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Keni Valenti Opens Miami's First Fashion Gallery

By Christine Borges

A seemingly unassuming little shop sits in the heart of Wynwood, only adorned by a painted black and white portrait of fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent. Behind the theatrical silver curtain lies a whole other world, though. Filled with decades of fashion, tons of turquoise and a Dalida soundtrack that paints the picture of a forgotten era, all of the luxury and sheer elegance is brought back to life by designer and über stylist **Keni Valenti**.

Valenti, a man with a vision, welcomes visitors to his fashion gallery — the first of its kind in Miami — with a boisterous laugh. He was inspired to set up shop here thanks to a local stylist friend that lured him (Anna Chu), and he fell in love with the city. Plans for his future exhibitions include an homage to Mr. Blackwell (up next) and a potential homage to the history of Miami’s fashion district. He’s already started collecting pieces for both, between styling the likes of celebrities like the Olsen twins and consulting for major fashion houses like Gucci. We caught up with Valenti recently to hear how it all came about.

How did you come up with this idea?

Keni Valenti (pictured below): About ten years ago there was a gallery owner named Holly Solomon. She was one of the biggest gallery owners in New York in the ’50s, ’60s and ’70s. She discovered Andy Warhol. She called me up one day because I started to get successful with what I do as a collector and she wanted to sell me her old clothes. We became friends and I asked, “Wouldn’t it be great if we could show these clothes as art?” She was like “That is absolutely fucking genius! Let’s do it!” But then she got very ill and passed away. So it was always in the back of my mind. ‘Cause I’m not a vintage clothing dealer. I’m not a shop proprietor. I wanted to do something fun. I knew about Wynwood and this area, and I thought, “What a great place to open something like this in Miami.” I’d been a New Yorker my whole life, born and raised. But this is beautiful. This is paradise.

What do you do when you’re not opening museum-like galleries?

I was a fashion designer and from that I went into styling and shopping for designers for inspiration. I started to amass this huge collection of things. Plus I was shopping for celebrities for things to wear. A lot of celebrities hate to spend money on stuff. They mostly get everything for free. But if it’s vintage, they hate to spend money on it because they can only wear it once. For instance, I was working with Victoria Beckham a few years back. She was like, “I don’t know what to do, here. I’m going to buy this dress from you for \$3,000, and I can only wear it once. It’s such a waste of money. Can I rent it from you?” So then I started to renting to celebrities. I run a business mostly with design firms like Gucci, Cavalli, Marc Jacobs. They come to me for inspiration for their own collections.

How many pieces have you collected?

I have over 10,000 articles of clothing. My real dream is to open a museum. I was thinking what a great thing to start this as a beginning to my museum. What people are tending not to understand is that people come in oohing and aching and then say thank you. But everything is for sale. Everything is set up like a gallery. I don’t want to sell them, but I have to maintain it all. I have the rest of my collection in storage.

Where do you plan on going from here?

My dream is to give back [with a museum]. Because the kids today have no culture. I watch the kids today and everyone is texting, nobody is thinking about anything. And clothing isn’t just clothing. It’s an era — all important parts of history. Clothing is art in a sense, because you can travel back in time and talk about an entire era. I want to donate my collection to the museum. So this is my beginning.

The [Keni Valenti Gallery](#) is located at 2612 NW Second Avenue. The Yves Saint Lauren homage is open until April 27. Open by appointment daily from noon – 5 p.m.

Tags: Wynwood