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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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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 HALE
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 ambiance 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 tours on a regular basis. If you're interested, we have to book in advance. It’s quite cheaply.

AS And how was the tour conducted?
AH Back then, Georg had various art collections. One was a collection of postwar German art, mostly 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. 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 this was an old dream of mine to have a public art space. So, we decided to do it here in Germany.

AS Three years later, Germany passed what they call the Kulturstichgesetz. 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?
AH To fill some gaps in your own? Or because a major artist had assembled it?

AS I think the masterpieces of our collection in Derneburg are special.
AH Both. We were already collecting PENCK, KIEFER, and KOENIG. Georg has a great eye. He is. That’s obviously not the majority opinion. But let’s check in twenty years.

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 the modern period, 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 make them easily to their sofas. But when you get to the 90s, 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 Pelizaeus 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 intensity 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 he just relishes 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 it won’t happen anytime.

AS The carefully arranged old religious robes reveal a tender side of him that I didn’t know. Other than that the collection seems to be a lot of good old white man’s rage in his work, no?
AH He was a political activist. 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 MARRA LASSING.

AS Maria Lassnig 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 somewhat 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 who collect art.
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.

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 remembers when we met. ‘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?

“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 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 cleaned it up, but left the sketches on the walls. We cleaned it up, but left the sketches on the walls.

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 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.