

## Arts

In 2005, art collectors Andrew and Christine Hall bought the renowned German painter Georg Baselitz's personal trove of about 120 artworks that he had acquired over the years, mostly from his friends and contemporaries. A year or so later, at Baselitz's suggestion, they bought Schloss Derneburg, the estate where he had lived and painted for 30 years. The Halls had been thinking about building a museum. What better place to house the expressionist visions of such master postwar artists as Eugen Schönebeck, AR Penck, Markus Lüpertz and Baselitz himself than the sprawling Derneburg, a nearly 1,000-year-old castle that long served as a monastery?

Last year, with the renovations nearly complete, their plans to exhibit German art in a German landmark outside the German city of Hanover were suddenly dashed by an unlikely culprit: Germany. The Bundestag and Bundesrat passed a highly restrictive cultural heritage law – in the face of fierce protests by the country's art community – that authorised the banning of export outside the EU of artworks more than 50 years old and valued at over €150,000, and inside the EU of works over 75 years old and worth more than €300,000. If the Halls kept their collection at Derneburg, it might have to stay there for good.

"We had an art truck turn up the week the law was passed, and all those early works were gone," recalls Andrew, who is chief executive of Astenbeck Capital Management and goes by "Andy". The Swiss warehouse that received the scores of artworks, he says, saw a veritable traffic jam of trucks arriving from Germany. "The law is totally stupid. The idea was to prevent the flight of artworks from Germany, but it had the exact opposite effect. Crazy."

On an overcast spring afternoon, after the markets have closed, Andy and Christine, a British-born couple in their sixties, are sitting in their Chelsea pied-à-terre. The apartment walls are pristinely white and starkly blank. The Halls have just completed a three-year renovation and have not taken the time to hang any art. They've been too consumed with Derneburg.

In addition to scrapping a show of Baselitz and his contemporaries' early works, the Halls stopped a shipment of about 140 of their Warhols headed for Derneburg's official opening, since the law applies to foreign-born artists as well, and to whole collections judged



## Obstacle to opportunity

Collecting | Andrew and Christine Hall tell *Julie Belcove* about the rewards and challenges of collecting and exhibiting across two continents

Clockwise from top: Schloss Derneburg, south of Hanover, Germany; 'Medieval Divided Self' (2016) by Malcolm Morley; Andrew and Christine Hall, photographed for the FT at home in London by Martine Fougeron

significant. Despite verbal assurances from government officials that their art would be allowed out, Andy says the law was so murky that his lawyers could not allay the couple's fears. "I just don't want to be the guinea pig," he says. "It's not a risk I'm prepared to take with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of art."

Since then, the Halls have scrambled to reprogramme the 70,000 sq ft of exhibition space in their museum, coming up with an inaugural list of seven shows.

With more than 5,000 works in their private collection and another 100 in their foundation to draw on, as Christine puts it, "we have enough art." Opening on July 1 will be five monographic exhibitions of living artists who are free to exempt themselves from the law: Antony Gormley, Malcolm Morley, Barry Le Va, Hermann Nitsch and Julian Schnabel.

Joining them will be two group shows that feature works the Halls have deemed safe from the law's reach. The first, *Für Barbara*, is a compendium of more than 90 artworks by women that comprise an ode to the late Berlin dealer Barbara Weiss, curated by her stepson, gallerist Leo Koenig. Weiss, who was a staunch champion of female artists, gently goaded the Halls to buy more art by women. "Let's buy it for Barbara," became a mantra, Andy says, when they were on the fence about a piece by a female artist. Now, roughly 20 per cent of the artists in the collection are women, including Carmen Herrera, Barbara Kruger and Judith Bernstein.

Andy conceived of the second thematic show, focusing on the moving image, with works by artists such as Tony Oursler and Omer Fast, as a way to outsmart the new law: exhibition videos are frequently copies, so if one were to be confiscated, it would hardly be a catastrophe. "That was my initial, genius, inspired idea," Andy says with a smile. Andy tapped Chrissie Iles, a well-regarded curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, to organise the exhibition.

The Gormley show will be the artist's largest retrospective in Germany to date and will include works on paper as well as monumental outdoor sculpture. "They're fearless," Gormley says of the Halls. The sculptor, who curated the show, says the couple managed to



turn an "obstacle into an opportunity... The law was a pretty serious undermining of their plans, but Andy and Christine quickly regrouped."

Although the Halls had long acquired art, they stepped up the pace substantially about 15 years ago in response to a mild midlife crisis. "I thought that rather than burnishing my bank account, maybe I should be doing something interesting with the money I was earning," says Andy. "We're talking about buying hundreds of artworks a year as opposed to one or two. Right

from the get-go, I thought, "There's no point in buying art just to put in a warehouse.' It was in the back of my mind that we would exhibit art to the public."

In addition to Derneburg, the couple have turned their Vermont farm into an exhibition space open by appointment from May to November. One of this summer's shows, *Hope and Hazard: A Comedy of Eros*, was curated by Eric Fischl, an American artist whose angst-ridden figurative work the Halls collect. Trawling the Halls' collection, Fischl found a pronounced through-line.

"It's very physical stuff – a lot of expressive, gestural work and very much involved with the body and with sexuality," says Fischl, who is himself known for his sensual nudes and has even painted Andy and Christine in the buff. He was floored by the hundreds of artists represented. "What surprised me was how few artists I knew."

The Hall Foundation also has an unconventional relationship with the Massachusetts Museum of Contempo-

The Halls are well on their way to acquiring one of every multiple Joseph Beuys created

rary Art, born from another legal tussle. The Halls had installed a massive concrete sculpture by Anselm Kiefer on their front lawn in Connecticut. The local historical commission deemed the piece a structure, requiring its permission, which it was not keen on giving. A court battle ensued, and the Halls lost.

Shortly thereafter, Joseph C Thompson, director of Mass MoCA, paid a fundraising visit to the Halls and, he recalls, "walking out, I expressed admiration for the sculpture". The following week, Andy called and offered the museum the work. Since Mass MoCA is not a collecting institution, Thompson declined and says he explained, "That one work, while beautiful, does not constitute an exhibition." A day or two later, he received a binder of Kiefer images from the Hall collection, along with a note from Andy: "See if you can constitute an exhibition out of this."

In the end, the Hall Foundation agreed to overhaul an abandoned structure on the Mass MoCA campus, pay the operating costs and make a 15-year renewable loan of the Kiefer art. It's a collaboration, Andy says, that he could envision expanding with more Kiefer works currently on view at the NSU Art Museum in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

A sophisticated observer of markets, Andy seeks out undervalued artists – Morley, an American painter of hyper-realistic cinematic images, is one – and buys deep. He is not naive about the impact his collecting habits can have on the art market. "I would like to think we were a factor in White Cube taking on Kiefer and Baselitz," he says of the London gallery, which first made its name promoting the Young British Artists, not ageing German ones.

The Halls' tastes have expanded from German expressionism to minimalism and conceptual art. They are, for instance, well on their way to acquiring one of every multiple Joseph Beuys created; they own about 550 of 650 made. "It's just a question of me getting the energy to go out and track down the remaining ones," Andy says.

Although their daughter Emma is involved and their daughter-in-law, Maryse Brand, is the foundation's director, Andy gets a creative jolt from assembling the collection. Says Christine, who has seemed content to let her husband do most of the talking, "No one advises him."

[hallartfoundation.org](http://hallartfoundation.org)

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## HOW TO BUY A LUXURY WATCH

Understanding collectable timepieces

12 February 2015 | The Soho Hotel

LONDON

This June, the FT in partnership with international watch retailer Wempe, aims to help you learn 'How To Buy a Luxury Watch'

Never in the history of time have luxury watches been more popular than they are today. With more brands offering more models than ever before, the choice is vast – and often bewildering. Dress watches, chronographs, minute repeaters, tourbillons and perpetual calendars vie for attention with world timers and watches made for adventures, aviators, divers and drivers. But which one is right for you?

Led by Simon de Burton – a contributing editor to the *How To Spend It* magazine and the FT's regular Watches and Jewellery reports – this event will include comment and advice from a major collector, Wempe's experts and an auction house specialist in order to provide a comprehensive overview of today's luxury watch market.

Tickets are £30 and available to buy now:  
[live.ft.com/LuxuryWatch](http://live.ft.com/LuxuryWatch)

### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



**Simon de Burton**  
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International Watch  
Specialist Director,  
*Phillips*

An event from FINANCIAL TIMES LIVE

## Review

THEATRE

### The Gabriels

Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts,  
Brighton  
★★★★★

In 2014, Richard Nelson's tetralogy of *Apple Family* plays was one of the highlights of the Brighton Festival; this year, he returns with a trilogy featuring the Gabriel family from the same upstate New York village of Rhinebeck.

As with the earlier work, each individual play is set on a politically significant date and had its opening performance on that date. The new trilogy is subtitled "Election Year in the Life of One Family"; *Hungry* is set following the primaries' Super Tuesday in March 2016; *What Did You Expect?* in mid-September just after Hillary Clinton's pneumonia wobble; and *Women Of A Certain Age* on November 8, election night (the action of the play ends before the polls close).

Nelson insists that the play is "about" the year, not just the election itself. The middle-aged and elderly women of the Gabriel family and their brother George are liberals and Clintonites, but in the first two plays the election is mentioned only in the final phase; in

total, the T-word is uttered only once, 15 minutes before the end, with the Republican candidate being referred to at other times simply as "Him", like a kind of political Voldemort.

The conversation, as on each occasion they prepare a family dinner, deals with bereavement (in March they had just returned from scattering the ashes of elder brother and playwright Thomas), class and money problems: they are becoming aliens as Rhinebeck becomes a weekend colony for prosperous Manhattanites, and ultimately have to sell their home and treasured possessions to pay for mother Patricia's residential care.

Nelson is masterly at showing liberal values at work through casual conversation and everyday work. Paradoxically, this undramatic quality is what renders the plays so powerful: sister Joyce's lesbianism is hardly mentioned, and folk are surprised but not exercised by the amicable relations between Thomas's widow Mary and his first ex-wife Karin. Even the political

dimension is often only glanced at: in a literary-historical account, "[Nathaniel] Hawthorne tells [Herman] Melville that he has stopped reading newspapers", to which the sardonic response is "Was it an election year?"

But things resonate. As meals are co-operatively prepared, we hear the frequent question "What can I do?" and also its Kennedyesque echoes.

The playwright shows himself a skilled director in this production from New York's Public Theater, allowing talk to flow unforced and overlapping;

he could, however, care more about verbal clarity, even in an overhead-miked 200-odd-seater space like the Attenborough. It is a gloriously unshowy ensemble piece, although Maryann Plunkett (pictured) comes out ahead by a nose as Mary. A simple yet powerful examination of what it – still, so far – means to be American, and indeed to be a human being among others.

Ian Shuttleworth

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