

Media Contact:
Meg Floryan
Head of Marketing + PR
mfloryan@thewolf.fiu.edu | 305.535.2622



The Wolfsonian
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

1001 Washington Avenue
Miami Beach, FL 33139

T 305.531.1001 F 305.531.2133

wolfsonian.org



The Wolfsonian–FIU Appoints Yucef Merhi as Inaugural Curator of Digital Collections, Role Funded by Knight Foundation

Merhi, a new media pioneer and interactive designer, sets sights on enhancing digital engagement and digitizing the museum’s collection of 180,000 objects

MIAMI BEACH (October 8, 2018) — Yucef Merhi has joined The Wolfsonian–Florida International University as the museum’s first-ever curator of digital collections, a new role made possible by a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Having started the position in late July 2018, Merhi rounds out The Wolfsonian’s curatorial team with his extensive experience integrating ambitious online and technology-based tools in the galleries and beyond—skills that are integral to the long-term Wolfsonian goal of forging new avenues for visitors to connect with special exhibitions and the permanent collection.

The tech-focused position is one of eight across the country funded by Knight Foundation to help art institutions implement digital strategies that improve the visitor experience and expand audiences.

“A large part of a museum’s success in the digital era depends on its ability to leverage technology to take risks and engage audiences. The Wolfsonian has always presented its permanent collection and special exhibitions in thought-provoking ways. For The Wolf, integrating digital technology into the design of future exhibitions is another example of its innovative approach.” said Victoria Rogers, Knight Foundation vice president for the arts. For the last six years, Knight Foundation has supported The Wolfsonian’s efforts to digitize its collection, primarily for purposes of academic research.

Added Wolfsonian director Tim Rodgers, “With Yucef’s impressive background and expertise, we are well poised to explore the endless possibilities now open to us thanks to the generous support of Knight Foundation. He has a proven track record of visionary innovation that feels incredibly Wolfsonian—thoughtful and smart, but also playful. We look forward to collaborating with him.”

Merhi’s career is deeply rooted in the arts and academia. He earned his bachelor’s in liberal arts at New School University and a master’s of professional studies in interactive telecommunications at New York University, and has lectured and published widely while completing a laundry list of high-profile fellowships, residencies, and commissions with institutions such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, and Eyebeam. He also previously served in curatorial and archival roles at White Box; the 2010 International Biennial of Contemporary Art in Mérida, Venezuela; and Esther Klein Art Gallery at Philadelphia’s Science Center. In addition Merhi founded and directed Canal, a technology-oriented cultural space in Caracas, Venezuela, and has organized and curated new media venues for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Americas Society; Rhizome; and more.

Outside of his professional work, Merhi is an award-winning new media artist whose practice lies at the intersection of language and technology. Past projects include an immersive wallpaper installation displaying a datagram of the hacked personal emails of Hugo Chávez, then candidate for president of Venezuela; a multiplayer poetry game built with vintage Atari consoles; and a 40,000-ft electronic sound visualization that translates real-time sounds into colorful geometric patterns choreographed by voice interaction. He has been featured in dozens of solo and group exhibitions around the world, and his work is held in various public collections including the Orange County Museum of Art and the Library of Congress.

“I am very grateful and honored to join The Wolfsonian,” said Merhi. “The museum’s collection offers intriguing stories from numerous countries and traditions, focusing on a very crucial period of our convoluted modern history. Making sense of this peculiar and diverse web of objects is an incredible task, especially for younger audiences, and I look forward to using dynamic media and applications to unlock exciting interactive experiences for all visitors.”

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About The Wolfsonian–Florida International University

The Wolfsonian–FIU is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collection comprises approximately 180,000 objects dating from 1850 to 1950—the height of the Industrial Revolution through the aftermath of the Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial-design objects; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian is located at 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL. Admission is \$12 for adults; \$8 for seniors, students, and children ages 6–18; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under 6. The museum is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 10am–6pm; Friday, 10am–9pm; Sunday, noon–6pm; and is closed on Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at wolfsonian.org for further information.

The Wolfsonian receives generous and ongoing support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; and City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program, Cultural Arts Council.

About Florida International University

Florida International University is classified by Carnegie as a “R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity” and recognized as a Carnegie Community Engaged university. It is a public research university with colleges and schools that offer bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programs in fields such as business, engineering, computer science, international relations, architecture, law and medicine. As one of South Florida’s anchor institutions, FIU contributes almost \$9 billion each year to the local economy. The university received honors in all categories of The Chronicle of Higher Education’s “2017 Great Colleges to work for.” FIU graduates are consistently among the highest paid college graduates in Florida and are among the leaders of public and private organizations throughout South Florida. FIU is Worlds Ahead in finding solutions to the most challenging problems of our time. FIU emphasizes research as a major component of its mission with multiple state-of-the-art research facilities including the Wall of Wind Research and Testing Facility, FIU’s Medina Aquarius Program and the Advanced Materials Engineering Research Institute. FIU has awarded more than 220,000 degrees and enrolls more than 56,000 students in two campuses and centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell, FIU@I-75, the Miami Beach Urban Studios, and Tianjin, China. FIU also supports artistic and cultural engagement through its three museums: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, The Wolfsonian–FIU, and the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU. FIU is a member of Conference USA and more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit fiu.edu.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy. For more, visit kf.org.