

# Q&A

WITH ANDY HALL,  
FOUNDER OF THE  
HALL ART FOUNDATION

In the words of French Impressionist painter Edgar Degas, “Art is not what you see, it’s what you make others see.” Art philanthropist Andy Hall exemplifies this philosophy through his work with the Hall Art Foundation, an organization that he founded in 2007 with the aim of showcasing thoughtfully-curated collections of contemporary art to the greater public. After spending decades developing and refining his personal art collection with his wife Christine, Hall made the decision that he wanted to do more than just collect—he wanted to give back to the global arts community.

The Halls purchased unique historical properties in Germany and Vermont and subsequently restored them, converting them into stunning exhibition venues. They created elegant spaces where people of all levels of artistic awareness could come to enjoy eclectic and compelling collections of contemporary art. Through their extensive art lending program, the Hall Art Foundation also collaborates with other renowned international museums, galleries, and exhibition spaces, building bridges of cross-cultural connections that make it possible for valuable and culturally-significant artwork to reach a wider audience.

We at VERMONT Magazine had the privilege of speaking with Andy Hall about the origins of the Hall Art Foundation, the future of the art industry, and the power that art has to influence world culture and shape public perspective in times of change and uncertainty.

**Q:** How did you get involved with art? Are you an artist yourself?

**A:** When I was in grammar school in England, I did some “studio art”. I had an interest there. I went to museums and that stayed with me. But it was in my late twenties that I had an epiphany when I was living in Paris. Someone pointed out to me that you could actually buy art for yourself. It might sound improbable, but that was a novel idea to me. I honestly thought that art was something that you just saw in museums. It was then that I started collecting art in a modest way.

**Q:** What was the first piece of art that you purchased?

**A:** It was a painting by a French-Hungarian artist named Paul Kallos.

**Q:** How did you discover Kallos’ work?

**A:** I was introduced to him by a mutual friend who happened to be my French teacher at Berlitz. He was meant to be teaching me business French, but he had little interest in business. He was, however, very interested in art—and in our French lessons, we often ended up talking about art. He introduced me to Paul, and we went to his studio several times. I ended up buying some of his works.

**Q:** What was it that attracted you to his work?

**A:** He had been operating at the borderline of representation and abstraction, and that interface has always interested me. Where do you define the boundary between one and the other? So that was part of the appeal. His work had also evolved radically over the course of his career. He started out using oils but had shifted to acrylics, with a much lighter and more ethereal touch. It was a real evolution and transformation in his work. It always fascinates me when an artist doesn’t get stuck on a single style, medium, or idea.

**Q:** Around what time period was this that you started collecting?

**A:** This was in the late 1970s. I was in my late twenties. Soon after, I got married, and Christine and I came to America. I was very focused on my career at the time. I can’t say that art was a major passion at that point, but it remained an interest. Once I had achieved some professional success, we started acquiring art to decorate our home. We bought works by fairly well-known artists. It was opportunistic and random. It wasn’t an obsessive “collecting bug” at that point. It tended to be according to how “well-off” I was feeling. We acquired some interesting works, quite a few of which we still live with. One of the first significant works we bought was a Joan Mitchell painting. It actually hangs in our home in Vermont. We bought primarily from auction houses. The process is very open and transparent. There’s no pressure to buy anything. You can go to an auction preview and if something interests you, you can bid on it and pay as much as you feel comfortable paying.

Then - around 2000, I went through a “mid-life adjustment” of sorts. Christine pointed out to me that we had become quite well off. So, I decided to focus on more than just growing my bank account. She introduced me to a New York art

dealer. We had lunch. He pointed out to me that I shouldn’t view art as being a luxury, and I shouldn’t view collecting it as consumption. I could even view it as a diversification of my financial assets. That made me comfortable with the idea of spending a lot more of my money on art.

Then 9/11 happened, and that also made me question my life goals. I recalled our visits to London in the 1980s, when the English art collector, Charles Saatchi, had staged a number of absolutely spectacular exhibitions at his gallery in North London. It all came together. I got a real “collecting bug”. A lot of collectors talk about art collecting as an obsession or an addiction. I became an addict, but it wasn’t driven by the idea of buying paintings like trophies to hang in my home. It was motivated by the idea of creating a public space somewhere where we could give exhibitions of our art collection. That mindset defined how we went about collecting—we decided we were going to collect in depth. We wanted to be able to make exhibitions that were worth sharing with others. That’s what we’ve been doing for almost 20 years now.

**Q:** You mentioned your wife many times. Is she an artist or art lover?

**A:** Christine and I have known each other since high school. My undergraduate degree is in chemistry, and Christine’s degree is in microbiology. We’re from the other end of the spectrum in terms of education, but art has always been an interest or a passion that we have shared.

**Q:** Do you and your wife tend to agree on art? Are there any instances in which you have vehemently disagreed?

**A:** I would say that we generally are on the same wavelength. There have been some artists that I have become passionate about where she has been not so sure, but then eventually comes around. I tend to be more impulsive. Christine tends to be more reflective about it.

**Q:** Let’s talk about the actual art that you’ve collected. I understand that the Hall Art Foundation specializes in “Post-War” art. Is there a reason that you are attracted to art from that era?

**A:** Post-War art is the art that defines our time. I was born in 1950, so it’s the art of my generation. That’s not to say that we are completely disinterested in art from other periods. To the contrary, we have spent many hours visiting museums around the world, discovering and rediscovering

older work. When it comes to collecting, though, if you don’t specialize in terms of the art you collect, you can get spread a little thin. We have bought the odd work from earlier periods of Pre-War art, but that’s the exception. Our collecting has been driven by how best to put cohesive groups of work together in the context of running a successful museum program. I jokingly say that I’m a frustrated museum director or curator. No one’s ever going to hire me or appoint me for those jobs, but I am in a position where I can appoint myself. I can do it without some of the constraints that museum directors or curators normally operate under.

**Q:** You mentioned Anselm Kiefer. You have an exhibition of his works in Massachusetts at the Mass MoCA campus. I think it’s really wonderful that your organization is committed to inter-organizational collaboration. How did the collaboration with Mass MoCA come about?

**A:** We got to know Mass MoCA through Jock Reynolds, who was the director of the Yale Museum of Art. We had acquired some monumental works of Anselm Kiefer, and we weren’t sure what to do with them, at least in the short term. We reached out

to Jock, who introduced us to Joe Thompson, the director of Mass MoCA. We ended up doing a substantial Kiefer exhibition at Mass MoCA. It was a very successful show. It looked great, and it was very well received. I then asked Joe if he would be interested in doing something more permanent. He said “Be my guest. We have a few buildings that we still need to develop. Take your pick.” We found a building that worked for us and came up with a plan to develop it. We designed the installation collaboratively with Anselm and his studio. He came to Mass MoCA to survey everything and make sure he was happy with it. That exhibition space opened four or five years ago. It was all somewhat serendipitous through that initial introduction by Jock Reynolds.

**Q:** You must have had some dealings with other artists. Do you think you can separate the art from the artist? Do you think art should be judged based on whether someone is a wonderful human being or not?

**A:** That’s a really interesting question. We could have a whole conversation on that. A lot of artists, historically, were quite awful people when judged by today’s standards.

There are also artists who are alive today who probably haven’t adjusted too well to current sensibilities. But if you mean are there any artists in the collection that we don’t like, no one springs to mind. I have met a couple of artists who I have taken an instant dislike to, but funnily enough, we don’t own any of their work.

**Q:** Do you find the artists you work with to be interesting people?

**A:** Absolutely. Artists really put themselves out there, and because of that I think they’re very vulnerable in some ways. In order to overcome that vulnerability, artists have to develop a thick skin, not always being appreciated - or even being reviled. For that reason, they can sometimes appear egocentric. I think that you have to make allowances for that. Artists are very individualistic. They’re not your typical “boy or girl next door”, but I think that’s fine. It makes them interesting, and also wonderful people to talk to and be around. In my experience, artists are very stimulating company.

**Q:** Agreed. I would like to ask you the obvious question for VERMONT Magazine readers: How did you end up in Vermont?



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**A:** Well, why not end up in Vermont? It's a very beautiful state. When we discovered Vermont, Christine and I were living in Connecticut in a suburban area that felt like it was in the shadows of New York. We were missing the beautiful landscapes of England. Then we spent a weekend in Vermont, and said "Hey, this place is pretty nice. It has a different feel". It was rural in a way that Connecticut wasn't. We came up one weekend looking for a property and ended up buying almost the first one that we saw, an old dairy farm in Reading, Vermont. A few years later another dairy farm nearby came on the market so we bought that as well. We owned it for some time without really knowing what we were going to do with it. Then Christine decided that we should turn it into a place for an artist-in-residence program. I took a look at it when we were halfway into it and I thought "My god...this is the perfect place for a museum!" and our foundation took it over. We opened it to the public about four or five years ago.

**Q:** It was interesting that your original intention was to make it into an artist-in-residence space and then decided that the property was a more appropriate space for a museum. People sometimes

have a difficult time with changing gears. Thinking about an educational program is one thing, but thinking about a museum is a different scale. When you decided to build a museum there, what was the response?

**A:** We set up our foundation back in 2005 or 2006, and the first thing that we did was the collaboration with Mass MoCA. The idea then occurred to us to use the second property that we had acquired in Vermont as a further extension of the foundation. It has been well received. We don't get an overwhelming number of visitors, but from the visitors that do come, we only get positive feedback.

**Q:** Are there any Vermont artists included in the collection?

**A:** About three years ago, we started the "Made in Vermont" exhibition series, which we held in the visitor's reception area. This "Made in Vermont" series has been well-received and reviewed by various Vermont publications. For at least two or three of the artists that we featured in the shows, it helped to change the trajectory of their careers.

**Q:** Art is one of those things that people see as decoration. Some people see it as a true "object", while others see it as an investment that they can keep in a storage facility. I'm curious to hear your take on it. You've mentioned art as decoration for your home, you mentioned it in the context of collecting it as an object for its artistic value, and you've mentioned it as a financial investment. What does art mean to you?

**A:** To clarify, I don't see art as purely an investment in any sense. Paul Kasmin was the New York art dealer who I knew and mentioned earlier. Sadly, he recently passed away. He was very influential in my journey in the art world. He was the one who told me that I shouldn't view art as conspicuous consumption. It's not like buying a fleet of Rolls Royce cars or a private plane or boat. But art is something that can hold its value over time and that made me feel better about spending a lot of money on it. However, my thought process concerning investing money in art was very different from the way I would put money into stocks or bonds. It's not an investment mentality. There are a lot of people whose approach and involvement in art is exactly that—purely an

investment. Unfortunately, it's a very significant part of the art market and the art world these days. I find it distasteful. On the other hand, Christine and I have so much money invested in art that we can't ignore the value of it. Obviously when you're spending a lot of money on a piece of art you have to make sure that you're not spending money foolishly. It's impossible to completely ignore the financial aspect of it, but for me it is secondary to the artistic considerations. However, there are many collectors who consider the financial aspect to be the only thing. I won't name any names, but I remember many years ago being introduced to a world-famous collector. He and his wife had the most amazing collection of works. His collection was remarkable, but he couldn't wait to sit me down by his computer to show me the spreadsheet where he had every work of art listed alongside what he paid for it, and the estimate of each artwork's current value. It seemed he was much more interested in the financial dimension than the artistic dimension.

**Q:** With all of these different factors at play in the art world, how do you see art as a whole progressing in the future, and how do you see the Hall Art Foundation progressing along with it?

**A:** The art world was already undergoing some fairly major changes with artists, galleries, auction houses, museums, collectors, and financial speculators all now interacting in a more connected and transparent world. Now we have the Covid-19 crisis which is already having a profound impact on the art world. Globally, it's in crisis mode. Covid-19 is going to hasten change. The art world was already having to deal with much greater transparency, with things like the internet and Instagram and online auctions changing the dynamic of the art industry. I don't know how it's all going to shake out, but from the perspective of the Hall Art Foundation, our mission hasn't changed. We want to continue to create, to use a German term, a "Gesamtkunstwerk", or a total artwork. We want our place in Germany, Schloss Derneburg, and on a much smaller scale, our property in Vermont, to not just be where people come to see interesting exhibitions and collections of art presented in a thoughtful way, but places that give people a more holistic experience, where they can see great art in an aesthetically pleasing environment. It's not just about the art. It's also about the architecture and the surrounding environment. As I say, the totality of the



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experience, a true Gesamtkunstwerk. The most cathartic art experience that we ever had was when we went to Marfa, Texas about 15 years ago. It wasn't just the art, it was the way that it was presented. It was a true epiphany seeing the installations there. In a modest way, that's what we aspire to with our installations in Vermont, and Germany.

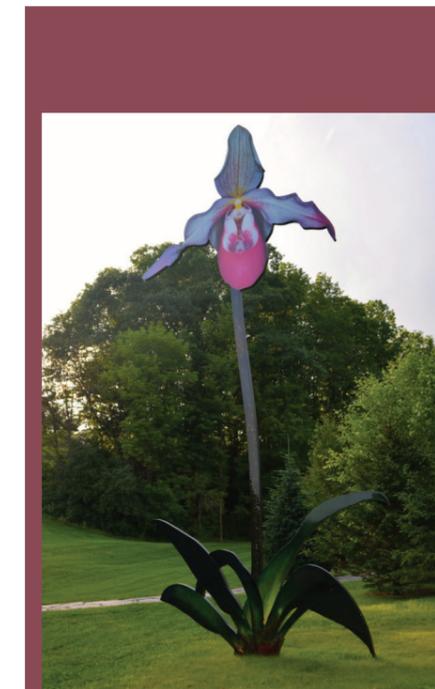
**Q:** It's always interesting to see, especially in the context of current events, how times of change inspire new art. Do you think art itself also has the potential to help people come together to overcome challenges in difficult times?

**A:** I would certainly hope so. I think that history demonstrates that to be the case. We have been travelling much more, and visiting museums around the world and exploring periods of art history that we were not so familiar with. We've also immersed ourselves in European history. When you read about things such as the thirty-year war it's interesting to see the art made in these times of upheaval. A lot of the great artworks that were created in these periods were probably in response to the challenges that people were going through. I like to think that art provided inspiration to people when they needed it most. I also think that to be the case today. One of the ironies of the Covid-19 crisis is that it has forced these museums to close. But art still provides an emotional outlet for people, and we can share it by other means, such as social media. I've become a fan of Instagram lately. The people whom I communicate with on Instagram get inspired by art. And more than that, we get spiritual and emotional support from being able to share interesting art that catches our attention with one another.

**Q:** It's an encouraging sign to see that in spite of current events, art continues to find a way to inspire people. Is there anything else you would like to let people know about the Hall Art Foundation?

**A:** I would say that there are a lot of people who might feel intimidated by art or think they know too little about it to understand it. I would tell those people that it is more than worth overcoming their trepidation and coming to the Hall Art Foundation in Vermont. We've had a series for the last two summers, the "Open Friday" events. I think there were a lot of people who had little to no prior experience with art who came to those events and were pleasantly surprised. I just hope that we can help even more people to overcome their reservations so that they can enjoy the art.

Art is very powerful in its ability to change peoples' perspectives. Every time art gets delivered to Schloss Derneburg, it has to be inspected by the customs officials. A couple of years ago we had an exhibition of large-scale photographs by the German photographer-artist, Candida Höfer. Apparently, when the customs guys walked into the gallery and saw the artwork leaning against the wall, their jaws literally dropped. They said "this is amazing". That is an example of a moment where you can open someone's eyes to something that they were not appreciative of before. When you give someone a new perspective, a new appreciation of the world through art, you open up a whole new set of possibilities for them.



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