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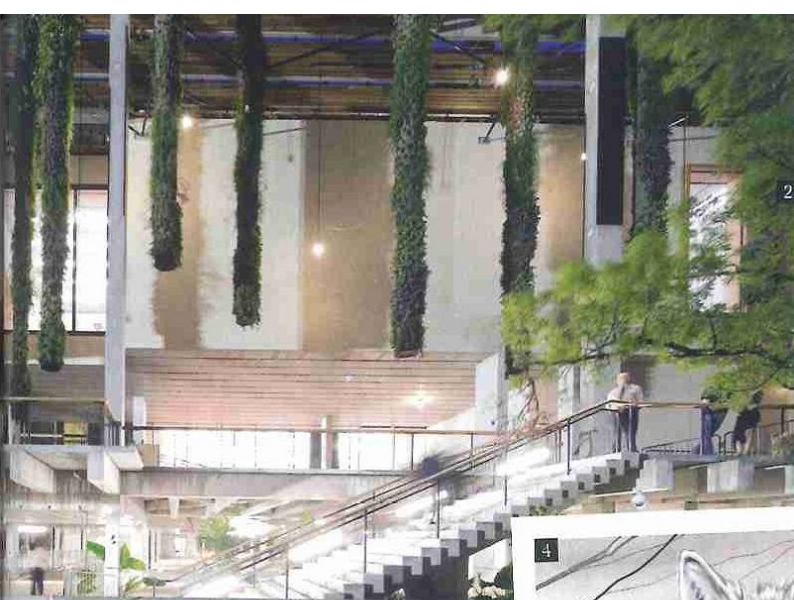
POLITICS

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WYNWOOD WALLS



# CITY OF MAGIC

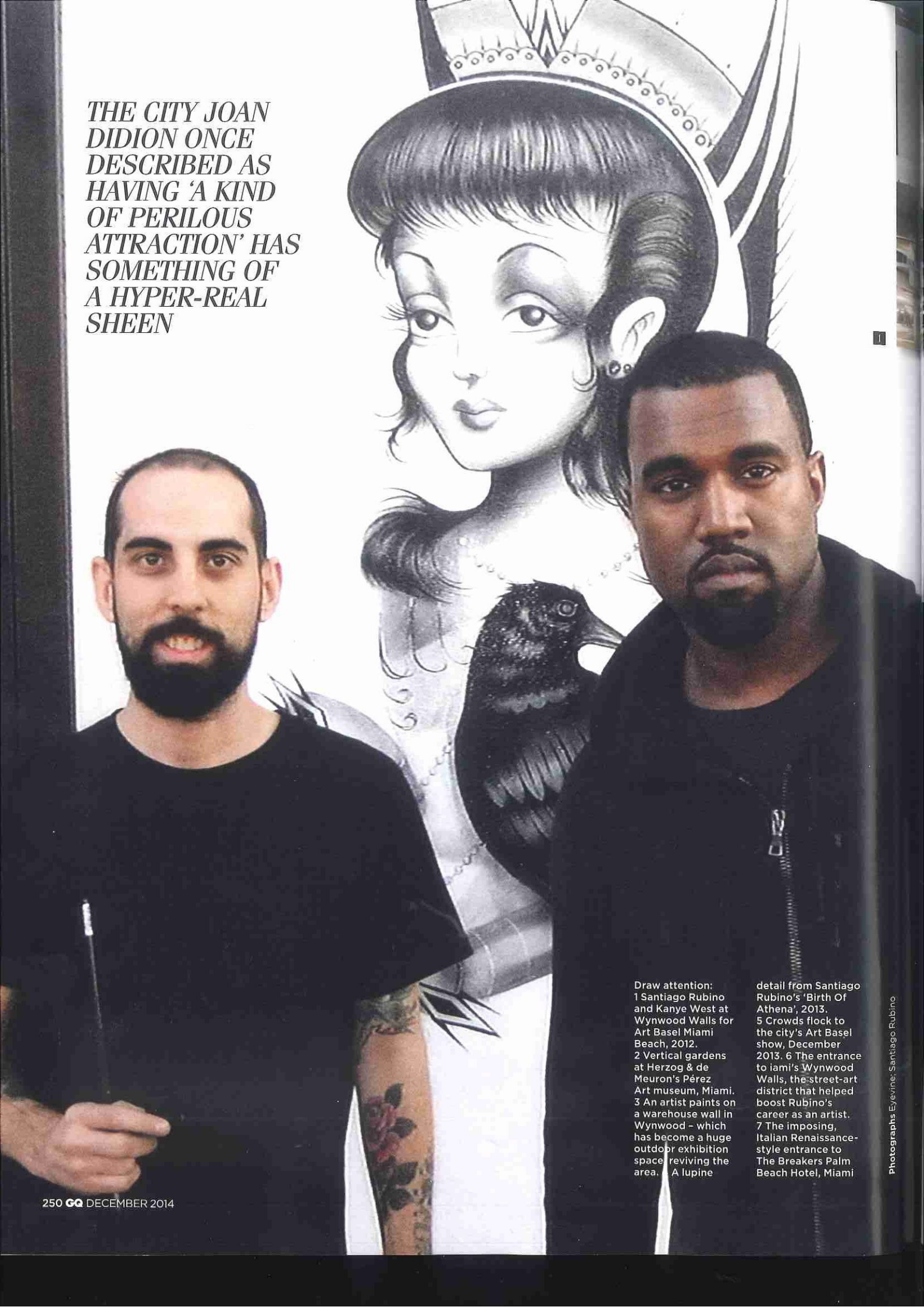
Once the land of the velvet rope – an art-deco sanctuary for the beautiful, the bronzed and the brash – today Miami has art. Art is everywhere, defining the city, and not just during the massive Art Basel fair. GQ visits Argentinian master of graphite and graffiti Santiago Rubino and puts the new Miami in the frame

STORY BY DYLAN JONES





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SHEEN*



Draw attention:  
1 Santiago Rubino  
and Kanye West at  
Wynwood Walls for  
Art Basel Miami  
Beach, 2012.  
2 Vertical gardens  
at Herzog & de  
Meuron's Pérez  
Art museum, Miami.  
3 An artist paints on  
a warehouse wall in  
Wynwood - which  
has become a huge  
outdoor exhibition  
space, reviving the  
area. 4 A lupine

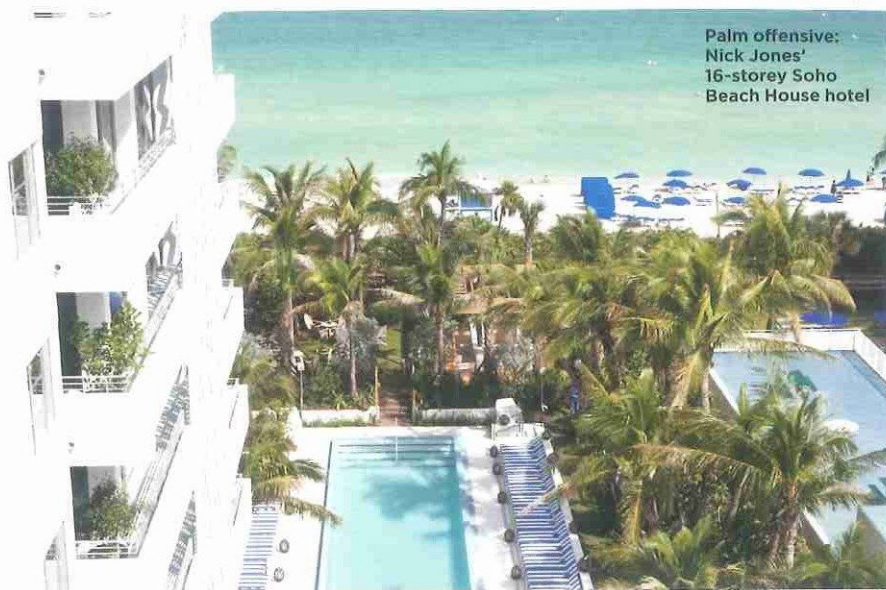
detail from Santiago  
Rubino's 'Birth Of  
Athena', 2013.  
5 Crowds flock to  
the city's Art Basel  
show, December  
2013. 6 The entrance  
to Miami's Wynwood  
Walls, the street-art  
district that helped  
boost Rubino's  
career as an artist.  
7 The imposing,  
Italian Renaissance-  
style entrance to  
The Breakers Palm  
Beach Hotel, Miami



'Stella Octangula' by  
Santiago Rubino, 2009







Palm offensive:  
Nick Jones'  
16-storey Soho  
Beach House hotel

In a tiny and almost unbearably steamy studio in a gated industrial zone on the borders of Little Haiti in northern Miami, the 35-year-old Argentinian artist Santiago Rubino is crouching over a huge piece of paper parchment, delicately scraping his graphite pencil over the surface. A former graffiti artist and graduate of the nearby Wynwood Walls, Rubino's work is almost the antithesis of what most of us consider to be graffiti art.

Rubino's largely black-and-white world is one inhabited by psychedelic, doe-eyed waifs, the kind which you could easily imagine wandering through a Tim Burton movie, the sort of thing you might expect to find collected in

large Taschen-style books on Johnny Depp's coffee table – should the sun king of high-sheen Gothic Hollywood be so gauche as to actually own a coffee table, that is.

If the Victorians had shown any inclination to indulge in graffiti – and if they had expressed that desire through an impossible futuristic prism of 20th-century Japanese illustrative pornography – then this is what they might have come up with. Rubino is obsessed with Egypt, the Renaissance, geometry, and nature in general. His studio is festooned with reference books, and he takes an encyclopedic interest in draftsmanship, as well as keeping a keen eye on the machinations of graffiti and comic books. He says he has created a world in his head that he projects through his drawings,

inspired by nature, science and “the mysteries of the universe”.

Rubino was born in Buenos Aires in 1979, and came to Miami when he was ten, along with his parents and his younger brother. His uncle owned a construction company, and encouraged Santiago's family to move to the US. “My dad was an industrial engineer, and the job prospects and the lifestyle here were meant to be much better,” says Rubino. “And they were.” He was drawing from the age of ten, doodling and colouring and spending all day with his crayons. A lot of his drawings were inspired by Renaissance art and by watching Disney cartoons and *Tom And Jerry*. “It became like a mixture of everything,” he says. The high, the low.

He fell in love with Da Vinci from a young age – when we met, he mentioned Leonardo, Picasso and Michelangelo in the first ten minutes – and he says the artist influenced him more than anyone. “You look at his life and you see that, wow, he did this by the time he was 20, and wow, he did that by the time he was 22. Every day, another masterpiece.

“My mother always said that I have talent, and I always believe everything she said. So I guess I realised I had some talent when I was young. I just never gave up. That's the >

## SOUTH BEACH IS SO SLICK, IT FEELS LIKE IT'S SPENT TEN YEARS IN POST- PRODUCTION



Scene and heard (from left): Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron's designer parking garage, 1111 Lincoln Road, in Miami Beach; traditional Cuban cuisine at Versailles in Little Havana – one of the filming locations for Jon Favreau's June 2014 movie *Chef*; more Wynwood Wall graffiti art



➤ message I would always try to give to young kids: never give up, and don't let other people affect you. Because it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what anybody says – you gotta be strong and do what you want to do. Art brings people together. And that's the best part of it. We need more of that."

Rubino started copying Da Vinci, tracing and stencilling and trying to make his lines work in exactly the same way, using the same techniques to draw cartoon characters. Above all else, he liked the juxtaposition of the old and the new. "I like imperfection. I feel that it is more interesting. Because I love artists that I know draw very beautifully, but I've always wanted to subvert it. Because it doesn't have the same energy."

Rubino started doing graffiti in 1994, when he was 15, fusing these new techniques with his figurative styles, mixing and matching on the side of warehouse walls in the Wynwood Walls. "After I finished high school, I told my parents that I didn't want to go to college, didn't want to study any more... I just wanted to paint. I was doing graffiti, sure, but I was also putting the hours in, reading books, spending hours in the library, and practising at home. I just wasn't at college."

"It wasn't until I met my dealer, Anthony Spinello, that I realised I could go into a gallery

## I WOULD SAY THAT ANY ARTIST IN THE WORLD NEEDS TO BE HERE'

SANTIAGO RUBINO

situation and I decided this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. I mean, I've always known I wanted to paint, but that was the point when somebody gave me an opportunity to be part of an art show I never experienced before. It just opened up my whole vision of what it was like to be an artist. Having said that, you don't have to be in a gallery, and you can just paint a mural and inspire the world."

The gallery is where he now works his magic, and so far he has exhibited in Miami, New York and LA, while also working closely with fashion brands such as Jimmy Choo, and producing work of a more permanent nature – for instance, his installation in the St Regis Hotel in Bal Harbour.

Of course, Rubino wouldn't have been anything without the Wynwood Walls. Ten years

ago, the Wynwood district (formerly known as "El Barrio"), was the home of heroin street zombies, down-and-outs and squatters. But because rent was cheap in the area, a colonisation began, with satellite art fairs and pop-up galleries. As artists started using Wynwood's outdoor surfaces for painting murals, the area turned into one of North America's largest outdoor exhibition spaces. In 2009, Tony Goldman, a property developer known for revitalising decaying neighbourhoods, saw an opportunity to build on this momentum. He started gentrifying the district, turning it into an art destination in the process, and soon the area started appealing to local artists like Rubino and international ones like Kenny Scharf. As Art Basel Miami started to gain traction, so the Wynwood Walls became a default stop for collectors.

"The beauty about painting murals and doing street art is that you're not locked into one room, and you're basically part of the environment and part of the people," says Rubino. "I met a lot of amazing people just being on the street, doing murals, doing my thing down in Wynwood. You'd turn around and there would be another great person, another great person with a story, a gallery, an idea, a coffee shop, whatever. The Walls did that for everybody. One day we're painting on the sides of derelict buildings, and the next we have a whole support network."

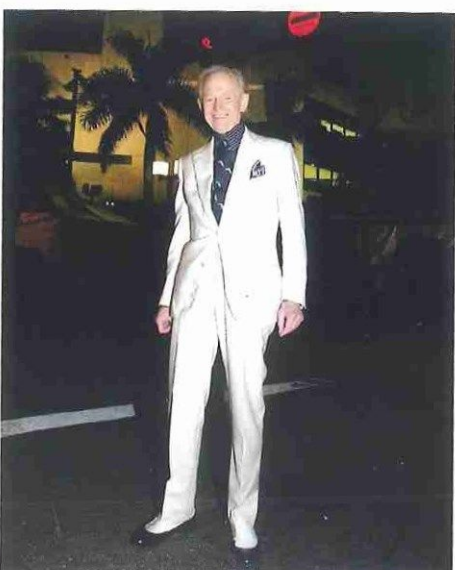
Miami itself has changed enormously in the past few years. These days, the city Joan Didion once described as having a "kind of perilous attraction" has something of a hyper-real sheen. South Beach is so slick, so colourful, and so bright that as a whole it feels like it has spent the past ten years in post-production. The place is a show-and-tell orgy of neon signs, Day-Glo T-shirts, hi-vis trainers and fluorescent canopies. Sparkles of sound fleetingly emerge from shops, cars, restaurants and wine bars, a ready stream of urban-chillax-pop. While the deep turquoise waters and the white-sand beaches add a sense of normality to Miami, in most other respects it is extraordinary.

Miami is called "The Magic City" because it managed to grow to more than five million residents in a smidge over a century, a remarkable feat for a city that started from swamp and sand. Consequently Miami feels like the future. Twenty-five years ago Miami was the spiritual home of the model industry, the go-to destination for some fast winter sun, the perfect backdrop for the body-beautiful parade. A quarter of a century ago you could come here with great expectations, complete with toned abs, a perfect tan and brand-spanking new designer threads, and still feel insecure. The beaches were full of the golden and the gorgeous, as were the nightclubs, the hotels and the restaurants.

In the Nineties, Miami was upping its game, trying to punch above its weight by acting all high and mighty and sniffy and snobby. ➤



Florida frieze (clockwise): Kevin Spacey and Tracey Emin at her *Angel Without You* show, Art Basel Miami Beach 2013; the Four Seasons; Tom Wolfe in South Beach; Ritz-Carlton Naples; Wynwood Kitchen & Bar





The art house: Miami style summed up by The Betsy South Beach, featuring a Bob Bonis archive exhibition of photographs of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones (below)



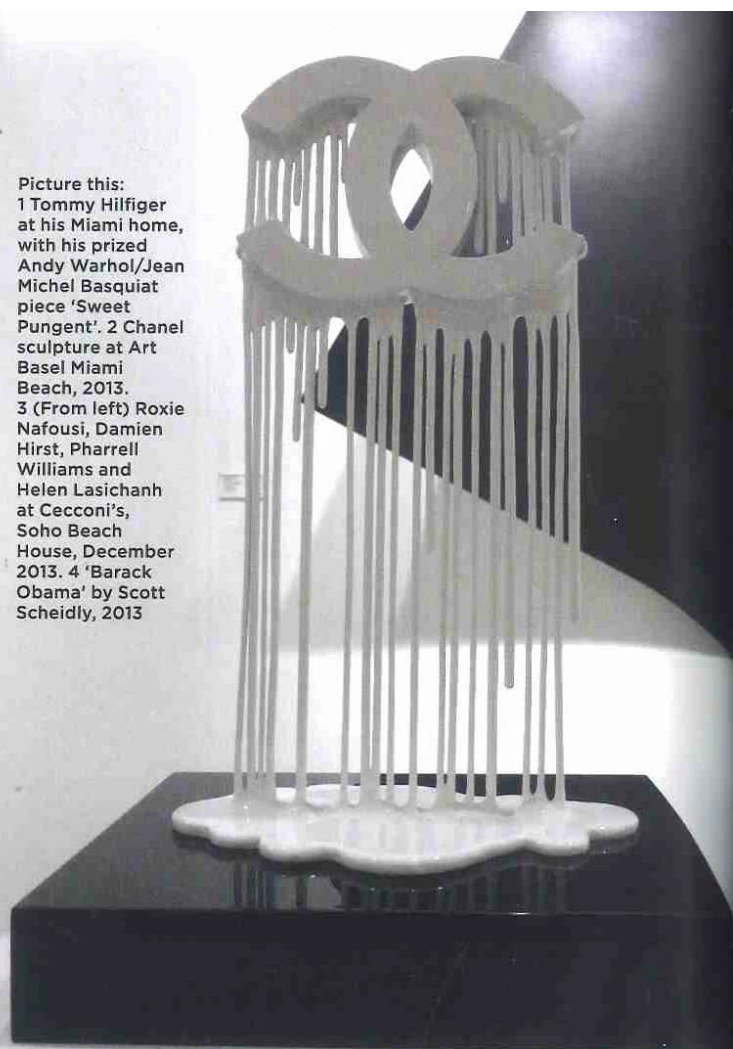
*MIAMI BEACH HAS BECOME A BASTION OF EGALITARIAN COOL*



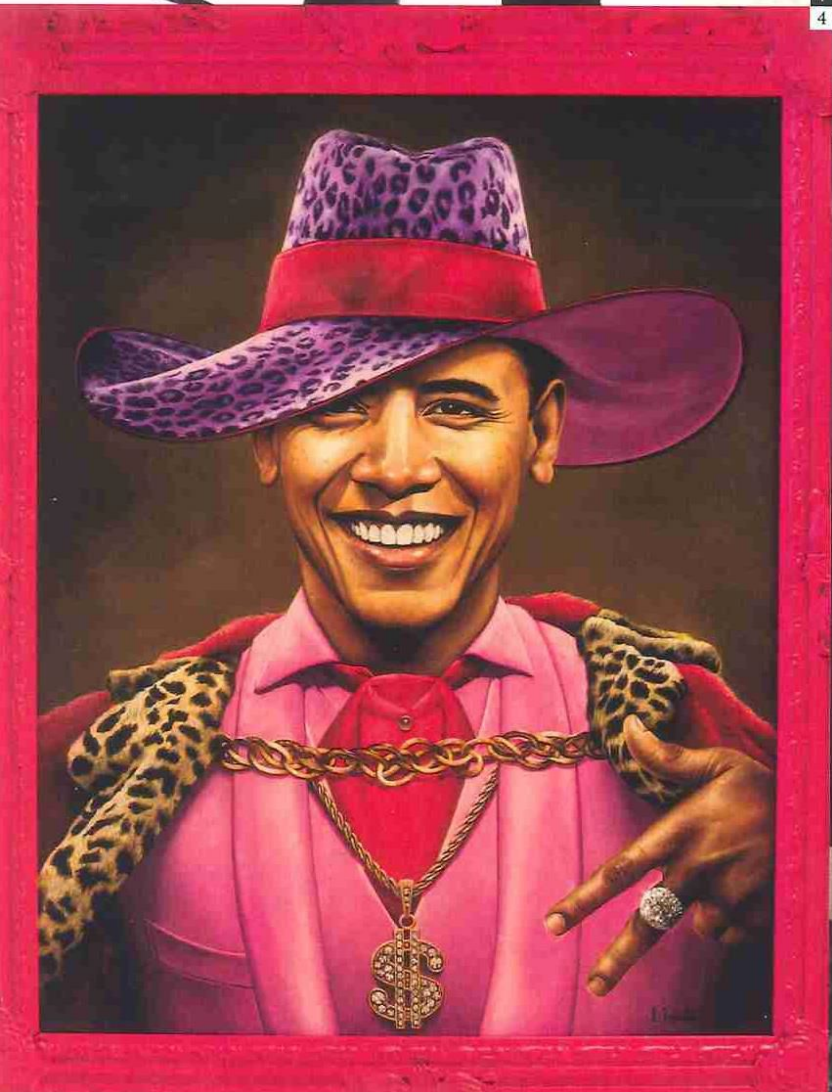




Picture this:  
 1 Tommy Hilfiger  
 at his Miami home,  
 with his prized  
 Andy Warhol/Jean  
 Michel Basquiat  
 piece 'Sweet  
 Pungent'. 2 Chanel  
 sculpture at Art  
 Basel Miami  
 Beach, 2013.  
 3 (From left) Roxie  
 Nafousi, Damien  
 Hirst, Pharrell  
 Williams and  
 Helen Lasichanh  
 at Cecconi's,  
 Soho Beach  
 House, December  
 2013. 4 'Barack  
 Obama' by Scott  
 Scheidly, 2013



1 2  
 4 3



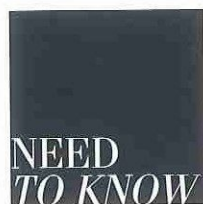
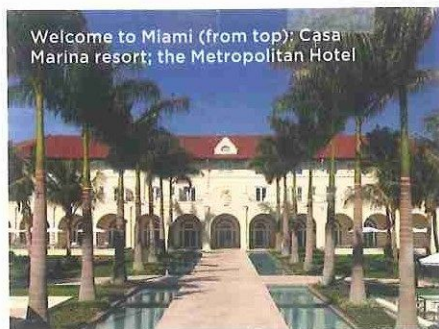


➤ The fashion crowd loved it – for a while you couldn't move along South Beach without bumping into European models, photographers and fashion editors – and for a while it became a haven of the beautiful people. Miami suddenly discovered social hierarchies, suddenly understood the notions of “in” and “out”, of being on the guest list or not. The Magic City became a trendy destination, with all the trappings and with all the baggage that came with it.

Today, however, Miami is a lot more democratic, having ditched the velvet rope. Everyone appears to be beautiful. In a lot of vacation spots in the US, people appear to have been digitally enhanced by up to 20 per cent, whereas in Miami the opposite appears to be true. Here, even the fat people look thin. And while the city feels like one big shop, unlike most other US holiday destinations, Miami is less a collection of consumer outlets and more a link bracelet of “wearable boutiques”. Shopping here actually seems like fun. Which means that the artificial subtext of the city is actually a lot less “sub” than you might think... but it works.

These days, the city doesn't have to try so hard, as it is one of the pre-eminent cities in the country, one of the coolest in the world, so much so that nowhere needs old-fashioned discriminatory door policies. If you're in then you're in. The Soho Beach House might have a membership system, but then its door policy is no different from any other Soho House around the world. If you're a member then you're a member, while membership isn't determined by how thin or rich you are. Miami is now confident enough to embrace 21st-century urban egalitarianism, like London, New York or LA: everyone here is cool, whether they know it or not. Also, Miami isn't cynical like those other cities are, trading off their ability to diminish newcomers to the city, gleefully mocking newbies with glissendorf. Miami has open arms.

Essentially, Miami – and in particular Miami Beach – is far more sophisticated than it used to be. There is a studied ease about the place: for example the hotels here aren't big on upholstery, replacing physical softness with refracted sunlight in the restaurants and cosy pools of light in the bars. Whereas the city once celebrated bright green and yellow sports cars that celebrated the gauche and the fuel-injected, nowadays the cool cars to drive are Mercedes or Range Rovers. And while the place is swarming with Brits, they're the right kind, not the kind you're going to see in Dubai or the wrong parts of Spain. In Miami you're shopping in Base, browsing for novels in Books & Books, buying Angelo Galasso shirts in the Design District, eating Haitian food in Tap Tap, hoovering down Cuban food in Versailles, sipping cocktails by the gargantuan pool in the Biltmore, and hanging out in The Betsy, The Metropolitan or the Palm Beach Four Seasons.



Carrier (0161 492 1356; [carrier.co.uk](http://carrier.co.uk)) offers ten nights from £2,145 per person based on two sharing. Price includes two nights at Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach, two nights at Metropolitan by COMO, Miami Beach, two nights at Casa Marina, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, two nights at The Betsy South Beach, two nights at The Ritz-Carlton Naples, ten days' car hire and return flights from London Heathrow to Miami with British Airways ([ba.com](http://ba.com)).

You can even disappear to Naples for the day, and park yourself in the Ritz-Carlton as you drink the afternoon away.

It is still the home of the unbelievably rich and exponentially famous, full to the brim with the likes of Timbaland, Matt Damon, Shakira, Iggy Pop and Oprah (occasionally, especially during Art Basel, in the same room). The mansions of limbo never get any smaller, but it's no longer just the domain of the staggeringly wealthy and the tragically poor (though neither have gone away). And while corpulence and opulence can still be found inside the shuttered mansions of Palm Beach up the coast, Miami Beach has become a bastion of egalitarian cool.

In the Eighties, the clothes here mirrored the pastels of the Po-Mo apartment blocks and the art-deco hotels – pale flamingo, peppermint, the palest blues – but for the last half-a-decade the predominant clothing in Miami has chimed with the neon that lines SoBe: fluorescent orange, yellow, pink and the

inevitable and ubiquitous coral. In fact coral (or salmon) is now Miami's Snapchat colour of choice – it might be a deco hotel, might be a neon awning, might be a sunset.

Of course what Miami has now and what it didn't have 20 years ago is art. Art in CAPS. In CamelCase. In *itals*. In **BOLD**. Art is everywhere in Miami, from the extraordinary Wynwood Walls – a Hollywood backlot overrun by a gang of escaped graffiti artists – to the new Pérez Art Museum, from the hardscrabble little galleries that have cropped up everywhere from Little Havana to the Design District, to the dozens of outposts of Art Basel Miami Beach.

“I would say that for any artist in the world, they need to be here,” says Rubino. “Because Miami's the place to be. I would say the last five years has changed a lot. A lot of the city's success has to do with art because without it... There's a certain type of energy in Miami that I can't describe. I would say it's the people and just everything there. The environment, the weather, we have Art Basel that's a major part of it and it's always good. You know?”

Without the new Miami as a springboard, it is unlikely that Rubino would have attracted quite so much attention, and without the co-dependent support system of the city's galleries and museums, there is no way he would have had access to the international art pipeline. Here he is, though, up in Little Haiti, meticulously working his way across yet another wall of paper, scribbling away as though his life depended on it, conjuring his big-eyed oddballs out of an imagination steeped in cultures both highs and low.

“There's no doubt in my mind that Miami is going to be one of the major art centres of the world,” he says, almost smiling. “You have the local artists, the artists who are now coming because of Art Basel and the Walls, and the ones who come because Miami is an exciting city. The most important artists come here and collaborate, they paint murals, they have parties, they get involved. I mean, seriously, where else do you see that? New York? Los Angeles? Sure, but it's not the same.

“I think Miami is like the next New York and I feel like a lot of the artists that I'm friends with now are going to be part of history, and that's why I want to stay in Miami, because of that. It's grown so much and there's so much happening here. The weather is perfect, you know. People come from all over the world just for the weather. There's nowhere else like it. New York has thousands of artists, but it feels like the past. Miami is a different city, a city all about the future.” ☺



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