

The New York Times, Collectors Show Their Chinese Prizes, text/ Barbara Pollack, Dec. 11, 2013

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Henry Zetrowski of *Murderfist*, a sketch comedy group that performs with a rough, risqué energy and a real fun jousting the envelope of its material.

Kennedy Center Names New Chief

By ROBIN PARIBEN

Deborah F. Ruster, who is president of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, has been named the fourth chief of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, which she will lead starting in 2014.

Ms. Ruster, 57, will succeed Michael H. Kopelman, who after 13 years as president, is leaving in September. Her work with the DePaul Institute of Arts Management, which he founded at the center in 2001, is the University of Maryland. Ms. Ruster will be the first female president of the center, which opened in 1951.

During her tenure in Chicago, Ms. Ruster led the orchestra through trying financial times, including a strike by musicians in 2012. But the orchestra survived when others did not, and she won wide praise for being the chairwoman of the Roberto-Roldán Fund, which became music director there in 2012.

"She has the universal respect of people in the industry," said David H. Robertson, the chairman of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, who led the search committee with Anthony Waters, another trustee.

Just two years ago, Ms. Ruster insisted that she had no interest in leaving the Chicago Symphony when her name came up as a possible successor to Larus Motta as president and chief executive of the New York Philharmonic. But now Ms. Ruster said that she would be leaving the orchestra, an odd phrase and the timing coincident.



Deborah F. Ruster

One's Crude, the Other's Cerebral

The sketch-comedy group *Murderfist* begins every show live in English, then switches to their own language around the stage, bantering off one another, a bit of beer, banter, and a little bit of... **JASON ZIMMAN**

ON COMEDY An arch, raucous, and hilarious, *Murderfist* is a professional wrestler, Huckster Jim Duggan, *Robbin' Me*, a bespectacled comic who looks like a prep school student down on his back, *Field*, a hilarious and leggy John Stormo, a stark contrast, adopting a

Murderfist and the Birthday Boys, sketch comedy opposites.

dead-eyed calm that *Murderfist* is a far more interesting live. *Others* (poor, punning) and *others* look as if they were about to vomit into the audience. *Murderfist* seems to be everywhere these days. *Others* (overabundant) by stand-up and *Others*, that

we get to see in a popular staple at theaters like the Lyric Opera House and the Old Town School of Folk Music, and, as comedy expands on television, it has had a resurgence on radio. *Comedy Central* has had shows with permanent cast audiences around strong personalities like Amy Poehler, Nick Kroll and Ray & Powell. *Others* (overabundant) was his fall with "The Birthday Boys," a show starring a Los Angeles troupe of that name that is refined, cerebral, well-proved the polar opposite of *Murderfist*.

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A Nostalgic Chord, Shared in Solitary Style



Keith Jarrett, shown in 1980, has released his album this year, several of them banking back to earlier work.

The album and disc company alike is bound to a long history of... **NATE CRIVEN**

ON MUSIC Keith Jarrett's new album, *Keith Jarrett Plays Every Instrument He Can*, is a... *Keith Jarrett* plays every instrument he can, from the electric guitar and... *Keith Jarrett* plays every instrument he can, from the electric guitar and...

"I never look back at any of it, but I do look back at some of the... *Keith Jarrett* plays every instrument he can, from the electric guitar and... *Keith Jarrett* plays every instrument he can, from the electric guitar and..."

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A Special 'Nutcracker' Bond



Gelsey Kirkland rehearsing "The Nutcracker" with her troupe. The show opens Thursday.

By GIA KORLIAN

Gelsey Kirkland's relationship with "The Nutcracker" runs deep. She played Clara opposite Mikhail Baryshnikov in his 1977 production for American Ballet Theatre, and one of her fondest memories is of when she was a student at the School of American Ballet. Ms. Kirkland, a lovely song of a girl, was cast as the lead in George Balanchine's classic version. What could go wrong?

"I had a really good time on the other cast," Ms. Kirkland said, sitting next to her husband, the director and choreographer Michael Chabon, at the Gelsey Kirkland Academy of Classical Ballet in Tribeca. "So I wouldn't hold the hand of the other auditioner, who was

Gelsey Kirkland connects with a classic in a new role.

Just Green's son?

"She was rehearsing in the Gershwin Theater and... *Gelsey Kirkland* connects with a classic in a new role.

Ms. Kirkland, who took up the ballet world with her first autobiography, "Dancing on My... *Gelsey Kirkland* connects with a classic in a new role.

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Collectors Show Their Chinese Prizes

By BARBARA POLLACK

When the prodigious Chinese collector Chen and Steve Baret first visited China in 2002, they found the artists they most loved, but they were hardly impressed by the art itself. "It was our most intense trip with the intent amount of art," Mr. Baret said. "Many of the artists seemed to be making work for export."

Seven years later, the pair returned to a new landscape. A ho-

liday art world filled with new and vibrant making work that was relevant to social issues in China today and really, few of the artists that had characterized contemporary Chinese art of the past. What they have acquired the *Yubella* to spend the next five years making one artist and palette in Beijing, Shanghai and far-flung Chinese cities. And during this year's Art Basel Miami Beach, the *Yubella*, who are best known for supporting the work

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Collectors Show Their Chinese Prizes

By BARBARA POLLACK

When the prodigious Miami collectors Don and Mera Rubell first visited China, in 2001, they found the artists they met fascinating, but they were frankly unimpressed by the art itself. "It was our most intense trip with the least amount of art," Mr. Rubell said. "Many of the artists seemed to be making work for export."

Seven years later, the pair returned to a new landscape: a vi-

brant art world filled with men and women making work that was relevant to social issues in China today and mostly free of the clichés that had characterized contemporary Chinese art in the past. What they saw inspired the Rubells to spend the next five years seeking out artists and galleries in Beijing, Shanghai and far-flung Chinese cities. And during this year's Art Basel Miami Beach, the Rubells, who are best known for supporting the works

of young American artists, unveiled "28 Chinese," a new exhibition at their museum in Miami that displays for the first time their acquisitions from six trips to China; it runs through Aug. 1.

Ms. Rubell, 70, equates finding artists like He Xiangyu, who paints with boiled-down Coca-Cola, and Chen Wei, who photographs surrealistic scenes in his studio, to first encountering the Aaron Curry and Thomas

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Collectors Show Prizes From Art Forays to China

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Honolulu, California artists who are now hot. Mr. Rubell, 71, a retired gynecologist who now devotes most of his time to his boutique hotel business, said that after visiting Mr. He's and Mr. Chen's studios and those of dozens of other artists, "we realized we were seeing something different that blew us away."

The exhibition at the 45,000-square-foot Rubell Family Collection and Contemporary Arts Foundation, in the Wynwood Art District of Miami, features the work of 28 Chinese artists, each given a separate gallery. These include "Ton of Tea," by Ai Weiwei, a huge cube of expensive Pu'er tea that resembles a Chinese Donald Judd, and "Diary," by Zhang Huan, a canvas based on a Cultural Revolution-era photo of a man in a Mao suit holding a book.

But, for the most part, the work departs from "made in China" iconography, especially the tapestries of the Shanghai artist Xu Zhen, next year's commissioned artist for the spring Armory Show in New York, or the geometric abstractions of Liu Wei, who had a recent exhibition at his New York gallery, Lehmann Maupin.

"The Rubell collection is not an illustrated history of the avant-garde, on the one hand, nor a speculative portfolio, on the other," said Richard Vine, the author of the book "New China New Art" (Prestel, 2011). "It seems like a personal response, much more than I expected." He added: "I suspect the lesser-known people they've plucked from obscurity will benefit. But I don't think they are operating like

some other collectors, who bought household names, promoted them and then sold them for a profit."

The Rubells began collecting in the 1980s, as the story, now famous, goes, on a budget of \$25 per week — "25 percent of our income," Ms. Rubell said during a recent trip to Manhattan for contemporary auction work. Their finds have grown into a collection of more than 5,000 works. Studio visits are the heart of the Rubells' mode of discovering new talent; they have visited at least 100 artists in China over the last few years. Among the first was Mr. Ai, in 2001, before he was the dissident artist he would become.

"He was a bit insecure about whether he would be accepted in the West, but was totally the ring-leader for all the younger artists at that time," Mr. Rubell recalled.

Rather than buy from the artists, as many collectors did in the 1990s, the Rubells purchased through galleries, particularly Long March Space, Shanghai, Urs Meile and Pearl Lam Gallery, thereby helping China's fledgling gallery scene develop. They also steered clear of auctions, where prices can be highly inflated, and takes abound.

"I would say the single most shocking change in the Chinese art world is that the gallery system is now in effect," said Mr. Rubell, who argues that the new system has helped to legitimize contemporary Chinese art.

The Rubells could be brusque when the art did not appeal to them. "When they didn't like the work, they would make excuses for running out — but when they liked the artist, they would sit down and have long discussions,"



Mera and Don Rubell at their museum in Miami. Behind them is "Liberation No. 1," by Liu Wei, part of a new exhibition, "28 Chinese," that shows the fruits of their art-buying trips to China.

said Ms. Lam, who advised them. One of the artists she steered them to was Zhu Jinshi, the oldest of the show's artists but still undiscovered when the Rubells met him; his signature style is to ladle paint on calligraphic compositions.

"It was amazing," Ms. Rubell recalled. "We walked into his studio, and there was 40 years of history in there. We asked if there was more to see, and they took us into three more studios filled with paintings."

The couple's son, Jason Rubell, 44, a co-owner of the family business, Rubell Hotels, accompanied his parents on several trips and collaborated on the purchases. "People tend to visualize Chinese art as Warhol-esque, brightly colored figurative stuff, but we found work that is quite conceptual," he said. "The politics that

has been framing the Chinese art scene is there, but in a sophisticated way that is a little more subversive."

Certain artists in the collection, like Li Songsong, who is represented by Pace, and Zhang Enli, represented by Hauser & Wirth, have sold for more than \$700,000 at auction in China. The Rubells, who drive hard bargains with dealers by buying six or eight pieces by an artist at a time, say they rarely spend over six figures for any Chinese work. And while their endorsement is expected to raise prices in the ruling market, they say they are not aiming to sell the work and be beneficiaries of those increases.

"In 50 years of collecting, we've put together over 3,000 pieces and we've sold less than 20," Don Rubell said.

Reaching a consensus was

sometimes a struggle for the three Rubells. "Abstraction was a little difficult at the beginning," Ms. Rubell said, yet they finally all agreed that geometric abstraction was an important trend. The "28 Chinese" show at the museum includes eight abstract painters' work, ranging from the calligraphic brush paintings of Lan Zhonghui to the optical illusions of Wang Guangqi. Several young artists whom the Rubells admired were already out of their price range, like Sun Xun, who is featured in the "Ink Art" exhibition, which opens Wednesday at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"It's tempting to look at Chinese art as these kids who started out and now they are living in mansions," the elder Mr. Rubell said. "But the shocking thing is the way they've become mentors for Chinese culture."