

# An Affair of the Art

MARTY MARGULIES IS ONE OF MIAMI'S FOREMOST DEVELOPERS AND ART COLLECTORS, AND PREPARING FOR ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH IS QUITE THE PRODUCTION. BY BILL KEARNEY

## 11 AM—The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse

I walk past the eerie 17-foot wingspan of Anselm Kiefer's three-ton *Sprache der Vögel*, past Olafur Eliasson's raw, rocky Icelandic landscapes, and into the Warehouse's main room, where Marty Margulies, alongside curator Katherine Hinds, is in the middle of welcoming Chinese artist Song Dong. Dong flew in yesterday to install his latest work for display during the week of Art Basel Miami Beach, the most crucial few days of the year for heavyweight collectors such as Margulies, both to share his collection and possibly buy art. Dong proffers a gift of tea and chopsticks, and the three watch as Margulies's crew installs Dong's arrangement of vintage wardrobe doors—forged from China—and set up to form a sort of rustic hall of mirrors. Each one is nearly identical, as per Cultural Revolution law, but also altered, dented from decades of family use, imbued with stories and heartbreak, and reflecting the visage of anyone viewing the art. "There's a history of people that use these," says Margulies. "It's about humanity. It's a very moving thing for me."

Back in the office, Margulies ribs his assistant, Nunzio Auricchio, about hanging art faster—they're expecting 5,000 visitors during Basel week and need to arrange pieces by Ai Weiwei, Jannis Kounellis, and Michelangelo Pistoletto. How does Margulies decide what to buy? "It has to fit into the rest of the collection, and that's a feel you develop," he says. "It's not about fashion; it's not about who's the hottest artist. For example, Miró is the bridge between Surrealism and abstraction, so if you have Miró, it's natural to go with de Kooning. Pivotal is a great word, and those [works] are almost impossible to find unless you have a huge amount of money, and that's not me."

## 12:30 PM—Morgans restaurant, Wynwood

We sit down for lunch with Norman Braman, the auto dealer  
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FROM TOP: Margulies and curator Katherine Hinds go over photos at the Warehouse; in his season seats right behind the Heat bench, taking in the action against the Atlanta Hawks.

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magnate and former Philadelphia Eagles owner, who is credited with helping lure Art Basel to Miami. He's also one of the more important art collectors in the US. The conversation bounces from hellacious construction permits to Miami Beach Convention Center strife to contrasting the value of the Marlins stadium (which Braman vehemently opposed) to the tax-free benefits of Art Basel Miami Beach. "Having this art fair here is like having a Super Bowl every year!" Braman says.

I ask if he'd like to own pieces in Margulies's collection.

"Absolutely. God, yes. I'm jealous of your Twomblys," he tells Margulies.

"Oh, come on!" Margulies says.

"No, I am. And also that new Kiefer sculpture..." Braman trails off as if in reverie. "If you have the opportunity to buy a great work of art by a great artist, you can't hesitate," he says.

"You have to make a move. You've got seconds," Margulies adds.

"Even if you're overpaying, the market will come along and surpass it. The key is to always move quickly."

Braman goes on to explain how he and his wife, Irma, have been lending out some of their less pivotal pieces to museums. In addition to a Picasso, "we've put four Miró sculptures in our lending foundation."

"Maybe we could have a Miró, since you're lending," Margulies says.

### 3 PM—Bellini, Williams Island

We pull into Williams Island, an enclave of high-rises laced with a canal leading out to the nearby Intracoastal Waterway, and enter Margulies's latest development, Bellini, a 25-story condo filled with units selling from \$1.5 to \$4.6 million. He seems to know all the construction workers by name and runs through finishing touches with his project manager. We walk through a unit with an Eric Ripert-designed kitchen and views of the Atlantic. Raised in Yonkers, New York, Margulies had a stint in the Army and the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School before settling in Miami. He found himself in real estate, and soon figured out he didn't like managing buildings but rather did enjoy building them. "It's a creative

Norman Braman elaborates to Margulies and Hinds about his recent travels to Barcelona.



## MY MIAMI

**Video artist you're keen on:** "Nathalie Djurberg, for her comic perversity."

**Early art purchases:** Prints by Marc Chagall and a series of prints by Picasso, *The Vollard Suite*.

**Charity efforts:** "Lotus House, because people fall through the cracks through no fault of their own."



process for me. I want to make sure it's done right—people live here." His phone chimes—he's had 36 e-mails today from galleries looking to sell. Margulies didn't even like art until he went to an auction in New York as a spectator. "I saw all of these people bidding lots of money, and I thought, These are pretty smart people, I've got to learn about this kind of stuff." At galleries, he would listen to the spiel. "I said, 'These guys are unbelievable.' They take nothing, and the way they talk, they make something out of it. It's fantastic! I called it the aesthetic of nothingness." And so a collector was born. His friends chided him about what seemed a fool's errand. "Are you crazy?" they said. I said, 'I'm crazy, but I'll tell you what, I'm enjoying it.'"

### 7:30 PM—AmericanAirlines Arena, Miami Heat vs. Atlanta Hawks

We take our seats behind the Heat bench (Margulies has had season tickets since the Heat began). Energy surges in with the opening jump ball. Bosh hits a three. You can hear the players chatter on the court, the leather against LeBron's hands as he bullies a rebound. Margulies is all smiles as he watches the flow on the court, the crisp geometry of passes and shots. "I love Ray Allen—doesn't show a lot of emotion on the court, clutch player." He also loves Pat Riley for the acquisition of Greg Oden. "They need a big body. Riley is very clever." There's a fast break. LeBron drives with magical lithe power, dunks. Margulies looks at me, raises an eyebrow, a boyish thrill in his eyes, as if we've gotten away with something, the witnessing of beauty. *The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse, 591 NW 27th St., Miami, 305-576-1051; margulieswarehouse.com* **OD**

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