

**Media Contact:**  
Meg Floryan  
Communications Manager  
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](http://wolfsonian.org)

## **The Wolfsonian–FIU Opens *Philodendron*, an Interdisciplinary Survey Following Tropical Plants from the Jungle to the Home, on October 16**

*Exhibition features a pop-up jungle installation in the museum’s iconic lobby as well as rarely seen objects from around the world, many on public display for the first time*

*Celebrating the pervasive, cross-cultural influence of Latin American plant life on U.S. and European fashion, art, cinema, architecture, and design*



**MIAMI BEACH (September 22, 2015)** — Philodendrons and other Central and South American flora take center stage at The Wolfsonian–Florida International University this fall in a sprawling exhibition that charts the migration of tropical plants from their native habitats to North American and European gardens and interiors. Spanning three centuries and drawing together objects from the Amazon, Caribbean, and beyond, *Philodendron: From Pan-Latin Exotic to American Modern* explores this often-overlooked, Pan-American cultural exchange to deconstruct the “social lives” of the plants, from their influence on material culture to their impact on diverse fields ranging from the visual arts, architecture, film, and fashion to the agricultural, industrial, and medical sciences.

On view from October 16, 2015 through February 28, 2016, the exhibition will be enhanced by a series of four contemporary art installations in The Wolfsonian’s lobby, including an immersive installation that uses columns of locally cultivated, live plants to evoke a jungle paradise within the museum. Together with an ambitious digital app created in partnership with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, these multimedia projects illustrate the myriad ways philodendrons shaped Western ideas of the tropics—becoming an evolving symbol for what is exotic, Latin, and modern.

“We are excited to present this exhibition in Miami, a gateway to Latin America where these plants originate,” said Wolfsonian curator Christian Larsen, who organized the exhibition. “Philodendrons now grow in the U.S. like weeds and decorate every home—they are so common that they go unnoticed. By focusing our attention on the way they have inspired artists and designers, we tell a story of Pan-American exchange and American notions, including stereotypes, of the tropics.”

*Philodendron* culls together approximately 150 objects including paintings, sculptures, mosaics, wallpaper, textiles, design drawings, furniture, fashion, film, photography, and scientific artifacts. Select works from The Wolfsonian's collection will be complemented by major loans from private collections, archives, and renowned institutions around the world, including original works and reproductions from the American Museum of Natural History; Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro; Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; Getty Museum; The Museum of Modern Art; as well as Miami-area organizations such as the Bass Museum of Art, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, and HistoryMiami.

The *Philodendron* experience begins with special commissions in The Wolfsonian's lobby. *Forest for the Trees*, an immersive installation by the Columbian-German landscape architect team Mauricio del Valle and Veronika Schunk, brings the jungle into the museum by introducing live plant specimens of various philodendron species. All commonly found throughout South Florida and harvested locally from collections including the Kampong and Pinecrest Gardens, the plants were raised to maturity by local non-profit Urban GreenWorks—an organization that empowers and restores underserved communities through environmental projects. This indoor "forest" of plant totems will be displayed in dialogue with: *The Somnambulist's Garden*, a collage by Miami artist Pepe Mar; a series of works by Naomi Fisher, also from Miami, exploring the balance between nature and civilization; and *Quando Eu Vi Series I and II*, Brazilian artist Claudia Jaguaribe's large-scale, panoramic photomural sculptures of composite views of the rainforest.

In the galleries, the exhibition continues with the roots of the tropical plant craze as early as 1693, when botanists began to identify the more than 900 species of the *Philodendron* genus for governments seeking natural resources to fuel colonial empires. Botanical illustrations, landscape renderings, herbarium specimens, field notes, and photographs collected during scientific expeditions—as well as objects made and used by indigenous peoples of South America—inspired Americans and Europeans. Western artists, designers, and architects such as Frederick Edwin Church, Henri Matisse, and Dorothy Draper embraced and transformed these symbols to represent national and even gendered identities, adapting and popularizing tropical iconography as abstract emblems signifying that which is foreign, other, or "primitive."

Highlights of this section are:

- Never-before-seen images from David Fairchild's 1932–33 Caribbean plant hunting expedition;
- A rare, feather-and-cord headband made by the Amazonian Karajá people, using philodendron fiber; and
- A 1935 etching by Henri Matisse—an early example of the artist's frequent use of philodendrons as a study of line, form, and weight in his compositions.

*Philodendron* then traces the plants' influx into mass media in the 1930s, when tropical imagery was incorporated into cruise advertising, home décor, and even on paperback romance novels. In the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, its ubiquity blossomed—appearing in the sensual set designs of Hollywood cinema, glamorous hotel lobbies and mezzanines, and in the open floor plans of modernist homes, where the hardy houseplants softened stark spaces with their organic forms and blurred the division between indoors and outdoors.

Key works include:

- Roberto Burle Marx's abstract masterpiece paintings *Still Life with Philodendron I and II* (1943), here marking their debut in the U.S.;

- Digital photographs of modernist spaces by celebrated architectural photographer Julius Shulman, revealing the use of tropical plants in mid-century landscape and interior design; and
- Original design drawings for Bacardí Imports Headquarters, a landmark of Miami's Biscayne Boulevard that marries 1960s American corporate identity with Brazilian artist Francisco Brennand's fantasy of tropical plants in an iconic blue-and-white azulejo façade.

Now, contemporary artists like Gabriel Orozco; architects such as Herzog & de Meuron; industrial designers; and fashion brands from Versace and Margiela to American Apparel ensure the philodendron's continued legacy, elevating its influence to the global stage and cementing its position as an iconic design motif still in vogue today.

Contemporary works on view in *Philodendron* are:

- Karl Lagerfeld's portrait photography of Michele Oka Doner (1999);
- *Cadeira Deliciosa* (2014), an indoor/outdoor chair by São Paulo-based designer Fernando Jaeger, with *Monstera deliciosa* leaf-shaped perforations that are specially designed to lighten weight and allow drainage;
- *Jumpsuit* (2015), a collaboration between Rio de Janeiro-based fashion label Osklen and the Inhotim botanical garden and art park in Minas Gerais, Brazil; and
- Erdem's *Look 3* from the celebrated designer's 2015 Spring/Summer collection, which drew inspiration from nineteenth-century botanical illustrations, Victorian conservatory architecture, and the 1951 adventure classic *The African Queen*.

The Wolfsonian also extends *Philodendron* beyond the museum's walls by partnering with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden on a digital app. The mobile tour, paired with museum-style, pop-up labeling installed on site throughout the Garden's grounds, approaches the botanical specimens as art objects, drawing connections between each physical plant and its sociocultural context.

An illustrated catalogue with essays by Larsen, botanist Mike Maunder, and others accompanies the exhibition. The museum will celebrate the opening of *Philodendron* with special programming including a Takeover Tour led by featured artist Edouard Duval Carrié; an adults-only Craft + Craft art-making workshop; a book talk; and a free family day and film screening. A full schedule of events will be posted as confirmed at [wolfsonian.org/calendar](http://wolfsonian.org/calendar).

###

#### Image

Claudia Jaguaribe, detail of *Quando Eu Vi Series I* [When I See Series I], 2015. Inkjet print with diasec mount. Courtesy of Claudia Jaguaribe and H.A.P. Gallery.

#### Exhibition Support

*Philodendron: From Pan-Latin Exotic to American Modern* is made possible by an Emily Hall Tremain Exhibition Award. Founded in 1998 to honor Emily Hall Tremain, the program rewards innovation and experimentation among curators by supporting thematic exhibitions that challenge audiences and expand the boundaries of contemporary art.

#### About The Wolfsonian—Florida International University

The Wolfsonian 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 collections comprise approximately 180,000 objects from the 1850s to the 1950s—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 \$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors, students, and children age 6–12; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under six. The museum is open Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday, 10am–6pm; Thursday and Friday, 10am–9pm; Sunday, noon–6pm; and is closed on Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at [wolfsonian.org](http://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.