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Take A Turn On Carsten Höller's Aventura Slide Tower in Miami Beach

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Photo by WorldRedEye.com. Aventura Slide Tower

I arrived in Miami Beach this past Sunday feeling wildly uncomfortable in my pale, loose skin, and didn't recover any sort of internal equilibrium until I joined a group of fellow New Yorkers at the Aventura Mall, a massive shopping complex at a safe distance from the beach. Outside, it was all sunshine and hard bodies visible through see-through clothing, but inside the mall, there was a Zara, and a Blue Bottle coffee shop, and women wearing jeans and long-sleeves.

I was at the mall for the opening of Carsten Höller's Aventura Slide Tower, a 9-story site-specific installation that looks as if it had been lifted from the 1964 World's Fair site in Flushing Meadows Park, Queens. Looming in the sky just at the edge of the mall's recent expansion, it joins an impressive collection of contemporary artworks commissioned or purchased by the mall's management company, including *Gorillas In the Mist* by the Haas Brothers, a series of water fountains shaped like gigantic cartoonish apes; *Moonrise, East* by Ugo Rondinone, a series of three grimacing busts installed between the Zara and the Topshop; and *Eye Benches* by Louise Bourgeois, two benches shaped like eyes upon which children, unaware they were in the presence of the liminal, lounged casually.



Photo by WorldRedEye.com.
Gorillas in the Mist by the Haas Brothers.

“We have 28 million visitors a year,” Jackie Soffer, the chief executive officer and co-chairman of Turnberry, the privately held real estate development group that manages the mall. “If you look at museum attendance in South Florida, it’s way below our attendance.”

Installing art in the mall is a way for culture to reach the masses — it’s also a draw for the sorts of high-end consumers that populate Art Basel, a classy event in a town that also hosted, this past weekend, rapper Gucci Mane’s birthday party.



Photo by WorldRedEye.com.
Carsten Höller and Chloë Sevigny

On the day I visited the mall, the artwork had drawn some bona fide celebrities, including Chloë Sevigny, Karolína Kurková, and Harmony Korine, the director of *Spring Breakers*. Like me, they were there to attend the event celebrating the unveiling of recently commissioned artworks, including Höller’s slide.

I can’t speak for them, because introductions did not foment conversations, but I assume that the event was like no other art opening they had ever been to. It was certainly not like any I have attended, mostly because it was so much fun. There were roaming magicians performing card tricks, and flash dancers who performed with unfettered joy, and mimes soaking themselves in the Haas Brothers’ fountains. The music that blasted from the loud speakers included all of the

top pop hits from the last decade, and in the time I wasn't talking to someone, I enjoyed sitting on a bench, and bopping my head along to the beat. The vibe was something between a toddler's birthday party and an episode of *My Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

"I like to bring my work outside of museums," Carsten Höller shouted at me over Rihanna's "We Found Love." "Can you even hear me?"

I assured him that I could, and giggled nervously. The truth was that Höller looked even more awkward in the context than I felt — based in Stockholm, he has a serious, intellectual European look about him — and I so desperately wanted him to like me. Chloë Sevigny was at the event because she is a close personal friend of Höller's. Beyond his obvious coolness, there is something really sweet and goofy about the artist, who professed to me that he keeps songbirds in his home in Stockholm to keep the darkness of winter at bay. "I trick them into singing a few months early," he told me.



*Photo by WorldRedEye.com.
A view of the slide from below.*

The installation is Höller's first permanent slide tower in the United States, but far from the first slide he's built — they have existed around the world, in locations such as Miuccia Prada's offices in Milan, and in the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London. When I professed that I screamed on my trip down the one in Miami, which looms 93 feet in the air, and brings passengers up to speeds of 15 MPH, he smiled, and said that this was appropriate. "My last name is Höller, after all," he joked.

On the day of the opening, just as many adults ascended the swirling staircase of the installation as did children. Chloë Sevigny, clad in a bubblegum pink dress, went up three times. As if aware the structure might be dangerous, a flock of turkey vultures circled air above the site, waiting for an accident to deliver them a meal.



*Photo by WorldRedEye.com.
Chloë Sevigny after a run.*

When I asked Höller if he had done the math for the engineering of the structure, which consists of 2 opposing chutes that bring passengers down to the ground in clockwise and counterclockwise directions, he laughed. “If I was able to do that, I would be very proud of myself,” he said.

In school, he noted, he studied plant pathology. He could tell me all about plant diseases and pests, but engineering was not his forte. He is, after all, an artist. The idea, not the execution, is where he thrives.

When I noted that I could see the slide surviving for centuries, through hurricanes and flooding, Höller seemed to find that a bit dramatic. When I ventured that the slide was the best thing about Miami besides the beaches, his face lit up. “The beaches, they are many,” he said. “But there is only one slide.”