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WHY DON'T YOU BUY MY CASTLE?

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As one of the most prolific art collectors, it almost came natural for ANDREW HALL to buy a castle to celebrate one of his most beloved artists. Since Georg Baselitz sold Schloss Derneburg to the former hedge fund manager, it has turned into a refuge for those seeking some cultured, quiet time – while passing by spectacular pieces from the 77-year-old's giant collection.

A conversation about the luxury of collecting art.

Interview: ADRIANO SACK

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ADRIANO SACK

Mr. Hall, I went to SCHLOSS DERNEBURG recently and did an extended 5-hour tour. What I found puzzling: I could not find the helicopter landing pad. How do you get to Derneburg?

ANDREW HALL

We are modest. We don't use helicopters. We normally fly to Frankfurt and take the train to Hildesheim.

AS How would you describe this place?

AH It's called a Schloss, but it's not really a castle. Originally, it was a Cistercian monastery and I think of it as a monastery. It has a more monastic feel than a palatial feel. It is a living art work, a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. I like to think I have an artistic sensibility but I'm not capable of creating worthy works of art. So, we are curating and creating a certain ambience for the art. Out of practical reasons we can't just throw the doors open and have people come see the collection because we would have to hire hundreds of guards and would go bankrupt in the process. But I actually like the format of people having to do the tour. We join quite a lot of them for the lunches.

AS Right now, there is a feeling in our society that the fringes are getting louder and more aggressive. In Derneburg, it was a group of educated, polite people meeting up for a cultural tour. I found that really comforting.

AH That's exactly the feeling I get. It confirms your faith in human society. Some people might find that bourgeois and reactionary. But you know: So, what? I don't care.

AS Do you remember the very first time you visited Derneburg?

AH My wife and I went to visit Georg Baselitz for tea. We were sitting in the library with him. We were there for an hour and a half or so

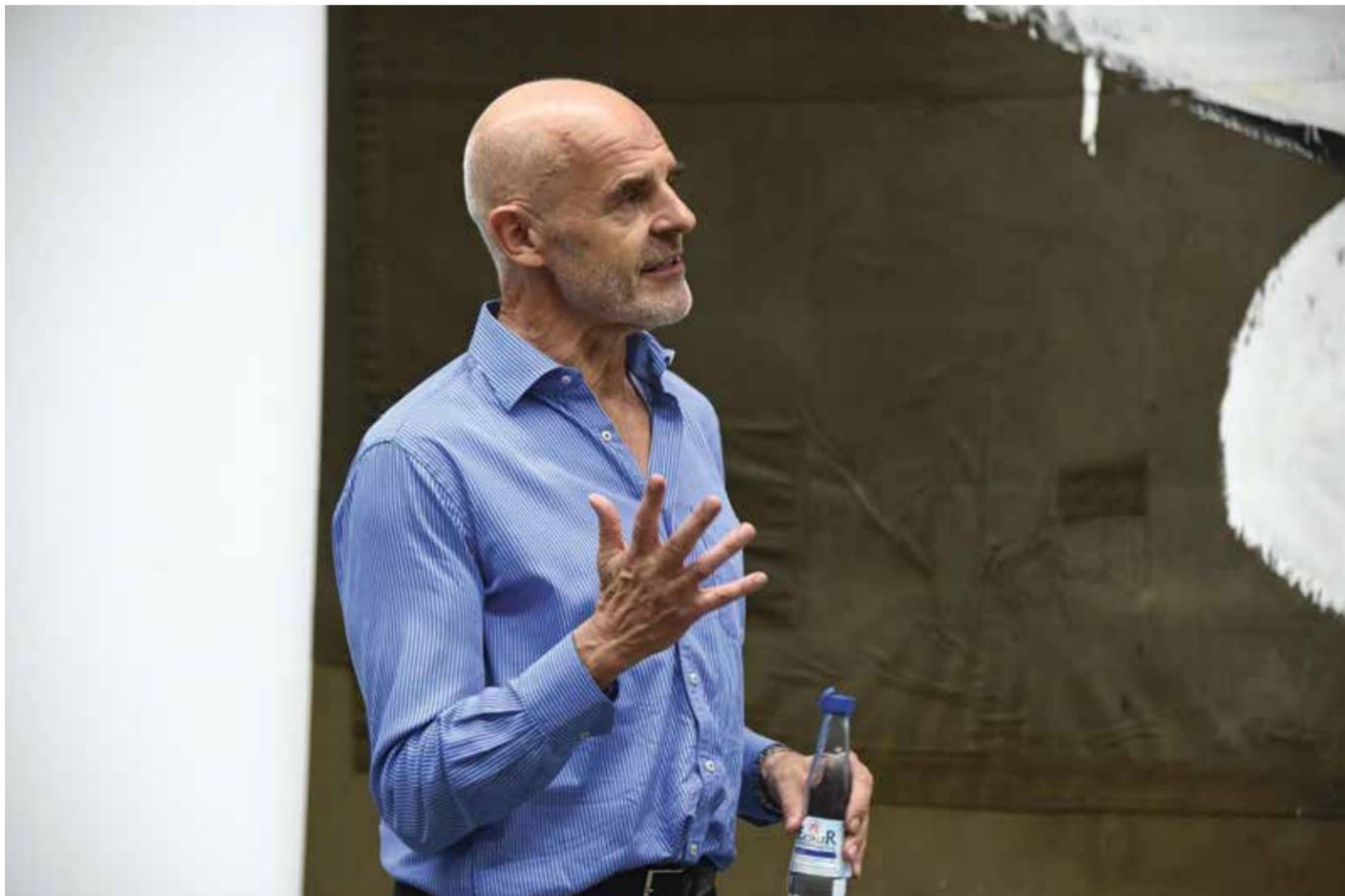


THE LIBRARY AT THE HALL ART FOUNDATION, Schloss Derneburg Museum, Derneburg, Germany © Hall Art Foundation Photo: Helen Doring

and talked about his art and art in general. He would jump up to show things in certain books. We got along quite well and invited ourselves back. Next time we stayed for dinner, the time after we slept in the castle. We became friends, would stay up late drinking. Georg would entertain us singing old, East German mining songs. His wife is a good accordion player.

AS How much of the castle was being used back then?

AH They did not own the domain. Not even the old abbot's house. They were living in a small fraction of the castle. The rest were abandoned rooms. Pretty bohemian. The one constant thing is the library. Georg took his books with him. But we acquired a library of art books from Elke König, the first wife of Kasper König, and are planning to expand it to another building this year.



ANDY HALL Hall Art Foundation, Schloss Derneburg Museum, Derneburg, Germany. © Hall Art Foundation, Photo: Helen Doring

AS On our tour, we were told the purchase of the castle was almost a by-product...

AH Back then, Georg had various art collections. One was a collection of postwar German art, basically of his contemporaries. Among them were a lot of artists represented in our collections. Upon the fourth visit, the idea was floated that we should buy it. On our next visit to Germany he said: "Well, you bought my collection. Why don't you buy my castle? Then you'll have somewhere to show it." At that point, I had been thinking about building a museum in America because it was an old dream of mine to have a public art space. So, we decided to do it here in Germany.

Three years later, Germany passed what they call the *Kulturschutzgesetz*. The irony is that this law keeps us from showing what I consider the masterpieces of our collection in Derneburg. Nobody can guarantee us that we could take these works out of Germany again. I am not handling the negotiations myself, but it seems there might be a solution for that in sight.

AS Why was his collection so interesting? To fill some gaps in your own? Or because a major artist had assembled it?

AH Both. We were already collecting PENCK, KIEFER, POLKE. And Georg has a great eye and knew them from the beginning, so his collection was special.

AS Is it still an entity in your collection, or has it merged?

AH Of course, all the works are tagged G.B. We might show his collection at some point.

AS Why is German art so interesting for you?

AH I never managed to find a quick, snappy answer to this question. It has an interesting form of continuum. From the classical period to today. People tend to view art history as a trajectory from impressionism to cubism and look at Paris mostly. But that neglects an alternative trajectory that takes you to the Northern countries and Germany. German history is very interesting and the art is a reflection of that. There is a certain grittiness that I like. BASELITZ is the perfect example of that.

AS Is he more important than RICHTER?

AH He is. That's obviously not the majority opinion. But let's check in twenty years from now. I hate to quote the market, but in the past ten years, Baselitz's works have sold at higher prices. The jet set still likes abstract works by Richter because they can match them easily to their sofas. But when you get to the 60s, when Richter was at his most interesting, those works sell quite cheaply.

AS I'm intrigued by the private chambers of the castle, the ones not shown on the tour. How are they?

AH We have four or five guest suites for artists, collectors etc. and we use one of them. It's all quite modest. Comfortable, but not grand at all. Not a lot of polished marble.

AS There is a lot of religiously themed art on view right now.

AH In our current show, THE PASSION, we explore the Christian iconography in contemporary art. That might become a permanent exhibition with some works being replaced occasionally; almost every week I come across a work that might fit here. We are collaborating with the Roemer and Pelizaesus Museum in Hildesheim. It has an extraordinary collection of Christian works going back to the 9th century.

AS Did the fact that Derneburg was a monastery intensify your interest in religiously themed art?

AH Yes. I always had a vague interest in Catholicism. Personally, I am a borderline atheist/agnostic. But if I were forced to adapt a religion, I'd become a Catholic.

AS What does the Austrian artist HERMANN NITSCH mean to you?

AH I came across him for the formal qualities of his works. But his paintings are just relics from his performances. I never went to any of those. Ideally, we would have him do such a performance in Derneburg, but I am afraid that this won't happen anymore.

AS The carefully arranged old religious robes show a tender side of him that I didn't know. Other than that, there seems to be a lot of good old white man's rage in his work, no?

AH He was part of the Viennese actionists. One of their themes was religious rituals in a postwar environment. Interesting group and Nitsch kept it up the longest. Austrian artists are not very well known outside of Austria. Another one in our collection is the painter MARIA LASSNIG.

AS Maria Lassnig's room is the part of the exhibition in Derneburg that is dedicated to the late gallerist Barbara Weiss. You only show female artists there. Georg Baselitz said in an interview some years ago that women can't paint. Do you agree?

AH Oh, that again. Actually, this was one of the reasons to put up that show. He was somehow misquoted. Georg likes to be provocative. He said: "Women can't paint because the art market says that they can't paint. It values women's works much less than men's." At that time, it was true.

AS Is collecting art a luxury?

AH It is. You need some money for it. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren despise people

HALL ART FOUNDATION, Schloss Derneburg Museum Derneburg, Germany © Hall Art Foundation Photo: Stephan Hüsch



“Schloss Derneburg confirms your faith in human society. Some people might find that bourgeois and reactionary. But you know: So what? I don't care.”



JONATHAN MEESE, ALBERT OEHLER, DANIEL RICHTER: Works from the Hall Collection April 2019–March 2020. Hall Art Foundation, Schloss Derneburg Museum Derneburg, Germany © Hall Art Foundation Photo: Heinrich Hecht

Former sculpture studio of Georg Baselitz featuring preserved sketches on the wall is now the lunch reception room for visitors. Also installed is Jonathan Meese's bronze sculpture, NAPOLEON (2006). Hall Art Foundation, Schloss Derneburg. Museum Derneburg, Germany. © Hall Art Foundation. Photo: Henner Rosenkranz



like me. The thought that somebody has the means to finance a place like Derneburg is against their beliefs. But our collection was created to be shown to the public and that guides us. In my mind, there is a difference between hanging a 100-million-dollar-PICASSO in a penthouse on Park Avenue that a handful of other billionaires might see, and buying PENCK or BASELITZ and showing it to the good people you met in Derneburg. At least it's a different kind of indulgence.

AS Your collection contains roughly 6000 works. How many mean something to you?

AH All of them. There is not a single work that I did not choose to buy personally.

AS How did you start collecting?

AH When I was living in Paris in the 70s. It was a painting by a French-Hungarian artist, PAUL KALLOS. I was introduced by a friend and ended up buying a fair amount of his works. Right from the get-go I wasn't buying just one thing.

AS Did you grow up in an art-loving environment?

AH Absolutely not. I had no idea that collecting was possible. I thought art was something you looked at in museums.

AS How do you decide what you sell and what you keep? Market movements? Mood swings?

AH We have occasionally sold from the collection and subsequently regretted it deeply. So, we normally do not sell anything from the collection. However, in a former career I was a commodity trader. So, I get offered things that I don't really need. But I recognize a good piece of art for a good price.

So, I buy those things with the express intent of selling them, but I never consider them part of the collection. It's a different account, so to speak. A different part of my brain.

AS I asked DAVID ZWIRNER once if he still discovers young artists. "I wish I could say that. But the truth is, I find them in young galleries," he said. Is that also the fate of a powerful collector?



AH Not at all. We don't spend hours doing studio tours in Brooklyn, but we do discover new artists. Just recently, at an art fair in Capetown. Or I see something on Instagram. I keep my ears and eyes open.

AS Your exhibition dedicated to BARBARA WEISS was the result of the realization that there are not too many female artists in your collection.

AH Not quite true. But Barbara's first question when we met was how many women were in my collection. That changed my mind.

AS Do you think a work of art tells you the gender of its creator?

AH No. But it's relevant. When people tell me I have more white, straight male artists than black, gay female artists, my answer is: That might have to do with the fact that I am a white, straight male. I think the pc-ness of art has gotten totally out of hand. It's ridiculous and patronizing. I could talk for hours about it. The new installation of the MoMA is bending over backwards to be pc.

AS Parts of Derneburg felt intimate despite their scale. For example, the JULIAN SCHNABEL hall. Is he a close friend of yours?

AH Indeed.

AS Can collectors and artists be friends?

AH It's a tricky thing. Artists have big egos. But they are also quite vulnerable. There is a certain narcissistic component. You have to view artists differently. You forgive them behavior that would otherwise be unacceptable.

AS And then there is a certain financial dependency.

AH That is a factor. Most definitely. That is why I don't like to do studio visits. I hate the pressure of someone expecting you to buy something.

AS My favorite part in Derneburg is the kitchen with the old BASELITZ sketches on the wall. How was it when you found it?

AH It was his old sculpture studio. So, there were big chunks of wood, it was a big mess. I am sure you have seen pictures of Francis Bacon's studio. That gives you an idea. Maybe we should have left it like it was. We cleaned it up, but left the sketches on the walls.

AS Is collecting a creative act?

AH Yes.

AS Would you trade your collection for being a talented artist?

AH Would I give up my collection to become Picasso? If I were thirty years old, maybe. But I am seventy. I don't think this would be a good trade.

“That is why I don't like to do studio visits. I hate the pressure of someone expecting you to buy something.”