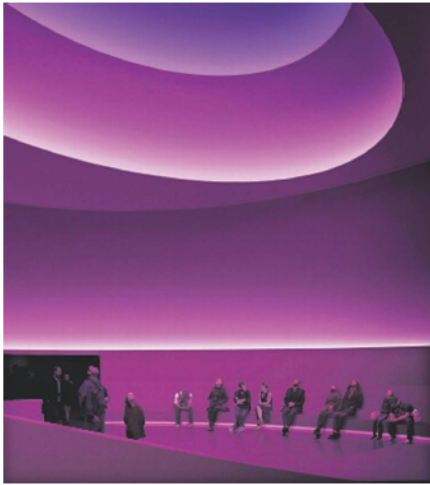


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Proposed Fairholme project offers Miami a 'seminal' artistic opportunity



Color and light: James Turrell's "Aten Reign" drew a record number of visitors to New York's Guggenheim Museum when it was installed in 2013. | File photo

BY JANE WOOLDRIDGE
jwooldridge@MiamiHerald.com

Two summers ago, New Yorkers and tourists alike queued for entry to the Guggenheim's blockbuster art show, James Turrell's *Aten Reign*. The massive play of color and light was the largest temporary exhibition ever created by Turrell. More than 412,000 visitors came to lie on the museum's interior "field" and stare into Turrell's 2013 skyscape, installed in the Guggenheim's iconic spiral. The average of 5,026 visitors per day made it the best attended exhibition in the museum's history.

Last summer, Richard Serra's massive *Passage of Time* — an undulating 12-foot-high canyon of twin steel walls stretching 200 feet — drew global attention to Qatar. The work was part of a much-heralded solo exhibition by Serra, one of the world's foremost sculptors.

So it seemed almost poetically fitting when Fairholme Capital hedge-fund manager Bruce Berkowitz, who has kept a low local profile, said last year that he had purchased the two works and would install them in a permanent, publicly accessible exhibition in Miami's endless summer.

But the Serra and Turrell may never see the light of a Miami day.

After an initial design was deemed unsuitable under the Miami 21 zoning code, Berkowitz — who is not related to Miami SkyRise developer Jeffrey Berkowitz — bought additional land so his design team at Arquitectonica could meet Miami 21 requirements. The plan now calls for two six-level buildings (36 stories are allowed) containing 36,140 feet of gallery space — 6,000 more square feet than the galleries at the Perez Art Museum Miami, which boasts a total 120,000 programmable interior square feet. The rest of the Fairholme interior contains mechanical facilities and offices for Fairholme, its foundation — which gave \$20 million last year to the University of Miami — and a trust company for which it has been granted rare federal regulatory approval.

Four-and-a-half months after the team's last meeting with the City of Miami, four months after formally submitting the two-building plan — and a week after the Miami Herald reported that Berkowitz was planning to sell his land — his team received a written response to his latest design revision. Reviewers deemed it a commercial building rather than a civic space. Among the city's comments: The plan doesn't include enough doors— necessary for ground-floor retail in a commercial building, but in this case prohibited by the sheer size of the Serra sculpture, not to mention a security issue for works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Richard Prince and other blue-chip artists slated to hang inside. The report also finds that the design isn't dense enough to meet the commercial code — in essence, saying there's too much space for sculpture and park.

City of Miami Planning and Zoning Director Francisco Garcia did not respond to phone and email requests regarding this matter that were placed via an aide.

Some blame the notoriously convoluted review processes common in many Miami-Dade municipalities, which is further complicated in the downtown corridor by stringent Miami 21 code. Said one neighbor, "As developers, you have to have an amazing amount of patience to put up with the nonsense of the municipalities here."

To be sure, the Fairholme building doesn't fit prescribed definitions by combining the functions of office and gallery space in a single campus. But its interior square footage is roughly the same size as PAMM. Fairholme currently has only about 25 employees, according to Berkowitz, who share 6,000 square feet of leased office space, while PAMM's full and part-time staff numbers 117, with an additional 90-plus contractors. The Fairholme sculpture garden was designed to cover 25,262 square feet — 14,250 of that is for the massive Serra — while PAMM has 80,000 square feet of outdoor programmable space. PAMM is designated for use as a "tourist attraction/exhibit," while the city has designated the Fairholme campus as an office building.

"I've stopped," Berkowitz said via phone this week. "I don't know how to proceed." He met with building officials twice more than a year ago; his team of architects, lawyers and his project manager, Kevin Schwarte, have handled submittals and technical details. "Everyone [at the city] has said 'We're excited; we want this.' And then nothing happens."

Berkowitz is willing to alter the design, he said — if he can get a clear sense of direction from the city. When he has followed requests by one city agency — to cut back foliage and safeguard vacant apartment buildings — another department cited him for breaking rules. Calls from his team to building and zoning officials frequently have gone unreturned, he said. "Either I'm doing something wrong or the process is broken." He has not engaged elected officials, he said, because in the closely regularly financial industry in which he works, going above staff can look suspicious.

Now, said Berkowitz, "We have to make decisions. Do we build it? Do we give the art away? We have to do something."

The Turrell and Serra would be a unique and generous addition to Miami's cultural offerings. The purchase price of the two works alone was likely "in the tens of millions," according to Dennis Scholl, a collector and former vice president/arts of the Knight Foundation. Others have placed the combined value at \$25 to \$30 million — a figure that doesn't include transporting the 600,000-pound Serra to Florida. Add in \$20 million to buy the land, design development and legal fees, construction of the proposed two-building campus, ongoing upkeep and additional works that he plans to show there, and total investment runs upward of \$100 million. That's \$100 million-plus in private dollars, on private land.

But this isn't just a matter of money. Turrell and Serra "are two of the most important artists of our time. These works are representative of the greatest kind of works these artists have done," Scholl said.

Collector Martin Margulies, often listed as one of the world's top 200 collectors, agrees. "These two works, they're extremely important works by these artists, very seminal," said Margulies, who showcases contemporary works at the publicly accessible but privately funded Margulies Warehouse museum in Wynwood. "This would make an immediate imprint in the art world," Margulies said. "It would be a very good public relations situation for the City of Miami."

The proposed Fairholme facility, at 26th Street and Biscayne Boulevard, lies in the heart of Miami's burgeoning cultural district stretching from the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) to the Design District. Between Biscayne Bay and Interstate 95 are PAMM, the private CIFO collection, the Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, YoungArts' Bacardi Campus, the private Rubell Family Collection and Margulies Warehouse, Wynwood Walls street-art park and **the private de la Cruz Collection**. Under construction is the Patricia and Philip Frost Museum of Science, slated to open in 2016. Also on the drawing board is a new museum and sculpture garden in the Design District at the private Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami. All are open to the public.

With so many institutions in such a tight geographic area, "Miami is poised to be in a very unique position," said auto dealer and collector Norman Braman, who is leading the ICA building effort.

Beyond its inspirational and intrinsic value, culture seeds the economy, as Art Basel Miami Beach has proven. Granted, few Miamians can afford the multimillion-dollar luxury condos sprouting up all over town. But those who can — the ultra-high net-worth New Yorkers, Latin Americans and Europeans who have been drawn by the cachet of Miami's art scene — spend money that revs the entire economy.

Braman, Margulies and Scholl say they hope the city and Berkowitz can find a way to work out differences.

"When a private citizen comes to your community and wants to show two major works by two of the most important artists of our time and make them available to the public, this community needs to find a way to make that happen," Scholl said

“I would hope that people would understand the magnitude of this offer,” he said. “This is a private philanthropic gesture being made to everyone in our community. It doesn’t get any better than that. A great community embraces the opportunity ... to accept this kind of largesse, because its directed at the public. It’s for the public at no public cost.” Said Margulies, “When a guy like Bruce has the courage to venture into something that the average collector cannot do and give people in this community the opportunity to see these masterpiece works, they should seize that moment.”