent *modus operandi*, it's probably that their buildings don't share a unified look.

When it came to PAMM, the architects looked closely at indigenous vegetation as well as local building styles. Amongst these was Stiltsville, a small community of handmade bungalows that sit on wooden and concrete pylons in the middle of Biscayne Bay. Herzog compares the museum itself to a petrified wood structure, a kind of temple rising up to capture water views and currents of air blowing off the bay. "The breezes go right through the building," he notes. Rigid concrete forms are complemented by a series of "hanging gardens" that surround the museum, dangling from the roof like ropes of Spanish moss or the air roots of a banyan tree. The slender green columns were designed by French garden artist Patrick Blanc using 54,700 plants and 77 local species including an exotic mix of salvia, parlor palms, begonia and *artemisia arborescens*. "The colonnade of vegetation acts as a buffer between the inside and outside of the museum," says Herzog. "That's why it's more important than mere decoration."

PAMM is a cultural sieve of a museum, filtering art, architecture and weather through its open plan. Its galleries are laid out in a nonlinear pattern allowing the viewer the freedom to move in and out of the art spaces without following a set sequence. "It's important for artists to be able to create their work in situ," says Herzog, who explains how the free-form arrangement offers flexible exhibition spaces for experimental art, performance and multimedia installations.

The question, however, remains: Will the art being installed inside these elegant boxes live up to the architecture? It's been common knowledge for some time that the museum lacks a substantial collection, but the thinking has been: If you build it, the art will come. This has been true, to some extent, as gifts pour in from local collectors like Debra and Dennis Scholl, who donated about 300 works of art including a sculptural installation by Ólafur Elíasson and a video piece by Raymond Pettibon ; or Mimi and Bud Floback, who gave more than 30 modern and contemporary pieces, including works by Gerhard Richter and Dan Flavin.

"We're still very young but we've been rapidly building a collection," says Jorge M. Pérez, a museum trustee and billionaire developer of downtown Miami who donated \$40 million toward the \$220 million project, including \$20 million worth of Latin American art and important works by Wilfredo Lam and Roberto Matta. (He was subsequently honored when the name of the museum changed from the Miami Art Museum to the Pérez Art Museum Miami.)

"Hopefully, this museum will help the city grow culturally," says Herzog. It will certainly be a star attraction at the annual Art Basel Miami Beach art fair this December, when the much-anticipated building is unveiled with a series of installations including a retrospective of Chinese dissident artist [Ai Weiwei](#), a site-specific sculpture by Monika Sosnowska and a selection of works from Pérez's own collection. But for the time being, the true jewel of the exhibitions may be the building itself.