



# C L E A R V I S I O N

BONNIE CLEARWATER TAKES THE REINS AT THE MUSEUM OF ART | FORT LAUDERDALE

**Text** Hilary Lewis **Photos** Robin Hill

**IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE** that following an extensive search for a new Director the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale appointed Bonnie Clearwater, formerly the Director and Chief Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) North Miami where she powerfully led that institution for two decades. With an acclaimed resumé that includes serving as the Executive Director of the Lannan Foundation Art Programs in Los Angeles and as the Director of the Lannan Museum in Lake Worth, Florida, as well as working as curator of the Mark Rothko Foundation and the Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Collection, both in New York; Clearwater brings powerful experience and sophistication to Broward County's cultural landscape. She is also a long-standing champion of the South Florida art scene and its artists.

A scholar and curator, as well as a skilled administrator, Clearwater describes her greatest strength as "programming." This should lead to some very exciting developments in downtown Fort Lauderdale where the Museum has the poten-

tial to serve as an anchor for a whole range of cross-disciplinary activities that Clearwater envisions. Seeing great opportunity in the relationship between the Museum and its educational partner Nova Southeastern University, Clearwater

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notes the increase in housing near the Museum and forecasts a future where the "Museum is an architectural and social hub." This is welcome news to *Tropic* where we have championed the need for greater cultural development downtown — focused on the Museum's prime position on Las Olas.



**Above: the gentle sweep of the Edward Larabee Barnes' Modernist building hosts a massive mural by Miami-based artist Jen Stark entitled *Acid Free* which drapes its west facade. Right: In keeping with the museum's tradition of promoting public art, the 2nd level now displays Augustina Woodgate's *1111* made from sheets of diffraction grading film that shimmer, reflect and change color with the movement of the sun.**



Clearwater has written books on artists as diverse as Mark Rothko and Tracey Emin. With an intellectual streak that was fed early by her studies at New York University and Columbia University, she as easily references the great German art theorist Erwin Panofsky, known for such titles as *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, as she does Hiberno-Saxon Art. She reveals that the latter was an influence on the work of Frank Stella — (perhaps we should mention that her early studies were in medievalism.) This bodes extremely well for the quality of the exhibitions and programs that should await us under her stewardship.

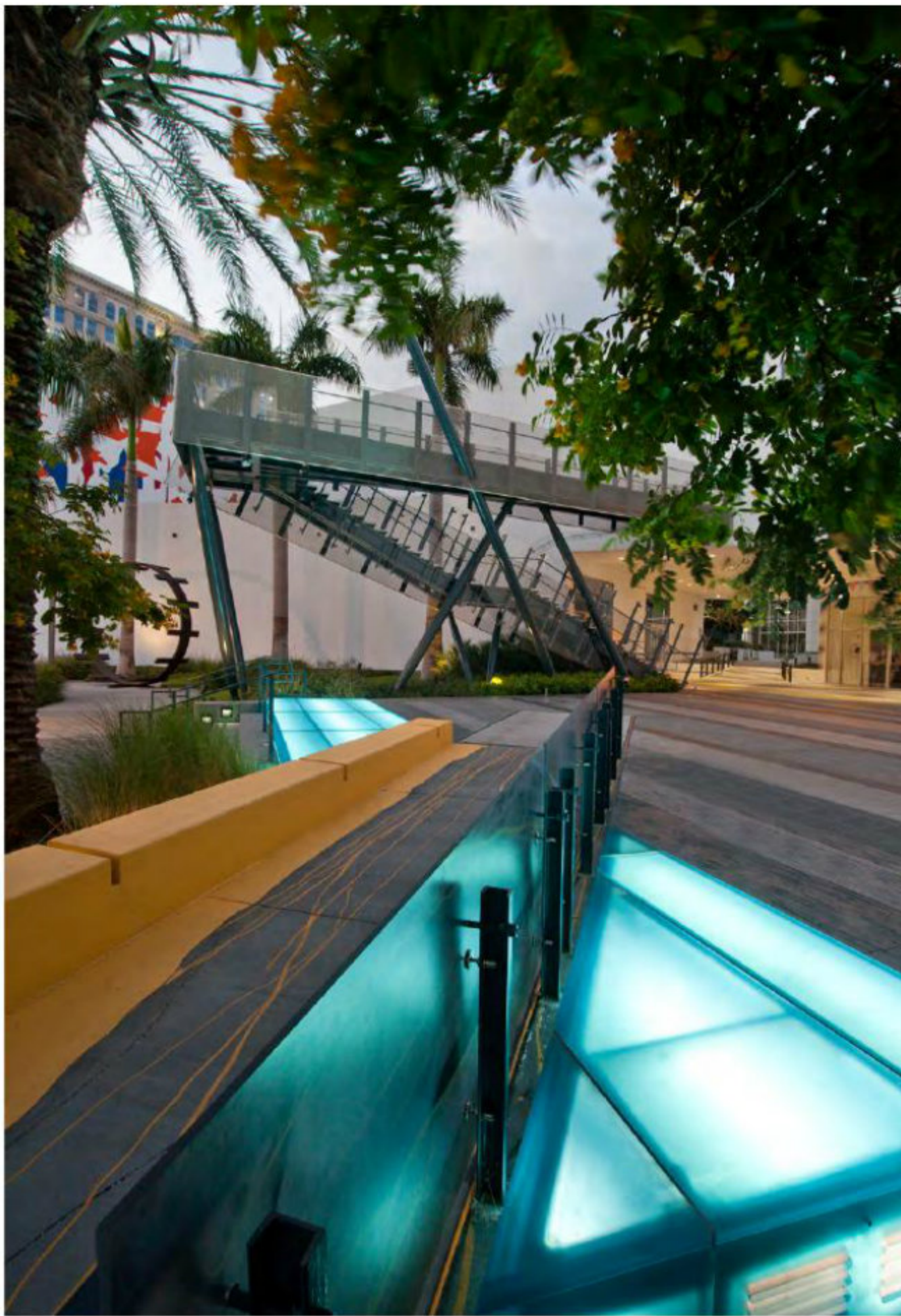
Discussing her views on photography, she notes that she is fascinated by issues of realism and reminds us of how artists and writers in the 19th century, such as Manet and Flaubert, considered this conceptually. (Clearwater spent time studying in Paris as well as in New York.) "What is really being represented?" she asks. Her fascination with how works can be read relates to

how she sees the curatorial function. While it's too early to know precisely the shows she will be presenting at the Museum, it is obvious that she is committed to raising the level of discourse.

She notes some of the strongest highlights of the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale. Its collection of COBRA artists (figures at midcentury from Copen-

Her fascination with how works can be read relates to how she sees the curatorial function. Her intense interest makes it apparent that Clearwater is committed to raising the level of discourse at the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale.

hagen, Brussels and Amsterdam who were known for expressionism in painting) makes the MOAFL appeal especially to European visitors. The unique collection of William Glackens, an American artist active at the turn-of-the-



century and one of the founders of the Ashcan School, is the most extensive in the country — a real treasure for our region. This, in addition to a Latin American collection and a fine postwar collection that includes pieces by Philip Guston, Frank Stella and Andy Warhol, adds to the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale's potential to rise to a new level of seriousness. "Museums are educational institutions," Clearwater reminds us. She is eager to use this platform to reach out to multiple audiences, from visitors to local students.

While obviously an expert on the subject of painting, Clearwater has a strong appreciation of architecture. The Museum's building by Edward Larrabee Barnes is a great asset, according to Clearwater. She appreciates the larger role of design in the culture, citing the extraordinary way Apple has transformed the general culture's understanding of design. She remarks that she is



**Above: Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt's *Watching The Wheels Go Round and Round* was painted as part of a three mural series celebrating the 25th anniversary of the opening of the modernist building by Edward Larrabee Barnes. Left: a photograph by Robin Hill captures the dynamism of the museum's entry designed by Margi Nothard of Glavovic Studio including a mesh sheathed staircase first built to accommodate patrons of the museum's 2006 exhibition: *Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs*.**

intrigued by "optical illusion in new approaches to architecture," in particular in work such as the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson, whose work crosses the boundaries of architecture, design, sculpture and conceptual art. We are hopeful this may mean that more shows addressing architecture and design will appear on the Museum's roster.

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to Miami in December make their way 25 miles beyond the pull of South Beach and the Design District? Clearwater confidently tells us: "The art world will travel." ■