

## A Behind-the-Scenes Look at How the Art World's Most Coveted Residency Chooses Its Artists—and Who's Up Next

This December, the Rubell Museum of Art will unveil the work created by three sought-after artists during its pandemic-era residency.

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Mera and Don Rubell in front of Kerstin Brätsch's artwork *When You See Me Again It Won't Be Me* (from BroadwaybratschCorporate Abstraction series), 2010. Photo by Chi Lam. Image courtesy of the Rubell Museum.

When the art world descends on Miami Beach for Art Basel later this year, three artists are poised to be the toast of the week: Kennedy Yanko, Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe, and Genesis Tramaine.

Their paintings and sculptures, created during artist-in-residence stints at the Rubell Museum, will be on display at the sprawling facility in Miami's Allapattah neighborhood.

## ALMINE RECH

Known as major tastemakers in contemporary art, Don and Mera Rubell have a track record for catapulting emerging artists to curatorial and commercial stardom. Their past picks include Sterling Ruby, Oscar Murillo, and Lucy Dodd. In 2019, when the museum relocated to Allapattah from Wynwood, the coveted spot was held by a then little-known Ghanaian painter named Amoako Boafo. Within months, his auction prices were approaching \$1 million and have been raging ever since.

This year's flock of artists, who are all Black and in their 30s, are arriving more established than their predecessors. They are represented by respected galleries, have had sold-out shows and, in some cases, dizzying auction results. The way their careers have been managed reveals the inner workings of a fashionable and highly speculative segment of the market.



Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe's *Boys in Beret* (2021) at the amfAR auction, July 2021.

Quaicoe, 33, who was introduced to the Rubells by his friend Boafo, moved to Portland, Oregon, from Ghana in 2017 and initially worked at FedEx. His recent solo show at Roberts Projects in Los Angeles, "One But Two (Haadzii)," sold out, with prices ranging from \$30,000 to \$100,000. Over the past year, 11 works by Quaicoe came up for auction, selling for as much as \$250,000.

During the residency in March, Quaicoe "painted these incredible portraits of twins," Rubell said. "With the portraits came a whole understanding of a culture." (Quaicoe, who is interested in exploring both duality and the Black diaspora through his portraits, is also the son of a twin.)

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In April, Yanko, 33, took over the family's former space in Wynwood to create monumental sculptures that wrap scrap metal in solidified acrylic paint that looks like an undulating piece of fabric. She used compressed shipping containers to create the largest work, which is almost 20 feet tall. The project required heavy machinery like a forklift and scissor lift.

"She's never made work on that scale before," Rubell said. "Take a [John] Chamberlain sculpture and make a woman attack it or make love to it."

Sometimes it takes a village to get such a coveted residency spot.

Perhaps not coincidentally, both Yanko and Quicoe work with Amir Shariat, a Vienna-based collector who recently started managing artists as an agent. He also worked with Boafo, who studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and Rudolf Polanszky, an Austrian artist also collected by the Rubells.

In addition to the artists' galleries, Shariat worked behind the scenes to help secure the residencies for Quicoe and Yanko, as he had for Boafo. He also brokered a deal to donate their works to an amfAR auction, a glamorous event frequented by celebrities and major collectors, on July 17.

Quicoe's 2021 painting of twins, *Boys in Beret*, sold for \$180,000. Yanko's sculpture *On Two Feet* soared to \$415,000 and was purchased by music entrepreneur and mega-collector Swizz Beatz, according to Shariat. All the proceeds will go to AIDS research. But while, as Shariat notes, the artists don't get a penny from these sales, they will indirectly benefit from the high-profile results.

In the past, the Rubells kept their artists-in-residence a secret for as long as possible because it would immediately spark interest from other collectors. Their debuts on the eve of Art Basel Miami Beach drew swarms of VIPs and became the annual destination, sponsored in recent years by U.S. Trust. This year, the word got out early.

"It's impossible to keep secrets today," Rubell said. "Information travels so quickly it's hard to surprise anyone."