

# ARTnews

## Hassan Hajjaj Brings a Marrakech Tea Shop to Miami Beach

By Maximiliano Durón | December 6, 2024



Hassan Hajjaj (right) explaining the Dar Miami 1446 project to Miami Heat player Jimmy Butler.

Hassan Hajjaj is among the leading photographers of his generation. Born in Larache, Morocco, in 1961, he moved to London when he was 12. The contrast between the life he knew in Morocco with what he saw in England had a profound impact on the work he makes, as did a visit to Morocco during the '90s.

In his images, Hajjaj shows fashionably dressed people in colorful spaces. The floors and backdrops of those spaces typically contrast with the colors of the subject's clothing or the couches and chairs they sit upon. To these lush, large-scale photographs, Hajjaj adds custom-made frames composed of eye-catching canned goods, from teas to tomato sauce.

He has often turned his lens to the people of Marrakech, where he lives for part of the year. His most famous of these is his "Kesh Angels" series, showing the female henna artists who are fixtures of Marrakech's squares and markets, where they can often be seen speeding around town on motorbikes. These women are known for their vibrantly patterned, full-length caftans and for their black face coverings; Hajjaj often pictures them wearing heart-shaped glasses.

He brought these photographs to the moving image with his 2015 short documentary *Karima – A Day in the Life of a Henna Girl*, which follows Karima, a henna artist he's known for years, as she goes about her day in Marrakech.

Over the years, Hajjaj's practice has grown more ambitious as he has translated his images into immersive installations. Now, Hajjaj has brought one of these installations to Miami Beach in the form of Dar Miami 1446, located at 530 Lincoln Road, as part of an ongoing collaboration between Capital One and the Cultivist. This former retail shop has been converted into a large-scale installation decked out vinyl prints of the textile patterns that cover the walls and floors. Throughout the installation are some of Hajjaj's photographs as well as one room screening another one of the artist's filmic works, *U-Lot 2010*, which first screened at Paris's Maison Européenne de la Photographie in 2019.



Exterior view of Hassan Hajjaj's Dar Miami 1446 project in Miami Beach.

During the day, the public can visit Dar Miami 1446, whose name refers to the current year on the Arabic calendar. There, they can sample tea from Hajjaj's tea brand, Jajjah (his name spelled backward), and sweets by Michelin-star chef Rose Previte. They can also purchase merch from the shop, with 100 percent of the proceeds benefiting the Miami Foundation to support its work with marginalized populations in the greater Miami area.

Over the course of three nights, from December 3 to December 5, Hajjaj hosted three dinners at the large table in the space's back to experience Previte's Tawle menu of several course served family style. Hummus, muhammara, chicken shish taouk, saffron couscous, Georgian ribeye, and braised lamb tagine were on offer. After dinner, Hajjaj invited musicians to perform. The whole installation is brings together art, food, music, and community under the concept of Marhaba, a word that commonly denotes Arabic hospitality and more literally translates to "welcome."

To learn more about the project, *ARTnews* spoke to Hajjaj ahead of the opening of Dar Miami 1446, which will have its final tea service on December 6.

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity and concision.*



Installation view of Hassan Hajjaj's Dar Miami 1446 project in Miami Beach.

**ARTnews: How did the project in Miami come together?**

**Hassan Hajjaj:** I had a call from the Cultivist, who approached me to be the second artist of this new project they do in Miami with Capital One. From there, it started as a conversation. The idea was to invite an artist to collaborate with a Michelin-starred chef to do a dinner and provide entertainment and music for their card holders and art world guests. For me, it was really an easy thing to jump on because it was art, music, and food, which are things I love and are part of my

work and ethos. I love it because it has a beginning, middle, and end—and hopefully the end will be the big fiesta that people will enjoy.

**The project is located in a former retail space on Lincoln Road Mall. Can you talk about the architecture of the space and how you responded to it?**

Normally, the first thing I do is work with the space. I fell in love with this building because it's quite quirky. It set me off to create a daytime and evening project, wanting to introduce my culture and my journey as contemporary version of where I'm coming from and all the influences I had, from living in London to traveling and meeting all these great people along the way. I already have a project in Morocco, Jajjah. It's a tea salon with a boutique and an open kitchen, and we play music as well—even the packaging of our products has a QR code that leads you to music you can listen to while you have tea. So, this was an easy thing to take to Miami because I already had that built in Marrakech.

The building is very beautiful because it has two windows with a door down the middle. On the righthand side, I decide to put the tea shop to bring that project into the thing that could be open in the daytime for the public, and on the lefthand side, it's a shop selling all our merch. When I do these kinds of projects, especially with Capital One, I always try to see if there's a way to give something to the city or the neighborhood. With all the merch that is sold, 100 percent of the proceeds will go to the Miami Foundation. That was a plus for me.

Inside the building, I created this large dinner table with quirky seats, as well as some tables on the side and a stage in front, as a place where people can have a photoshoot with a backdrop. Each night has a theme, and it's been great working on programming for the evening. From six o'clock, invited guests will come, have cocktails, and then be seated and have the food, and we'll have the live band and a DJ for the after parties. Every night during dinner, Simo Lagnawi will play a specific type of music from Morocco called Gnawa music. The first night we've got Yussef Dayes, who is a friend of mine and has collaborated with me on previous works, playing live. The second night, after dinner, we have Shaboosy performing with DJ Pee .Wee (Anderson .Paak) doing a DJ set. And the third night, we have Kaytranada, who will be DJing basically, until 2 or 3 in the morning.



Simo Lagnawi performing at Hassan Hajjah's Dar Miami 1446 project in Miami Beach.

On top of this, because I wanted to present my region through our food, Joey from the Cultivist recommended chef Rose Previte. In addition to the dinners, Rose is making some sweets that complement each particular tea type. I love what she does—it's the type of food that reminds you of your grandma cooking over an open fire. Immediately I was comfortable with that because idea is for people to come and hang out. The food is very important to presenting togetherness—it's how we eat, how we welcome people. In some of the rooms, I'll show some of my art, mainly videos and photographs. I want people to come there and find different corners and different spaces so they don't get bored.



Installation view of Hassan Hajjah's Dar Miami 1446 project in Miami Beach.

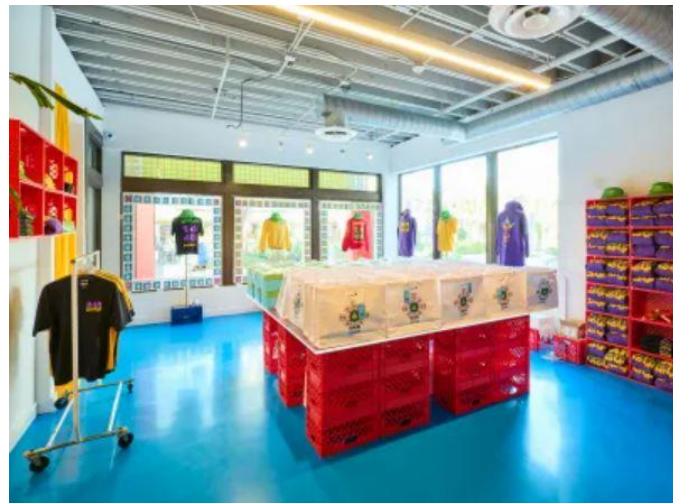
When you have dinners [in the art world] people come, have cocktails, sit around the table, and then leave, but I wanted it so people can go to another table and speak with the people there. It's like a home—like my home in Miami.

**Can you talk about why you feel having this welcoming nature, making people feel like they're at home is important to the project?**

It would have been easy to just table and some art in a room. What people might not understand is that we have this in this region of the world [where I come from], where we welcome, where food is important, how we sit around the table and eat out of one plate. Normally, in situations like this in the art world, sometimes it's too formal and that, for my mind, becomes a little bit too cold—it mires the conversation. Instead, I want to push people into a different environment to have an experience from the culture, from the food, from the music. It's putting a taste of my upbringing into Miami in the sense.



Guests dine at Hassan Hajjah's Dar Miami 1446.



Installation view of Hassan Hajjah's Dar Miami 1446 project in Miami Beach.

“Hassan, you should do a tea brand.” I thought he was joking and didn't take notice of it. The next time I went, he said the same thing. After about a year of saying it, I thought why not take up the challenge. It started from there. As the artist, I thought: what can I bring to the table? For me, it was easy to add the QR code that leads to tea-listening music, and I've also involved other artists in making the packaging. It's been an interesting learning journey.

**How did you approach the project's design in choosing the different textiles and colors that you chose? Can you talk a little bit about your approach to color and pattern?**

I suppose growing up in Morocco and then moving to London was a big difference, weather-wise, and what you wear in Morocco you can't wear in Europe—the bright colors. To break it down, I always thought of England as film noir and Morocco as Technicolor, because of their contrast. I think having that contrast so much that when

**What was the impetus behind launching your tea brand, Jajjah?**

I have a partner, Amine El Baroudi, who's a very big tea manufacturer in Morocco and globally. He's also an art collector. I met him through some openings many years ago. His company also produces the packaging that the tea comes in, and I asked him if I could use his factory to design my own cans for my frames for my photographs. Normally, I would buy all the cans from different shops. I wanted to push it to see if I could design my own cans to make it even more personal. He invited me to come to the factory and he took me around. Then I started designing stuff. Every time I went there, I would meet with him, and then one day while we were sitting there, he told me,

I started playing around with color in England, it almost looked wrong because the lighting. It also has to do with the daylight. But I just went with my flow and my feeling with color, and sort of just learn to clash colors. I suppose I'm also escaping that environment, creating a Pandora's box to escape for a minute or for hours.

This really happened naturally. I've been doing a salon since about '96, and it's an environment using recycled objects to create something that could feel familiar while also being something new, to invite people to be able to sit and use it. I'm coming from this background. I've worked in small places and big places. That's always been the challenge: how can you make a big place not so cold and how can you make a small place

become warm and welcoming. I think all these experiences I've had growing up, learning how to clash colors and how to play around with space to make people feel comfortable. They might not normally sit on, for example, a crate but then you put them in this environment and they're not going to see it as a crate but as a seat. It's playing around with this, and I think this is really coming out of my background of growing up in Morocco and recycling things. And when I say Moroccan, I'm also talking about [the rest of the Global South], the continent of Africa, the Caribbean, South America, where nothing gets thrown away. For me, with this project, the main thing is for people to enjoy it and hopefully experience something new.



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