

FT Series **Miami Art Week 2018****Collecting****Art collector J Tomilson Hill: 'It's about what I like'**

The financier on creating a new public foundation that reflects a very personal passion



Sarah Crowner's 'Rotated Stretched Stems' (2016) © Casey Kaplan/Jean Vong

There's a torrential downpour in New York, and billionaire J Tomilson Hill pulls up to a new tower in Chelsea not in a sleek, luxury SUV with a private driver but in a yellow taxicab. When the elevator doors open to the headquarters of his Hill Art Foundation, which is still under construction ahead of its January opening, he is greeted by a massive pile of dirt with a shovel sticking out of it. "It's a conceptual art piece," he quips and bursts out laughing.

Hill's low-key style and genial sense of humour — he wrote for the Harvard Lampoon, the college humour magazine, during his undergraduate years — are just two of the qualities that challenge stereotypes of the growing breed of billionaire art collectors. Unlike many founders of art foundations, who cloak their undertakings in a patois of altruism, the 70-year-old Hill is blunt about the tax benefits. He also makes no pretence of acting for posterity; the foundation itself owns only about 10 works, he says, leaving "hundreds" in the Hills' possession. "This space is designed for us while we're alive," Hill says, referring to his wife of 38 years, Janine, and himself. "When we're no longer around, [the foundation has] the ability to turn it back into condos."