



Martin Z. Margulies. Photo by Jon Lowe.

The One and Only Martin Z. Margulies

On an abnormally brisk late October morning in Miami's Wynwood Arts District, The Canvas entered the 50,000-square-foot Margulies Collection at the Warehouse to find the nonprofit's 82-year-old eponymous founder personally leading a tour of school children through his collection. Other prominent collectors with their own personal museums may delegate such day-to-day efforts to others, but for Martin Z. Margulies, educating the public about art represents the very lifeblood of his 50 years of collecting. "If I'm here in town, then I like to lead the tours," he tells us afterward. "It's what I get the most enjoyment out of."

Born in Yonkers to parents who ran grocery stores in Harlem and the Bronx, Martin – or Marty to his friends – first stepped into the art world in 1973 when he attended the famous sale of Robert C. Scull's Pop art collection at Sotheby's. Pointing to how peculiar the entire scene was to him at the time, he recalled leaving the auction convinced that collecting was something he should delve into. "All these nicely dressed, clearly intelligent businesspeople were spending their hard-earned money on these paintings. Why shouldn't I do that as well?"

Needless to say, he did. Befriending legendary dealers such as Leo Castelli, André Emmerich, Larry Rubin, and Arne Glimcher, Margulies amassed a Contemporary art collection many consider to be one of the country's best. Housed both at his Key Biscayne home and in the Warehouse – where Katherine Hinds is the long-time curator – Margulies's collection boasts names like Rothko, Miró, Lichtenstein, Rosenquist, Warhol, de Kooning, and Judd; as well as thousands of works by prominent living artists. As the Margulies Collection at the Warehouse celebrates its 20th anniversary – complete with a hefty two volume publication designed by his son, Joseph, to record the occasion for posterity – Margulies is neither slowing down nor stepping back from actively collecting. Instead, he's roaring ahead with as much dedication, passion, thoughtfulness, and energy as ever; attending auctions, visiting galleries, and adding to his ever-growing collection, which some market insiders estimate to now be worth close to \$1 billion dollars.

Displaying a sense of humor, openness, and honesty that The Canvas appreciates, Margulies treats us to a rollicking interview, recounting the inside stories behind recent acquisitions, describing his collecting philosophy, and sharing which young artists are piquing his interest. Exploring his favorite galleries, his thoughts on art fairs, how emerging artists and galleries come across his radar, the recent Warren Kandors controversy, and which museums he admires (and how he decides where to donate), our 90-minute conversation leaves no stone unturned – including what will happen to his collection once he's gone.

● **The Canvas:** Let's start at the beginning. You began your collecting career acquiring prints of relatively safe names such as Picasso, Miró, and Chagall from print dealer, Wally Reiss. If a young collector in his or her 20s or 30s came to you now for advice about how to start collecting, would you direct them to follow the same path? And now that prices have gotten so astronomically expensive compared to what they were when you first started collecting, how would you advise someone at the beginning of his or her career to make smart choices about what to acquire without having to spend unrealistic sums of money for that age?

Martin Margulies: I'd advise them to hire an advisor. Let's be honest – most people don't know what they're doing. They can read and go to galleries all they want, but at the end of the day, it won't really matter. What they buy is going to be dictated by their personal aesthetic preferences. So, it really depends on what their goals are. If someone is just looking to decorate their house with nice art, then that's one thing. But if they actually want to be a collector and build a genuinely thoughtful and valuable collection, then they could probably use an advisor to help steer them in the right direction.

The Canvas: It's interesting to hear you say that. I'm a bit surprised, to be honest. You've built a collection – some would say one of the best in-depth Contemporary collections in the United States – without relying on an advisor to help steer your decisions. And you're notorious for being a voracious reader of art historical books, catalogues, magazines; and constantly going to galleries and fairs to see what's new and to educate yourself. So, in today's market, you really think that an art advisor is necessary to start seriously collecting?

Martin Margulies: Well, you have to understand that it's a whole different world for someone who's just starting out compared to when I first began collecting. There were far fewer collectors back then. Today, if someone has just three works, then they consider themselves a serious collector; four works and they're suddenly building a private museum. Everyone wants to get into the game, but they don't know how. So, doesn't it make sense to hire someone to make sure their hard-earned money – and more importantly, their time – aren't wasted?



Installation view of the Margulies Residence. Courtesy of Martin Z. Margulies

The Canvas: Absolutely. That's a totally fair assessment. I just didn't realize you were such a proponent of advisors. Let's drill down on your collection in a bit more detail. To start off, can you talk to me about the differences between your personal collection that's displayed at your home on Key Biscayne, and the collection housed here in the Warehouse? Is there an official distinction between the two collections? And before you make a new acquisition, do you already have an idea of where that work will end up?

Martin Margulies: There is absolutely a distinction between the two collections; and for the most part, I always know before I buy a work whether it will end up at my house or at the Warehouse. In 2017 we decided to do a Pop Art show at the Warehouse where we brought in some of the Lichtensteins, the Warhols, and the Rosenquist from the house, because we thought it would make for a fun project. But my other pieces from the house – the Rothko, the de Kooning – they don't come here. Those are private. But if you'd like, I'll give you an example of a more recent purchase from a few weeks ago that is going to the private collection at the house. I just bought a wonderful work by Jonathan Lasker; a big beautiful painting that I am very excited about that I'm going to hang in my home.

The Canvas: This was at Frieze London?

Martin Margulies: Yes. I didn't go to Frieze this year, but it was offered there. How did you know it was from Frieze?

The Canvas: I remember that Timothy Taylor brought a solo presentation of Jonathan Lasker works that was very well received by collectors. So, you bought this piece from Timothy Taylor then?

Martin Margulies: You're good. Exactly. I got it from Timothy Taylor. I'd never done business with Taylor before, but I have five or six of Jonathan's works, and I saw an image of this piece on the computer, and I just fell in love with it. I've always liked his philosophy and his aesthetic, but this piece just hit me, and I knew immediately that I wanted to buy it and hang it in the house.



Jonathan Lasker's 'Ideal Interior' (2018). Collection of Martin Z. Margulies

The Canvas: For the most part, is there any major through-line that you would point to that connects the works in your personal collection? Do you find yourself gravitating towards certain types of works over others? I know that for the most part the collection is post war...

Martin Margulies: I would say that the collection's strength and aesthetic is mostly abstraction and pop. There are also some Minimalist works as well, but for the most part, I tend to like Abstraction. It's what I enjoy most. You're right about it mainly being post war. I do have Miró but that's mainly because his work feels so contemporary compared to some of the other artists from his time. And as a Surrealist he had some major influence on the abstraction of Motherwell and all the other abstract artists that I collect. Anyway, I know that answer is a bit all over the place, but the threads I'd point you to are abstraction and pop from the post-war era.

The Canvas: At the same time though, the Warehouse is known to acquire works from artists who are relatively early in their careers. When I interviewed your daughter, Elizabeth, she mentioned that she introduced you to the work of Federico de Francesco and you ended up buying a few pieces. Because of your reputation, the market views an acquisition by you as an explicit endorsement and a show of faith that will lead others (galleries, museums, collectors, curators, press, etc.) to explore the artist's work. At 82 years old and living in Miami, how do you stay current with everything that's new and current in the art world?

Martin Margulies: It's not as exciting as you might think. I get a couple of hundred emails a day from dealers who send me images. I genuinely enjoy looking through everything, and if I see an image of a work that stands out to me, I tell my people and they get in touch with the gallery to send over additional images, dimensions, and prices. I also read all the art magazines. Though, in all honesty, other than your publication, I've stopped actually reading them. It's clear that some of the articles in these magazines are written by people who care more about their writing than the actual art. I don't have time for that nonsense. The most important things for me are the ads from the galleries. If I see something that might be appealing, I rip the page out and I tell one of the people here to contact them and get more information. And, of course, I also go to New York every month to look at shows. I never know what I might stumble upon on each trip.



Installation view of the Margulies Collection at the Warehouse featuring Ernesto Neto's 'É ó Bicho!' (2001). Photo by Jeanie Ambrosio.

The Canvas: It sounds like you're comfortable purchasing works purely based on the images alone. Would it be accurate to say that you don't necessarily feel it's a requirement to see a piece in person before acquiring it?

Martin Margulies: Paintings, I have to see in person. But I don't have to see sculptures or installations in person. With paintings though, I want to see the hand of the artist. It's not like I'm usually buying geometric works, so the individual brushstrokes are very important to me.

The Canvas: Are there any specific young artists that you currently admire? Who's on your radar right now?

Martin Margulies: That's a tough question to answer because it depends on each person's definition of "young."

The Canvas: True. Well, let's look at it a different way. In a 2015 interview with the New York Times, you mentioned that your typical budget is about \$200,000 for a single work of art, but no more than \$3 million. So, that range is the general sweet spot. But let's take it even further down to artists whose works sell for \$50,000 or less. Are there any particular artists in that range in whom you're currently interested?

Martin Margulies: Oh yeah, we buy a lot of work in that price range for the Warehouse. For instance, last year we had a show that included works by Cate Giordano. Now I hear she has a residency in Paris which makes me incredibly happy. I love when that kind of thing happens. I just purchased a Kota Ezawa video work even though I don't usually collect much video art. But I don't really know how old these people are. Age doesn't matter to me. I look at the art, see if it's reasonably priced, and it either clicks with me or it doesn't. When I saw Jennifer Steinkamp's 'Blind Eye 3' (2019) – the work we currently have installed – I just knew the second I saw it that we had to have it. The same was true for Ibrahim Mahama's 'Non-Orientable Nkansa' (2017), which is also currently installed. He happens to be 32 years old though, so I guess that's relatively young.

The Canvas: Are there any specific galleries that you're currently buying from to keep the collection up to date, frequenting often, or to whose programs you are finding yourself drawn? What dealers do you currently admire? In your mind, which galleries are doing interesting things?

Martin Margulies: It's important to understand how I view the collection. I don't really view keeping the collection "up to date" as a necessity. My priority is to maintain the quality of the collection overall.

But to answer your question, yes, there are a number of galleries. There's a dealer who I really like in Milan, Gianfranco Benedetti, who now runs the Galleria Christian Stein. I just developed a relationship with Konrad Fischer in Germany from whom I just bought an Edith Dekyndt work. I just had a Bettina Pousttchi sculpture installed in the house which I purchased from Buchmann Galerie in Berlin. And I buy from White Cube quite often and always enjoy my dealings with them. I just purchased a wonderful Tracey Emin work from them that I'm expecting to be delivered any day now. In fact, the people at White Cube were the ones to first introduce me to Anselm Kiefer's work originally.

The Canvas: That seems to be a very Euro-centric list of galleries. Is that a conscious choice on your part to buy from European galleries as opposed to American ones? Are there any New York galleries whose programs you're particularly drawn to these days?

Martin Margulies: Well, a lot of the New York galleries do large shows with quite established artists, and for the most part, I've already covered that territory. Also, while I go to New York every month and have an apartment in Tribeca, the traffic is just terrible. It's hell. Driving through Midtown or the Upper East Side is excruciating. But I already have my itinerary put together for my next trip to New York. I'm going to Paula Cooper, who obviously always has amazing shows. I'm going to Pace to see a Peter Hujar show that I'm really looking forward to. Alex Berggruen just opened a gallery and I'm looking forward to seeing the group show he's put together. I always make sure to visit Bortolami, who I happen to like very much. Craig Starr always puts on some great, academic, bright shows that I admire. A gallery that's showing interesting work but doesn't get talked about often enough is Spencer Brownstone Gallery in the East Village. Tanya Bonakdar has introduced me to a number of artists over the years and I love working with her. And I always like Lévy Gorvy on the Upper East Side.

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The Canvas: You also donate heavily to museums such as the Whitney, The Met, and The Studio Museum in Harlem. In the past, you've been very vocal about your opposition to the Perez Art Museum's use of taxpayer money to fund its building. And in past interviews, you've spoken about how much you admire The Met because it represents an idea bigger than simply a museum. In general, what do you look for when donating to a museum? What do you like to see? What criteria do you use when determining where to funnel your donations?

Martin Margulies: There's no exact formula. It's the kind of thing where my instinct has to kick in. When I first met the current team at the Whitney – Scott Rothkopf, Adam Weinberg, and the rest – I was just incredibly impressed with their dedication and perseverance in working to open the new building. I felt they deserved some recognition beyond a simple “Nice job, pal.” So I gave them some money, which I was very happy to do. In terms of The Met, that museum welcomes in over seven million people a year. That's certainly not chickenfeed and it doesn't come cheap. They need money to operate and I happen to have money to give. And as far as The Studio Museum in Harlem goes, what they've done to champion the work of black artists is simply amazing. They deserve all the credit in the world.

Look, I'm blessed that my estate happens to be fairly substantial. So, the idea is to give the money to institutions that are doing great work and run by people who aren't going to blow it by misusing funds or hiring their kids or anything like that. I'm actually in the middle of thinking about all this now because the bulk of the estate will end up going to charities. After my children are taken care of, I want the money to go to museums; as well as philanthropies that are focused on hunger, homelessness, children, and veteran's groups.

The Canvas: I want to come back to that in a bit, but first, are there any other museums that you currently admire or have your eyes on? Who's impressing you these days?

Martin Margulies: I really like the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. I think they have a phenomenal team. I think the Chicago museums – the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago are wonderful. They've both been doing great work. And I haven't done anything with the Guggenheim yet. They've also been going in a really great direction these past few years. So again, I follow my instinct. And I'm looking for institutions that are led by smart, dedicated people who will respect the money and not waste it.

The Canvas: Sticking to the topic of museums for a second, the museum world is currently experiencing a shakeup as activists and protestors increasingly object to certain types of board members and donors being involved in museums. Obviously, the most famous example is Warren Kanders at the Whitney. Over the summer, you told Artnet News that you questioned the motivations of the protestors, as they were clearly harming both the Whitney and other museums and pointing out that Kanders doesn't have control over how the products he sells are used. What's your current take on this as these types of protests seem to be spreading to other museums like MoMA as well? Do you think museums should be stricter in terms of who they will and won't accept donations from?

Martin Margulies: At the end of the day, after all is said and done, there isn't going to be a perfect solution to this. But I think it's important for everyone to remember that these donors are voluntarily giving their money away so

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that these museums can operate in the first place. Now, if you're talking about someone who funded terrorists or communists, or things of that nature, or was somehow against the ideals of the United States, then that's one thing. You have to draw the line there.

But this Mr. Kanders (who I don't even know personally, by the way) doesn't control how his tear gas gets used by the governments he sells to. I imagine that it's mostly used to quell violent riots. So to chase a man like this, someone who operates a legitimate business, who's given millions of dollars to the Whitney and other organizations, is just crazy, in my opinion. These people picketed outside the man's home! I mean, who are these people, in the first place? What have they given? I understand that a lot of them are artists and they have their beliefs, but surely, they can go about this in a different way. And as for the artists who pulled their art from the Whitney in protest: I say let them! They already received their recognition for being included in the show, so to me, it seems like they get the best of both worlds and are just doing it for the attention. I mean really, who are these people? This whole thing is ridiculous. Look at the job that Adam Weinberg and Scott Rothkopf have done with the Whitney. It's one of the best, most forward-thinking museum programs in the country. Why would you want to squeeze their money away? It just doesn't make sense to me.

The Canvas: Last few questions and then I'll let you go. One of the most pronounced changes in the art world since you first began collecting – though mainly in the past 15 years – has been the proliferation of art fairs. Which fairs do you particularly like or dislike? What makes for a good fair experience for collectors? And do you think there are currently too many fairs and that serious collectors are becoming less enamored with the convenience they offer?

Martin Margulies: I understand what you're saying about convenience because you can see so much art in one shot, and I do think fairs serve a valuable purpose for collectors who are just beginning to get into the game, but I do think there are too many. I don't go to nearly as many fairs as I used to as they're increasingly of less interest to me. The one fair I really love is Art Basel in Basel. They have something for everyone, the work is generally amazing, and the experience is a pleasure. I also like the ADAA fair because it's small and intimate. That's actually where I bought one of my de Kooning paintings. And I've been to Independent a couple of times and really liked that experience as well.

The Canvas: What about Art Basel Miami Beach? It's only fair to ask since you're such a fixture in the Miami arts community...

Martin Margulies: I go to Art Basel in Miami because I'm based here. The truth is that Art Basel in Basel is just a completely different experience. The European galleries and collectors have a different mentality than their American counterparts. For the most part, the American style of collecting is to have one piece from each of the major artists. Europeans, on the other hand, maybe collect four or five artists at the most, but acquire their works in depth and buy multiple pieces from each. They're genuinely interested in building a well of knowledge about the artists they're interested in. So, I tend to identify with that sensibility – and therefore Art Basel in Basel versus the one here in Miami – a bit more.

The Canvas: I wanted to go back to something you mentioned before regarding your estate. Let's take just two examples from your collection, with the first being Joan Miró's 'Femme dans la Nuit (Woman of the Night)' 1940, from the artist's Constellation series, which you purchased in 1980 from the collection of Alexina "Teeny" Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp's widow, for \$300,000. The other example is Rothko's 'Untitled (Silver, Orange, Plum)' 1962, which had been in the collection of Robert and Jane Meyerhoff and which you purchased in 1983 from the Knoedler Gallery for less than \$400,000. One of the other works from Miró's Constellation series sold at Sotheby's in 2017 for \$31.1 million. And Rothko paintings from the early 60s of a similar size have sold at auction for as much as \$86.8 million. I know you mentioned before that the bulk of your estate would go to charity, but I'm wondering if you could perhaps shed a little more light on your plans for the collection itself. Do you intend to donate certain works to museums?

Martin Margulies: There's a general plan, but I'm actually now in the middle of formulating the specifics. I'm not in love with the idea of gifting many of the works to museums as I don't want them to just end up in storage. So, the plan is to sell the works and give the proceeds to charity. I've made some pledges to museums already; and I've made a pledge to Lotus House, the homeless shelter for women and children that I support here in Miami. And of course, I'll take care of my kids. So, that's the general plan.

The Canvas: Have you thought about whether the works should be sold at auction or instead with private dealers? And if it is going to be at auction, have you decided between Christie's versus Sotheby's? Is there an agreement already in place or is that still to be determined?

Martin Margulies: It really depends on the current market at the time. It's not the kind of thing where I'm looking to squeeze out every last dollar. When you originally buy a work for \$225,000 and now it's worth \$60 million, I think you should be satisfied if you only get \$58 million. And there's no agreement currently in place. But I do like the people at Sotheby's. Amy Cappellazzo is one of the sharpest, smartest people currently operating in the art market. She knows who to deal with. She knows art on a deep level. And I have the utmost respect for her. She's terrific.

The Canvas: I want to finish up by asking about something you once said in an old interview. You said that "there was something spiritually that led me to collecting" all those years ago. I'm wondering if you could expound on that thought a bit. Do you feel a spiritual connection to contemporary art? How would you articulate your relationship to art and collecting? Has it been the love of your life?

Martin Margulies: It's been a wonderfully spiritual activity for me. I've gotten a lot of joy over the years out of collecting, but I wouldn't necessarily say it's been the love of my life. Collectors exercise their faith in a work of art by purchasing it with their hard-earned money. Often times, they do it without fully understanding the work or really grasping the ideas behind it. But they have faith, nonetheless. Whether it's for investment purposes, as a learning experience, or that spiritual connection I feel, art has the ability to transport people to places they've never been before. ■



Joan Miró's 'Femme dans la nuit' (1940).
Collection of Martin Z. Margulies



Mark Rothko's 'Untitled (Silver, Orange, Plum)' (1962). Collection of Martin Z. Margulies.