

— STORY BY **BARBARA FLYNN**

— PHOTOGRAPHS BY **PHILIP GOSTELOW, DAVID MATHESON, JESSICA HROMAS AND JIM RICE**

# THE FINE ART OF GIVING



Collecting has its satisfactions but perhaps the greatest of these is giving it all away. Putting individual works or great collections of art into the public domain is an act of enlightened citizenship, and the fewer conditions placed on the gift, the more enlightened that act is



VHS VIDEO BY FISCHLI AND WEISS, 'THE WAY THINGS GO'. PURCHASED IN 1987.

**T**HERE WERE plenty of delicate issues on the table when art patron John Kaldor and long-standing director of the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW), Edmund Capon, sat down to discuss a gift. What conditions would apply to Kaldor's donation of 260 works of international contemporary art? Would it be accompanied by a suitable endowment? In the end, it took three years to negotiate. When the gift – valued at more than \$35 million – was announced in April, it became the single most valuable to be made to an Australian museum.

It's hard to imagine august art institutions in the position of kids in a candy shop, but even the trained professional can be seduced by the generosity of a luscious gift – despite the fact that, across the ages, the history of donations is littered

with failures, all of them revolving around the challenge of providing for the upkeep of the bequest. This has made self-discipline one of the most important skills in the director's kit – manifest in the resolve to hold fast to the museum's priorities when looking a gift horse in the mouth.

What is a museum looking for when it becomes the recipient of a private collection? First, the art must substantially enrich the museum's holdings. Second, the museum will need to make sure the value of the gift exceeds or at least equals the cost of accepting it. Rule number three – planning how the museum will finance the upkeep of a gift and maintain its visibility – is the one least followed. Yet it is the most critical, according to National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) director, Gerard Vaughan.

San Francisco-based collectors Pam and Dick Kramlich have assembled the largest and most-definitive collection of contemporary time-based media works of art. They have redefined the role of serious collectors by developing a conservation archive as well.



In an ideal world, museums would have the leverage in their negotiations to require collectors to provide lavish endowments. But the discrepancy in buying power between museum and collector is great and, more often than not, it will be the collector calling the shots. Whether this is positive or negative for art depends at least as much on the ethical make-up of the collector as on that individual's level of discernment, or 'eye', as it is known in art circles.

Sydney collectors Simon and Catriona Mordant have funded acquisitions for institutions such as the AGNSW and Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) without asking for curatorial control. They know that museums are often given works they don't want and will have to pay to keep, and have developed a more responsive mode of giving, jumping in when directors have identified something they want but cannot afford.

Sometimes this has been in partnership with other collectors – for instance, with Geoff and Vicki Ainsworth to purchase

an Anselm Kiefer painting for the AGNSW in 2006. The painting dates from 2004 and is titled: *Von den Verlorenen gerührt, die der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen die Trommeln im Fluss* (roughly *The river drums awoke, touched by the lost who didn't carry their belief on wings*). Catriona Mordant says they want "to put something back to enrich the cultural fabric" because they have benefited from living in Australia. While they have no desire to set up their own museum, they are enjoying giving their art away during their lifetime: "We'd like to see Sydney change while we're still alive."

More often, the norm among collectors is the stipulation that collections retain their identity, thought by many of them to be most effectively achieved by keeping the art together and continuously on view. The Kaldor gift is complemented by the 2007 pledge of \$4 million by other gallery supporters, the Belgiorino-Nettis family, which will go towards the conversion of existing storage space at AGNSW into a new, dedicated John W. Kaldor Family gallery for contemporary art.

Robin Wright, head of San Francisco's MOMA acquisitions committee, says museums may not want certain types of art that are either "too quiet" or harder to engage with – for example, ephemeral art, which forms a significant component of her own collection.



LAWRENCE WEINER, 'DUST AND DIAMONDS LEFT UPON THE SURFACE OF A SHEET OF GLASS', 1991; CHAIR IS BY ROY MCMAKIN; TABLE TOP: KATHARINA FRITSCH, 'MAUS (MOUSE)', 1998.

## Endowing a collection

The word in collectors' circles in the US is that \$US300 million is the minimum level of endowment required to ensure a healthy future for a donation or private museum. Funds need to be well invested, and the foundation or institution well managed or the money could run out. Further, collectors setting up private museums have no special immunity from future financial failure. Many such museums have been established without provision of an adequate endowment – “pure folly” is the view of one Australian museum director.

Unlike public institutions that are bound by public opinion and the legal conditions of some bequests – often costly and unpopular to break – selling art (termed deaccessioning) to finance an institution or acquire other art is an option more easily accomplished by private museums. In one instance, Michael Buxton's plans – already well advanced – to build a museum in Melbourne include the provision to review and possibly sell the work of an artist at regular intervals as a matter of policy, both as a means of financing the museum and to keep the collection “tuned up” and “fresh looking”.

There are risks, however: historically, it has been controversial when high-profile collectors have sold works, provoking speculation and often sending a shudder

through the artist's market. But as Buxton puts it, if he owns the work why can't he assert his right to sell it?

Mark Fraser, who is working on the establishment of collector David Walsh's museum, the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart, says that an individual as idiosyncratic as Walsh should probably have his own museum. But many museum professionals would caution the maverick: There is a useful system of checks and balances in public institutions, which will scrutinise every item in a collection that is being offered for donation. Specialists will get involved, and the relative quality and significance of the gift will be evaluated.

New York benefactor/collector Werner H. (Wynn) Kramarsky explains that in most American museums the board of directors or trustees must approve acquisitions and deaccessions. He says, “The oversight by many individuals has salutary consequences.” (Deaccessioning can be a drawn-out process, involving consultation with the heirs of the original donor and the requirement to replace the work with one of the same type and period.)

There is no such system in place to evaluate the holdings of collectors starting their own museums. In Australia, where many such museums are just opening, we are yet to see how exceptional they will be in terms of quality.

Brown had donated more than 450 works to public galleries in Australia over 40 years.) Brown wagered that allowing the NGV to select what it wanted would ensure its strong interest in the works. He turned out to be correct, and works from his collection are on permanent view at the Ian Potter Centre, NGV Australia at Federation Square.

Vaughan describes the NGV as “the only truly encyclopædic collection in Australia” and sees collection building as being “about depth and breadth”. By forging an alliance that both satisfied the benefactor and allowed the NGV to engage in aesthetic cherry-picking, he expanded the museum's holdings and gained unrestricted access for his curators – and, above all, public access – to significant Australian works.

Another unique holding, the collection of Perth residents Sir James and Lady Sheila Cruthers, was gifted to the University of Western Australia (UWA) in March this year. Since its inception in 1974, the collection had grown to include 400 works of art by 155 women artists dating from the 1890s to the present. According to son John Cruthers, himself a collector and Sydney-based art adviser, members of the Cruthers family had become familiar with the inner workings of the university over the years in a variety of roles ranging from undergraduate to committee member to deputy pro vice-chancellor (a position held by Sir James in the 1990s), making UWA the logical recipient of the collection.

Furthermore, UWA was the sort of smaller institution where the collection would be widely shown, used and made available for the greatest impact. Cruthers says the collection was driven by his and his parents' enthusiasm and “what we liked”. It has a number of themes, such as self-portraiture, the body, and the environment, and over the years the family was not averse to selling art by men to finance the purchase of art by women. The Cruthers Collection posits an alternative history of art, and is the sort of highly personal and idiosyncratic holding that fares well in a university gallery such as UWA's, where it is one of a number of donations including the distinguished collection of Australian art assembled by Joe and Rose Skinner.

Sometimes the total package is so exceptional that the mandate to keep it together is understandable. Over 30 years, San Francisco-based collectors Pam and Dick Kramlich, like the Besens, have assembled a time capsule without parallel: in their case, the largest and most definitive collection in existence of contemporary time-based media works of art. Pam Kramlich describes the earliest works in the collection as literally “representing a point in time that is gone”. With uniqueness comes value – and also the responsibility to preserve DVD and video works that can disintegrate or become obsolete (and unshowable) over time if not properly cared for.

In addition to giving works of art to New Art Trust, which has three institutions as its beneficiaries – the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Tate in London – the Kramlichs have funded the development of a whole support system in the form of an archive for the recording of details relevant to the works they own as well as the methodologies and practices required to conserve them. Their dedication and the level of art professionalism they have enabled have redefined the role of the serious collector. They have been living in Shanghai since January and observing the booming art market in China; they own a work by 27-year-old Yang Fudong. The move brings Dick Kramlich closer to the China operations of New Enterprise Associates (NEA), the venture capital firm of which he is co-founder and senior partner, with art a “happy by-product”.

It would follow that the larger the gift to a museum – and the greater the endowment – the more say a collector/benefactor would and, reasonably, should have. Collector and former board member of a Cologne insurance company, Udo Brandhorst, gifted a collection of 800 works of contemporary art to Bavaria state in 1999 – including 90 by Andy Warhol and the most important holdings of Cy Twombly's works in private hands. It has worked well for all parties.

Capon says collections of the magnitude of Kaldor's need to retain their identity and their logic, which he describes as “a cohesion of the inscrutable”. He acknowledges that the Kaldor works will require maintenance down the line, but upkeep would have been an issue only if Kaldor had bequeathed his collection *in situ* in his Sydney home. Housed at the AGNSW any outlays would fall “well within the bailiwick of what the gallery does already”.

**COLLECTIONS ARE** time capsules – think of the works belonging to fashion-retail giants Marc and Eva Besen that are now housed in their TarraWarra Museum of Art in Healesville, Victoria – and the wish to keep them together to evoke an era or communicate a particular vision, is often the strongest desire of the potential collector-donor, and the most frequent deal breaker. At one extreme, New York publishing magnate and former ambassador to the UK, Walter H. Annenberg's 2002 bequest of more than 50 works of impressionist and post-

impressionist art to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art set the benchmark for the number and stringency of conditions stipulated. Valued at about \$US1 billion when the gift was first announced in 1991, the terms of the bequest included a prohibition against excerpting any of the works to show them in other contexts, and a requirement to hang the works in a particular order, in perpetuity. Admittedly, even considerably less onerous stipulations are generally not in the best interests of a museum, since often the works in the collection will be of variable quality. Most museums won't even have adequate exhibition space to comply.

So museums prefer to pick and choose. Some Australian museum directors have succeeded in doing so, including Gerard Vaughan, whose arrangement with Melbourne collector Joseph Brown allowed the NGV to select from among a collection of Australian art amassed by Brown over more than 60 years in his capacity as gallery owner, connoisseur, scholar and practising artist. (Prior to making his gift to the NGV,





Brandhorst assembled the collection over more than 40 years with his late wife Anette. For him, a main objective was to secure the state to act as public-sector partner to provide a new building as well as administer the museum, slated to open in 2009. Brandhorst has provided for the ongoing needs of his foundation, which is allowed to spend the return on equity of €120 million (\$203 million) each year (which works out to between €2 million and €4 million a year). In return, Brandhorst will take a semi-active role, participating in the discussion of how the museum will be installed and how the artworks will be presented. As Brandhorst told the magazine *Weltkunst* in 2005, “Who knows the collection better than I?”

**EVEN IN** the face of such stellar examples, some collector/benefactors take a hard line against the requirement by some of their peers that donations stay together. In their view, such a requirement is always untenable and neither quality nor quantity will mitigate this. One loses all liveliness and sense of continuity, whether it’s 40 or 400 works of art, unless other works are integrated and drawn in around them, they say. In some instances, museums may have to knock back collectors who set overstringent conditions, with the best managed among them retaining a relationship with those collectors, in the hope of being able to work together in future.

Many collectors who don’t strike a deal start private museums. The chief curator of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, Gary Garrels, says that though the private museum trend may have accelerated in recent years, in the US, at least, “this is proportionate to the number of new public museums opening in cities everywhere”. Founding one’s own museum is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the history of collecting includes many examples of collectors who have set up museums when they couldn’t make it work with existing ones.

Two of them – Norton Simon and Armand Hammer – established museums in Pasadena in 1975 and in Los Angeles in 1990, respectively, in the aftermath of failed negotiations with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The museum was in the news again in January this year when American collector Eli Broad announced he would be keeping his collection in a private foundation that makes loans to museums, rather than donating it to LACMA. Broad’s reason was that no museum could commit to exhibiting a significant

portion of the collection permanently. LACMA director Michael Govan put on the best possible face, commenting in *The New York Times* that, “from the public perspective, I don’t think most people care when they walk in the door whether the museum owns the works or not, as long as they don’t lose them”.

Broad’s significance as a collector is such that Govan would have had little choice but to accept his terms. The Broad Foundation has more than 1,500 works, of which 600 were bought in the past two years. The \$US\$6 million (about \$59 million) Broad Contemporary Art Museum was funded by Broad to serve as the centrepiece of LACMA’s redesigned campus on Wilshire Boulevard. The Renzo Piano-designed building contains about 5,400 square metres of gallery space and opened in February this year.

Govan is a member of the US museum-director elite, and was reportedly hand-picked by Broad to lead LACMA following a successful tenure as director of Dia Art Foundation in New York. Govan’s achievements at Dia included the successful financing and establishment in May 2003 of the massive museum Dia: Beacon in upstate New York, for the exhibition of artist-designed installations and site-specific works of art such as Richard Serra’s three earliest *Torqued Ellipse* sculptures.

So why do collectors tend towards the more traditional approach, pooling resources by donating to one of the existing museums? One reason, according to Glenn D. Lowry, director of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), is the satisfaction and sense of security engendered by seeing one’s art, “at home with other great works of art, in an environment centred around them”. National Gallery of Australia director Ron Radford agrees: existing museums have administrative, curatorial and marketing mechanisms in place, ensuring that the private collection donated to a museum “will be seen as part of a greater whole and be admired by more people”.

People may visit the private collections that have been set up as destination museums, but will they visit again? Public museums encourage regular visits. According to the NGV’s Vaughan, “Untold millions will see the Brown collection.” Not every private collector has the wherewithal to set up as lavishly as Eli Broad, by showcasing a singular collection comprised of ‘name’ artists in an iconic building. Lowry says MoMA looks

## Australian collectors

While it is the art collectors outside Australia who generally invest in collections of greater monetary value that are more frequently gifted to museums, Australian collectors such as Michael Buxton, David Walsh, Simon and Catriona Mordant, and Corbett Lyon are the ones coming up with some of the most exciting collecting models. And it’s not just about putting pictures on walls. Ten years ago, Adelaide collectors Rick and Jan Frolich identified art school students as a constituency that needed a leg up, and have been funding them in the years since to put bodies of work together at the critical point in their careers after graduation.

There are other alternatives to collecting-as-trophy-hunting. Brisbane collector Paul Eliadis helps artists to reach a broader audience by funding publications about their work, while Sydney’s Andrew Cameron funds the Art Gallery of NSW level-two Contemporary Projects Space. For some collectors the main game is to create the largest possible audience for art.

When John Kaldor’s \$35 million contemporary art collection was gifted to the Art Gallery of NSW in April this year, it became the single most valuable donation to be made to an Australian museum.

Donating to an existing museum gives the satisfaction and sense of security of seeing one’s art “at home with other great works of art”.



JEFF KOONS, 'WHITE TERRIER', 1991; UGO RONDINONE, 'NO 210 (SIEBTERJULZWEITAUSANDUNNULL)', 2000.

to private collectors to complete its holdings: “The aggregate of what collectors can do is more substantive than what institutions can do.”

In another gambit, a museum may want to acquire art out of the exhibitions it programs as a way of documenting its history. In a recent example, a trustee of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) stepped up to purchase one of the major works in the Olafur Eliasson show that originated in San Francisco and will travel to Sydney’s MCA in late 2009. A museum will always want that highly coveted Anselm Kiefer, Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns or Jackson Pollock, which in today’s market can only be bought with private support.

On the other hand, perhaps a more grassroots way for a museum to get what it wants is to buy in areas associated with ‘new practices’ when prices are still affordable. SFMOMA, for example, has expanded the photography collection that was started in 1935 (the same year the museum opened), with the benefit of curator Sandra Phillips’s expertise and direction, and the engaged involvement of a group of collectors excited by the new medium and canny enough to be buying the best examples available.

As Capon recognises, a collection as significant as John Kaldor’s can also be used as a bargaining chip to entice government to allocate the funds required to remedy any number of long-standing ills – such as the chronic lack of storage space – which aren’t in themselves line items glamorous enough to attract substantial or enthusiastic support. With the Kaldor collection, the AGNSW gained, in Capon’s words, “the most important collection of late 20th-century avant-garde art in Australia” and state financing of a storage facility on land owned by Arts NSW (formerly the NSW Ministry for the Arts).

**OBVIOUSLY THERE** is competition between museums for the better collections: when rumours began to circulate about the Kaldor gift, some were surprised that the works weren’t going to the MCA, a museum dedicated entirely to contemporary art. In 1995, Loti and Victor Smorgon gave their collection, comprising 154 works of art from the 1980s and ’90s, to the MCA. Kaldor supported the MCA for many years, including a stint as chairman from 1997 to 2002. Jeff Koons’s floral sculpture *Puppy* from his collection stood in front of the MCA on Sydney’s Circular Quay in 1995-96. Collecting and benefacting are highly competitive pursuits and Kaldor’s AGNSW donation could well have a spillover effect for the MCA as other collectors target it for the next spectacular gift.

In New York, London or Berlin, a panoply of museums is the lifeblood of the city, but in smaller centres there is not as much in the way of private art holdings to go around. So in smaller communities, the city benefits from having one well-endowed museum. Tony Ellwood, director of the Queensland Art Gallery and its impressive recent addition, GoMA (Gallery of Modern Art) understands the appeal of contemporary art to Australians, who are at ease with current design and aesthetics, perhaps especially in Brisbane, which he terms “a new place, immersed in the new”.

In terms of what private collectors might want to give to the museum, he says quality isn’t the issue since “it’s not hard to buy well if you’re directed by one of the big-name [commercial] galleries”. Not everyone would be quite so generous. More frequently overseas observers will say that commercial galleries tend to be focused on the sale – at the expense of quality. But according to Ellwood, collectors with the nous to combine substantial holdings with loyal relationships with the institutions tend to have access to the key works of indisputable

value to rival the museum’s. And this, in turn, can only work to the museum’s advantage.

Robin Wright, head of SFMOMA’s acquisitions committee, is a serious and committed collector of contemporary art. She says museums may not want certain types of art that are either “too quiet” or harder to engage with – for example, ephemeral art, which forms a significant component of her own collection. And size does matter: over the years, the buying habits even of collectors as sophisticated as Anette and Udo Brandhorst changed with the realisation that the large works they might acquire would ultimately be shown to best advantage in museum rooms of generous dimension.

Directors of the major museums have big spaces to fill and, in Australia, it is still the case that these are often the only such spaces in any particular city. Internationally, the balance has shifted with the advent of so many collectors setting up their own museums and building them to spec to take works of any size. Judging by collector behaviour at the art fairs, what is indisputable is the attraction of XXL. At last December’s Art Basel Miami Beach, for example, American private collectors snapped up the largest works in the opening hours, including Andreas Gursky’s *Cocoon*, which was allotted its own wall at the Matthew Marks Gallery booth and sold for \$US900,000.

With the rapid rise of values in the contemporary art market, one would think it would be harder than ever for a museum director to persuade collectors to donate. If the work you had appraised is worth twice the value six months later, why would you let it go? At those sorts of prices, why wouldn’t you just pay the capital gains and sell the work at auction? For most collectors, the higher the value of the work, the harder it will be to give it away.

In some highly refined models, both collector and museum

# House museums

A number of significant art collections have been established as house museums. These days, they are subject to a new kind of scrutiny, as the high cost of upkeep has made what were once such desirable gems untenable for museums to retain as part of their holdings. Apsley House in London, which was the residence of the first Duke of Wellington and bequeathed in 1947 by the seventh Duke to the Victoria and Albert Museum, proved too costly to keep and was transferred for administration from the V&A to English Heritage in 2004. Similarly, the Barnes Foundation in Pennsylvania – created by

Albert C. Barnes with a patent medicine fortune and home to one of the world’s largest collections of impressionist, post Impressionist and early modern paintings – came close to bankruptcy in 2002. It petitioned a local court for permission to amend the laws so that it could move the collection to a new site where it would attract more visitors and financing.

Dedicated collectors such as architect Corbett Lyon

and family in Melbourne, and Rich and Lenore Niles in San Francisco, are building new houses that will incorporate ‘museums’ – at home. Rooms or whole floors are being given over to state-of-the-art presentations of the works in their collections. The Niles may exhibit their own art on the ground floor or invite students in curatorial programs to organise shows. As Rich Niles says, “So it’s not really a private museum as much as

a public-program art space. Since we collect art by women artists only, it will be our intent to show only art by women.” Lyon speaks of “museum fatigue”, and says he learned from the smaller scale of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice and the Herzog & de Meuron museum for the Goetz Collection in Munich how satisfying it could be to view art in a more intimate setting. This suggested people would come to see a highly personalised, non-survey type of art collection that revealed the passions of the collector. But how will these houses be funded in the future, once the benefactors/founders are dead? And will the founders of today’s generation of house-museums find existing museums reluctant to accept their gifts of houses plus art? The Nileses say they wouldn’t expect a museum to accept a gift of anything but the better pieces in their collection.





will be motivated by an overriding concern for the welfare of the artist. Starting with the purchase for \$US175 of a drawing by Jasper Johns from the artist's first show at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1958, distinguished New York collectors Werner H. (Wynn) and Sarah-Ann (Sally) Kramarsky have formed a top collection of American drawings over the past 50 years. It encompasses examples from both superstars and lesser-known artists as well as abstract, conceptual and minimalist works of art that Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin says "both require and reward close looking".

Drawing is known to be a medium particularly close to an artist and, initially, Wynn Kramarsky expressed his discomfort at the thought of acquiring something so intimately "part of an artist's life". Once an artwork is acquired, Kramarsky continues to try to help the artist through a variety of strategies such as collecting their work in depth and facilitating connections to the art world. He holds the artwork in trust – caring for it and not selling it during the artist's lifetime – then considering the right match of artist and institution. Since 1971, the Kramarskys have donated more than 1,700 drawings to 52 institutions in the US, including 20 colleges, universities and institutions that have strong teaching components – representing a contribution without parallel to the study of drawing.

**AMERICAN COLLECTORS** and museums in cities endowed with one or more robust institutions have developed symbiotic gifting relationships to the benefit of all parties: collector, museum and community. Collecting has become one of the tools of enlightened citizenship; today, in New York as well as cities such as Seattle, San Francisco and Dallas, collectors have developed a code of practice which puts the institution first, while managing, more or less, to hold egos at bay.

Like Sydney's Mordants, such collectors won't insist on giving things to a museum that it cannot readily display. Museums want the best work by an artist, and, if they're supported by such community-minded collectors, they will be free to hold out for the best work by a Matthew Barney or a John Baldessari, wherever it might be found. In the most successful relationships, collectors will see themselves as custodians of works of art and become adept at thinking in the museum's best interests.

In one example, Deedie Rose, a board member of the Dallas Museum of Art, was aware as she started to collect in the area of postwar Latin American art (a specialisation outside the interest of most museums) of just how greatly her activities would enhance the museum's collection. A recent large gift to the Dallas Museum by the Roses and two other collector couples, the Rachofskys and the Hoffmans, stood out in another respect, as a significant local donation in an age when many American collectors have succumbed to the lure of the Tate and other museums outside the US.

Wright says intelligent collectors will manage to strike a balance between functioning independently and allowing themselves to be influenced by the vision of a particular museum. And where all the boxes are ticked, a sort of glorious momentum will start to build: sometimes, even artists on the museum's wish-list will jump on board too, allowing price concessions or donating works of their own themselves.

But as Wright emphasises, there needs to be leadership – individuals like her mother, Jinny Wright. She led the way, collecting contemporary American art when no one else was interested, with purchases of Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock in the 1950s. In Seattle, Jinny Wright spearheaded a capital campaign for



JOHN YOUNG, 'THE PERGAMON ROOM, WINTER', 2004.

Sydney collectors Catriona and Simon Mordant have funded acquisitions for the city's major institutions without asking for curatorial control.

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**FORWARD** thinking



PHILANTHROPY

the Seattle Art Museum that raised in just seven years an astounding \$US1billion from 40 collectors to acquire 1,000 works. Sure, there's money in Seattle, but there wasn't always as much in the way of resources as there is now: collectors such as Jinny and Bagley Wright have had to pay their dues, collecting and benefacting for years without getting anything back in the way of endorsement or public acknowledgment.

Edmund Capon says what a museum director is really looking for in a private collection is the person – “someone with the belief to do it”. That is, to do something great. He says it's “not just about giving the money to buy this or that. J. Hepburn Myrtle, Sydney Cooper, Laurence G. Harrison, Kenneth and Yasuko Myer, Edward and Goldie Sternberg, Mollie Gowing, Margaret Olley, the Ainsworths, the Mordants ... take those names out of it and there's nothing.”

He adds that, in the rare instance, a particular gift can be so significant as to change the whole policy of the museum. This was the case with James Fairfax's extraordinarily generous gifts since 1991 of European Old Master works, which Capon says “defined and gave a purpose to a part of the collection that was moribund. Had Fairfax not done what he did, we would have had no choice but to abandon this period of art.”

According to Gerard Vaughan, acting in the museum's best interest does not have to mean disappointment for the benefactor. “It's best to be very frank,” says Vaughan. And one can say no. Initially, the NGV had to decline the gift of Joseph Brown, on the basis that it wouldn't be able to show the entire collection on a permanent basis. The deal was struck only after the collector agreed to give a large number of works of art – including 100 paintings and sculptures and about 50 works on paper, from a total collection of nearly 500 items.

Perhaps the best type of donation involves collectors who

“Had James Fairfax not done what he did, we would have had no choice but to abandon this period of art.”



combine an eye for quality, magnanimity, and a quotient of concern and respect for the institution so abiding that it enables them to give the works and let go. As Jinny Wright says, “I think the Seattle Art Museum will show a lot of what we've collected, but you have to trust the art, since the museum won't and shouldn't be bound in any way.” According to Edmund Capon, it has been the people “who have demonstrated faith in what you're doing who make all the difference”, their belief being “hugely underwriting of the director's role”.

He sees that sort of faith and commitment as being subtly palpable to the public, going so far as to say that it is the strength and evidence of his benefactors' belief in the institution that gets people through the doors. “Why do we like particular museums around the world, the Frick [New York] or the Norton Simon?” he asks. “Because they still retain the passion of the personalities that so generously fashioned them.”

How many of us have had our lives changed in the process of looking at a work of art? Such vivid personal experiences underline the fact that important works of art should end up in the public domain where everyone can see them. Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's *Warlugulong* (1977), that early drawing by Johns, Twombly's best paintings, late Warhol – an artist's best works belong to the public.

It's a sentiment that people in Australia are onto – the conviction at this stage of a small core group. But this group will need to grow to have an impact. They can experiment by giving up on using art solely for personal gain and putting it first by giving what they have to the public. They can pick the eyes out of the best and make a cult out of giving. ■

*Barbara Flynn is a Sydney- and US-based contemporary art adviser to leading Australian corporations and private collectors.*

**zanotta**

Established in 1954, Zanotta is one of the leaders in Italian industrial design. Today's collection comprises of armchairs, sofas, writing desks, storage units, bookcases, accessories, chairs, dining and coffee tables. Diverse manufacturing technologies are employed in harmony with the company philosophy aimed at research and development.

One of the most iconic pieces includes the Cavour writing desk created by the legendary architect and designer Carlo Mollino. Designed in 1949, the Cavour desk is still, for many, the most coveted item in the Zanotta collection.

Cavour writing desk designed by Carlo Mollino  
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