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# METROPOLIS

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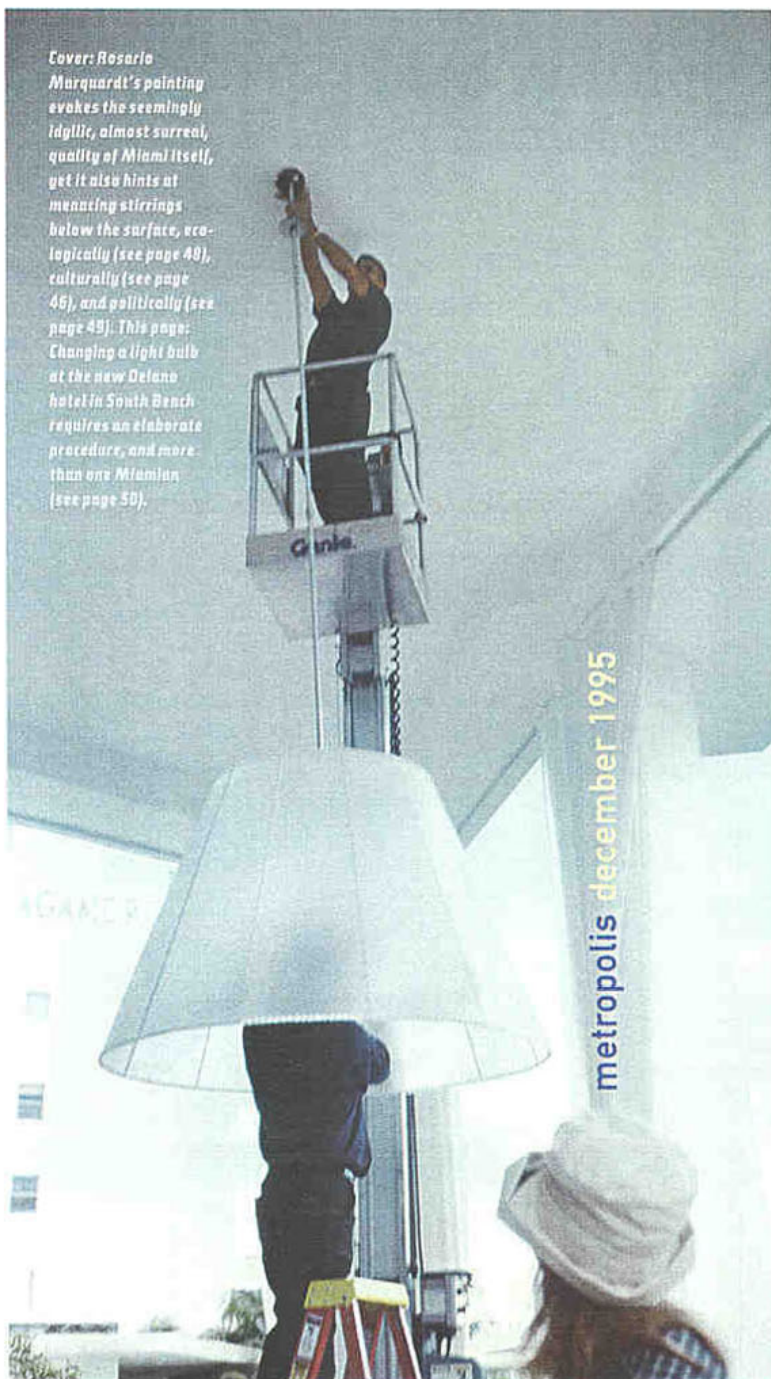
## miami:

a series of resorts, a television show, a giant shopping mall, a Latin rhythm, a place to retire, a city of hurricanes and dreams, a paradox

## a troubled paradise



Cover: Rosario Marquardt's painting evokes the seemingly idyllic, almost surreal, quality of Miami itself, yet it also hints at menacing stirrings below the surface, ecologically (see page 40), culturally (see page 46), and politically (see page 49). This page: Changing a light bulb at the new Delano hotel in South Beach requires an elaborate procedure, and more than one Miamian (see page 50).



metropolis december 1995

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**49 loved to death?** In the midst of South Beach's cultural reawakening, and with zoning codes fluctuating like fashions, preservationists and new developers square off in a battle for the soul of the city. Can Sobe survive its own success? asks BETH DUNLOP.

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**56 a public display of affection** An island shaped like a star? A 45-foot-tall letter M? This is just a sampling, as MICHAEL WEBB discovers, of gifts that architect Roberto Behar and his wife, artist Rosario Marquardt, have been inspired to lavish on their adopted and beloved city of Miami.

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COVER, COURTESY ROSARIO MARQUARDT; THIS PAGE, SYLVIA PLACHY

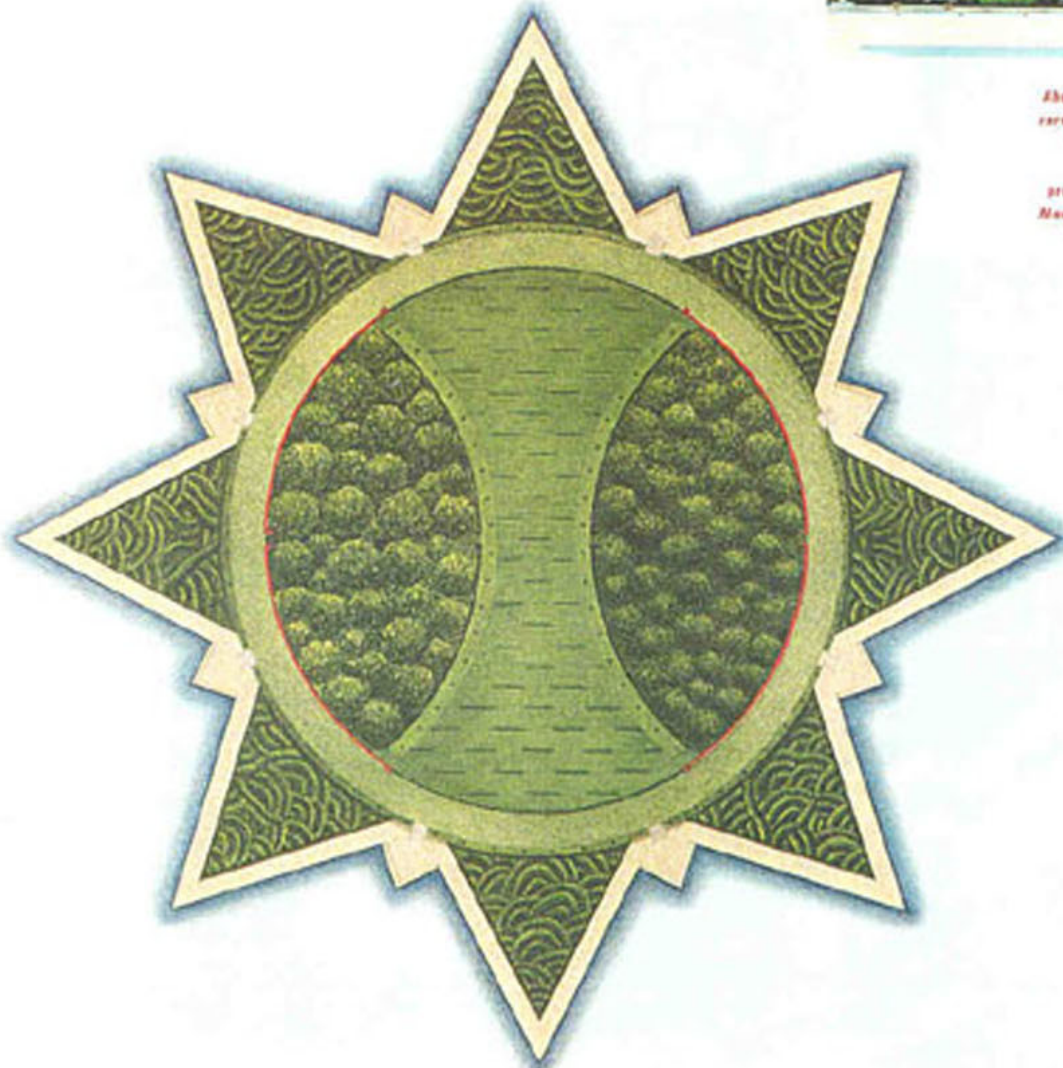


# *a public display of affection*

*The architect Roberto Behar and his wife, the painter Rosario Marquardt, are bent on making Miami the magical metropolis of their imagination.*



Above, the tropical Metrorail cars dreamed up by Behar and Marquardt will soon be a reality; at left, Behar's proposed Star Island; below, Marquardt's devilish portrait of Behar. Opposite page, Behar's *M* sculpture in downtown Miami, now under construction.



The architect Roberto Behar and his wife, the painter Rosario Marquardt, are bent on making Miami the magical metropolis of their imagination.



BY MICHAEL WEBB Someday, as you fly into Miami International, you may be able to look down on Biscayne Bay and see an island shaped like a star. You should certainly be able to ride across town in a "jungle cab"—a Metro train that's painted, end to end, with tropical vegetation. And a giant red *M* on a sidewalk plaza will tell you that you've reached downtown. Each of these public artworks was conceived by Roberto Behar, a 42-year-old Argentinian architect who came to Miami in 1983 to join his wife and close collaborator, the artist Rosario Marquardt.

Together with many other talented Latinos who have transformed Miami over the past three decades, the couple see it as a place of infinite possibilities. "People are coming here from everywhere, full of memories and desires," he explains. "When I was in New York, I saw no way of changing the city; here, there's an opportunity to think about what the future could be like. If you have something to offer, somebody will find it." Like Sam Rodia, the Italian immigrant who built his celebrated towers in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts as a thank-you to his adopted country, Behar would like to make a positive contribution to a place where he feels very much at home. Not for him the paranoia that has driven the city to post bold, new highway signs, steering tourists directly from airport to beach, and so sparing them from life-threatening detours along the way. He thrives on the raw energy and diversity of the metropolis. ▶ 41

## a public display

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One of Marquardt's paintings portrays Behar as an amiable devil, with a pitchfork and a goatee. Surrounded by her personal collection of magical realist canvases—including an arrow-studded Saint Sebastian, impassive in a dark business suit—it's easy to see how each inspires the other. She paints, he designs (and teaches architecture at the University of Miami), but, as he insists: "Everything we do is a joint production, and wouldn't exist without the other."

The project Behar calls Star of Miami has yet to be approved or funded, so it may remain a wonderful dream. But the site is ready: Flagler Island, a speck of land with an obelisk, just south of the Venetian Causeway, which links downtown and South Beach. "Miami was born with the airplane, and this star could be our Statue of Liberty, the first thing visitors see as they approach," Behar proclaims. "The star stands for destiny, for the future of a city that is becoming the capital of the Fourth World—of those who come from somewhere else." He intends for people to visit it by boat, to enjoy a "public living room," with its sofa-like stucco benches and densely planted enclosures. Sketches of the plantings evoke canvases by Henri Rousseau—you look for jaguars and parrots.

That image of a tropical paradise is to be re-created in paint on Metrorail cars—with any luck, in time for next year's centenary celebration, in a project sponsored by Metro-Dade Art in Public Places, which also funded the M. About 10 percent of the cars will be decorated, to preserve the element of surprise. Behar loves the idea that people will be driving along or waiting on a platform, and suddenly be overwhelmed by a jungle on wheels.

"M stands for Miami, and Metro, but also for magic, and moon, and metropolis," he exclaims breathlessly. "And monument, and memory, and money," Marquardt bursts in. "We were very lucky—but we believe in coincidence and chance. The meaning depends on who is looking at it, and the desires they project." The M will be constructed of concrete, clad in red-painted stucco, with a patterned metal dado and a clock suspended from the downstrokes. It will stand 45 feet high, defining a plaza at the junction of S.E. Fourth Street and S.E. Miami Court, and it will serve as an icon for pedestrians, as well as for subway riders looking down from the elevated station, 110 feet up. Monumental from below, it will seem toy-like from above. It should make a lively signature for the city, and a good companion to Claes Oldenburg's plaza-scaled *Fruit Salad*, four blocks north, adjoining Philip Johnson's Dade County Cultural Center.

The most ambitious of all Behar's projects to date is Little Guatemala, a new neighborhood for agricultural workers in Florida City, an impoverished area of

south Dade County that was devastated by Hurricane Andrew three years ago, and has still not been rebuilt. He has designed several blocks of single-story houses grouped around inner courtyards and laid out on a grid plan—a vernacular pattern that's enlivened, as in all traditional communities, by what he calls "elements of wonder." A bare park-plaza features a colossal, star-shaped communal swimming pool with a fountain. There's a step-up bench, 150 feet long. A baroque staircase with scrolled balustrade leads up from the plaza to a terrace planted with orange trees that roofs the parking garage.

Within this urban hub there's a church, a

campanile, a monument to Rigoberta Menchú, the Guatemalan activist who won the 1992 Nobel Prize for peace. There's a reference back to Mayan history in the red-stucco cladding of the civic buildings, for this was once the color of the stepped pyramids of Tikal and Chichén Itzá. The tropical Deco community center looks to the north with its 1930s lanterns and a cast-stone floral frieze inspired by the pressed-metal trim of New York's Chanin Building.

"It's a meeting of New York scale and Caribbean colors, of memory and the desire for something new," says Behar. "It offers a sense of possibility." The owner of the land is sympathetic, but the physical needs of the area are so great that it's

hard to imagine how something so visionary could be funded. Marquardt expresses the hope that the plaza and pool could be the seed from which the rest might grow, incrementally. Little Guatemala is more than art or architecture; it speaks to the emotions, generating a spirit of community among people who have twice been uprooted from their homes—by economic necessity and the assault of nature. It's a more inspiring version of Miami's Little Havana and Little Haiti. Behar and Marquardt firmly believe in miracles; perhaps they'll be lucky again.

MICHAEL WEBB is a frequent contributor to *Metropolis*.