

CULTURED

CULTURED.MAG.COM

DESIGN | ART | ARCHITECTURE



WINTER 2015

THE MOMENT IN ART

JOHN GIORNO AND UGO RONDINONE AT PALAIS DE TOKYO, PARIS

WHERE THE GIRLS ARE

The Rubell Family Collection captures the moment with its first all-female show, "No Man's Land."

BY SIOBHAN MORRISSEY



Lisa Yuskavage's *Northview*, 2000

Her name is Lysa, and she's a big, beautiful doll who can crack walnuts with her vagina.

She's the creation of Jennifer Rubell, the daughter of Don and Mera Rubell, who launched the Rubell Family Collection nearly a quarter-century ago in what was once one of Miami's grittier neighborhoods. When a version of the nutcracker first exhibited at the Dallas Contemporary in 2011 (and the following year at Frieze New York), Jennifer's gallerist, Stephen Friedman, described the work as embodying "the two polar stereotypes of female power: the idealized, sexualized nude female form and the too-powerful, nut-busting überwoman."

Although nude and with porn-star pecs, the interactive installation was actually inspired by The Hillary Clinton Nutcracker, a handheld gadget that features the former First Lady crushing nuts between her blue-pant-suited legs, and other powerful female nutcracker toys. The work was selected for the Rubell Family Collection's first all-female show, titled "No Man's Land." The show includes the work of some 70 artists culled from the collection and marks Jennifer's debut at the space, (outside of her annual Art Basel breakfasts at the collection).

"Jennifer did not want to be in the show," says Mera, herself fearful of any undue criticism that might ensue, despite her daughter's bona fides, such as the large installations she did at Fondation Beyeler in Basel, and at the Brooklyn Museum. "We've never shown a work of hers, but this is so apt," Mera says of *Lysa III* (2014), a cast fiberglass sculpture whose left leg acts as a lever that viewers can swing down to crack walnuts strategically placed between the thighs. "Everyone said it's time to allow Jennifer into the building."

There's been much focus of late on the invisible barriers female artists face in the contemporary art world. Historically, women have been underrepresented in galleries and museums.

A legendary group, the Guerrilla Girls, has been protesting the unequal treatment of women in the arts for the past three decades. They emerged in 1985 when an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, "An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture," included only 13 women among the 169 featured artists. The Guerrilla Girls went on to publicly chastise 20 prominent galleries for exhibiting "no more than 10 percent women artists or none at all."

Since then, things haven't changed much. Just five years ago, Don Rubell told *Poder* magazine, "If you go back through a thousand catalogues you probably won't find one where, in a group situation without a female theme, the majority of artists are women." He made the point shortly before their exhibit "How Soon Now," which was dominated by women artists and debuted during Art Basel Miami Beach in 2010. "The reason we didn't do an all-women show is that it cubbyholes them," he said at the time.

Today he says, "women's art has gone beyond the possibility of cubby-holing it. We always generate our shows by what we see at the moment. What we've noticed is that a number of the most interesting artists we see are women. Unfortunately, for women, in many cases it's taking them much longer to be appreciated."

His son, Jason, who began collecting art as a teen and co-founded the Contemporary Arts Foundation arm of the RFC, notes the ongoing inequalities between the sexes in the art world. This plays out not only in less wall space dedicated to women in galleries and museums, but also in who collects their art and the prices paid. In his estimation, collectors typically gravitate towards male artists and pay higher prices for their work.

"Is that still an issue?" he asks. "Yeah, and if I look at the makeup of the whole collection we're just as guilty as everyone else. The percentage is

definitely skewed toward men. I can't say that it was something conscious. The same thing with African American artists; one saw what was presented and what we gravitated towards. It just shows you—it's a real snapshot of the market, who's shown where, what museums are showing and where the focus of attention is."

Lately the Rubells have been drawn to several women artists, such as Brazilian-born Sonia Gomes, who works with textiles and creates biomorphic sculptures. Another intriguing artist is the Dutch painter Natasja Kensmil, whose haunting masterpieces are as dark as they are brooding.

The show—which takes up the entire 30,000-square-foot exhibition space—combines works by recognized and lesser-known artists. The second floor landing features the female body as seen by female artists, including such stalwarts as Cecily Brown, Lisa Yuskavage and Marlene Dumas, whose nine-foot-tall *Miss January* stands unabashedly naked from the waist down, save for the pink sock on her left foot. "Notice where your head lands," Mera says, of the work that turns viewer into voyeur.

While several of the works express an in-your-face feminist point of view, the majority do not. "Maybe they feel the subject has been worked over," Jason says. "Much of it is actually quite abstract. It's not necessarily work you'd attribute to a male or female artist. It has sort of crossed beyond all of that."

Case in point are the Mary Weatherford paintings illuminated with neon light embedded in the canvas. And also the richly textured Suzanne McClelland canvases from the early 1990s.

"It's fun for us to connect the dots and really make sense of what's out there," Jason says. "These women don't need Jeff Koons or Richard Prince to hang alongside them in an exhibition to make them valid. Their work stands on its own."



Clockwise from above: Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Money Makes Money)*, 2001; Kara Walker's *Camptown Ladies*, 1998; Mai-Thu Perret's *Apocalypse Ballet (Pink Ring)*, 2006

