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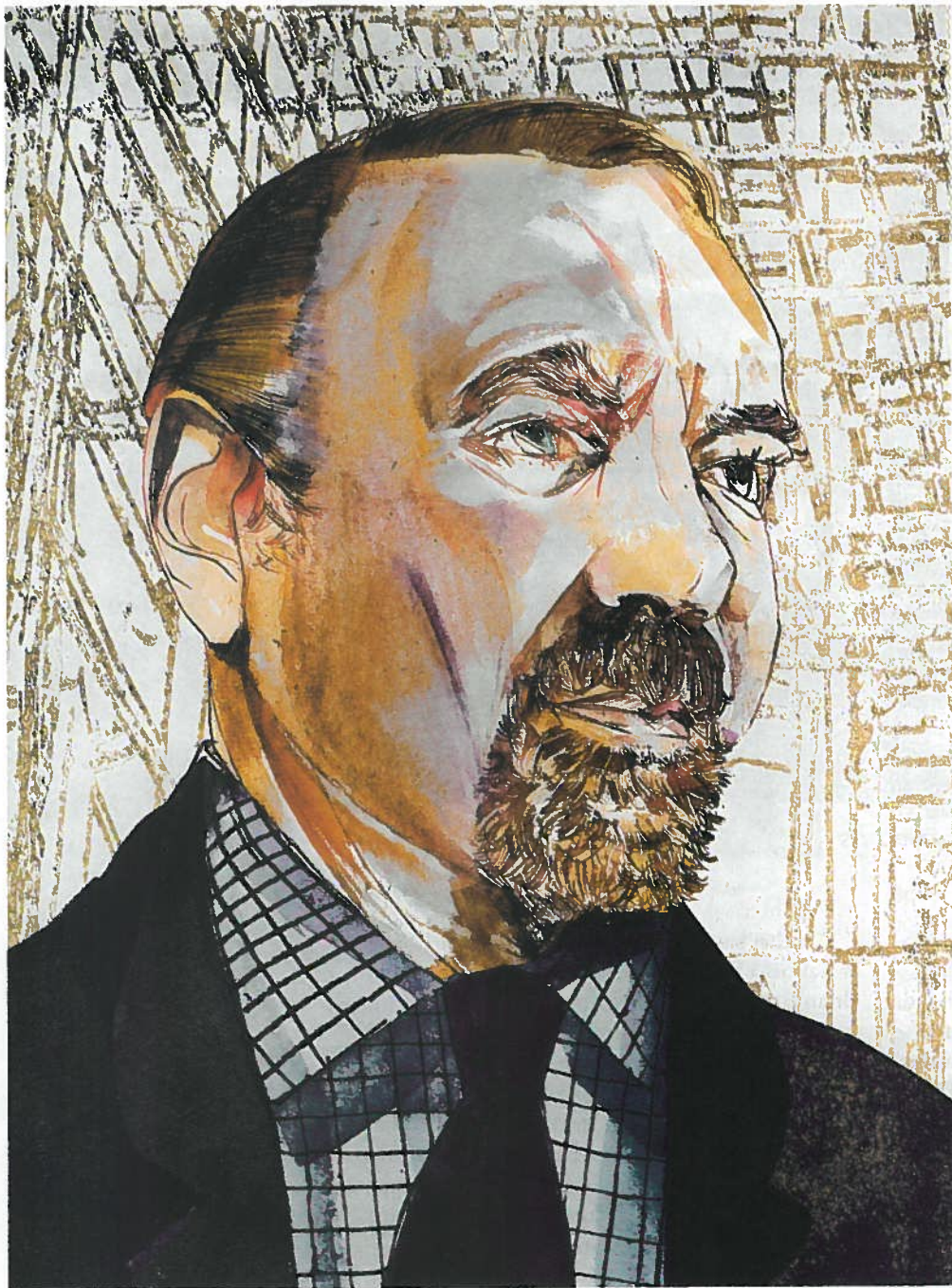
BOATS TO CHARTER

AND MORE...

# MIAMI

America's City of the Future





PROFILE

# The Namesake

Latin-American transplant Jorge Pérez built a condo empire and, following a \$40 million gift, named the city's hottest art museum after himself, to the consternation of his fellow trustees. As **BRUCE HANDY** discovers, Pérez is the quintessential Miamian.

Miami edifice, it was designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron as, I think, an equatorial riff on high modernism. It opened last December to general acclaim.

Formerly housed in an unbeloved Philip Johnson building, the PAMM was also formerly known as the Miami Art Museum. The rechristening, in 2011, became national news when it prompted the resignation of four of the museum's trustees amid a flurry of art-world sniping. Pérez, a trustee himself, had donated \$40 million in cash and art to help get the new building completed. The dissenters objected to an individual, however generous, having his name affixed to a public concern. As one told *The New York Times*, "Name a plaza or a wing or the building, but not the institution."

Pérez seemed hurt by the criticism, but not too hurt. "Did it bother one? For a time," he told me, a bit abstractly, while pointing out that he is hardly the first wealthy person to have his name attached to a museum or some other cultural edifice, public or private. "People want to have their names associated with good deeds. It's nothing to be ashamed

**D**rive around Miami, especially downtown, and you will see a lot of new buildings—white and gleaming, the sun reflecting off teal-tinted glass—and nearly as many construction sites. The city might not be as much a work-in-progress as Dubai or Qatar or Shanghai, but still, in the right light, from the right vantage point, the Miami skyline can look as if it is half-composed of cranes.

One of the men responsible for this growth spurt is Jorge Pérez, a very successful developer of upscale condominiums. *Forbes* estimates his net worth at more than \$2 billion, and his company, the Related Group, is responsible for upwards of 80,000

residential units, mostly in South Florida. *Time* dubbed him "the Donald Trump of the tropics," which is alliterative but unfair. (Pérez supports Democratic candidates, and his buildings aren't eyesores.)

But enough real estate. I was visiting Pérez in his office overlooking Biscayne Bay to talk about art, which he owns in abundance. Some of his collection I saw on the walls of his not-as-big-as-you'd-think-a-billionaire-developer's-would-be office. More of it is at his home in Coconut Grove. Even more of it now belongs to the museum that sits about a mile from his office, bearing his name: The Jorge M. Pérez Art Museum of Miami-Dade County, colloquially known as the Pérez Art Museum Miami. Yet another spanking-new



of.” He mentioned that most of those names have to date been Anglo or Jewish. “Pérez is the first Latin name on a major institution,” he said, “so maybe that is a little strange. Maybe it’s just as strange as if we called it the Ho Chi Minh Museum of Art.”

**P**érez is a handsome man with a close-cropped beard. When we met he was in shirtsleeves, but cuffed, his tie loosened, but only ever so slightly—a portrait of relaxed elegance. He projects gravitas but also a hesitancy or even shyness that, in my somewhat limited experience, is rare in billionaire precincts, where the norm runs toward dead-certain megalomania.

Collecting art for Pérez is clearly more than just a form of visible ledger-keeping or a social stepping-stone: He grew increasingly passionate as we talked about his collection, which started with Latin-American figurative works and has since grown to embrace a wealth of contemporary art in various styles. Living with art had enriched his life—made it “better,” he said—time and familiarity revealing deeper meanings. Among his current favorites are works by the Swiss artist Beat Zoderer, the Cuban painter Julio Larraz and the late Franco-American sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle. He’s not immune to the sort of big-ticket names that set auction houses panting, with works by Alex Katz and Frank Stella currently hanging at home, and he spoke with evident delight about turning a skeptical friend on to the work of Mark Rothko. Does he own any Rothkos himself? “I wish,” he said with unguarded relish. (For the record, I wish, too.)

He was born in 1949, in Argentina, to Cuban parents. The family then settled in Colombia, where Pérez spent his formative years; at some point he logged time in Cuba and Uruguay as well. College and graduate school

brought him to the States, where he received an undergraduate degree from C.W. Post and a master’s in urban planning from the University of Michigan. That pan-Latin-Caribbean-U.S. heritage makes Pérez an emblematic Miamian. He credits his love of art to his mother, an intellectual who dragged him to museums and got him reading Kierkegaard and Husserl as a teenager. He bought his first pieces while in college. “I would look at the dorms and everyone had naked women or rock bands [on their walls],” he said. “I couldn’t wait to save enough money to go buy art.” Poker winnings staked him to his first three pieces, lithographs by Joan Miró, Man Ray and Marino Marini.

The bulk of his personal collection—there is a corporate collection, too—has been promised to his namesake museum. He has signed the Giving Pledge, promoted by Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, which commits him and other billionaires to earmark at least half of their fortunes to philanthropy. “Hopefully I set an example that those of us who have been so fortunate in coming to this great country and being able to make a lot of money...have an obligation to give back,” he said, adding, “We don’t have a great tradition of individual philanthropy in our Latin culture.”

Why is that? I asked. “The easy explanation...is that in our culture all the deeds, all the hospitals, all the public things were done either by the government or the church,” he replied. “The individual was not expected to [contribute]. If they amassed money, their legacy was to give it to the family. To me, legacy is much more what you leave behind to the larger community. But I’m not saying one is better than the other one.” He laughed. “Well, I *am* saying one is better than the other one, or else I would do the other one. The challenge is convincing everyone that I’m right.” ♦

## SAVE THE DATE

## December To-Dos

A (very) short list of Basel-timed art world goings-on.

**PAMM Presents  
Future Brown**

December 4,  
1103 Biscayne Blvd.

An installation featuring the DJ super group. Open to Art Basel VIPs.

**One Way:  
Peter Marino**

December 4–March 29,  
2015, Bass Museum of Art

Examines the influence of art on Marino’s architecture.

**WET**

Opens December 2, Casa  
Casuarina, 1116 Ocean Dr.

Adam Lindemann hosts a water-themed art show at the former Versace mansion pool.

**Transposition:  
Over Many Miles**

Opens December 1, NE  
First Ave. at 39th St.

An outdoor installation by artist Paula Crown in the Design District.

FILM

## Beyond Scarface

*Borscht, a cutting-edge collective of young Miami filmmakers, is trying to change the sun-fun-and-guns perception of the Magic City.*

“**Miami is a famous city**, but that fame is still left over from the 1980s: the Art Deco, the cocaine, the big boobs,” says **Borscht Corp.** founder Lucas Leyva. “That’s all still here, but we’re trying to talk about the other stuff.” Leyva and his creative partner, Jillian Mayer, spent the summer not only programming the ninth edition of their biannual Borscht Film Festival (its mission: “to redefine Miami in cinema and vice versa”) but also commissioning a slate of made-in-Miami short films, putting the finishing touches on their MTV digital series about the city’s surreal underbelly and developing Borscht’s first feature.

Borscht’s short films wormhole audiences into alternate universes in which coral reefs discuss hallucinatory dreams and Miami Heat star Chris Bosh must transcend space and time to save the world. The frenzied style of the films has made Miami the darling of the independent film world. In the last four years, Borscht premiered four shorts in competition at Sundance (including *Yearbook*, the 2014 Short Film Jury Award winner for animation) and nine films at the South by Southwest Music Conference and Festival and had a retrospective of its work at the Glasgow Film Festival.

“Miami’s film scene isn’t established like New York’s or L.A.’s,” says Mayer. “There isn’t a hierarchy you have to blast through or a culture of apprenticeship. If you have a project and can rally some friends, it’ll get done, and it can really surprise you.” [borschtcorp.com](http://borschtcorp.com). —Jim Goldblum



A scene from the short film #PostModem