

# Collecting and Sharing

Agnes Husslein-Arco



Collecting is a passion, a fervent devotion to specific objects, which the collector seeks out and acquires in order to understand, enjoy, and preserve them. Almost anything can be a collectible, and unlike a “hoarder,” the collector catalogues, structures, arranges his or her collection and complements it where possible, so it remains a dynamic ensemble.

FIG. 1 MARTIN VAN MEYTENS, *ARCHDUCHESS MARIE CHRISTINE*, 1750

FIG. 2 HELGA DRUML, *HEIDI GOËSS-HORTEN*, 2018

Art collections have existed in all ages. The earliest generations of collectors were stirred and driven by piety, the thirst for power, the sheer pleasure of looking, the spirit of cultural patronage, or a desire for knowledge. The seventeenth century was the golden age of the cabinet of curiosity—art and nature on a small scale united in a display that reflected an extravagant urge to collect. *Virtuosi* was the period’s term for the connoisseurs who, scattered throughout Europe, engaged in this passion. If you aspired to be a person of consequence, you needed to possess something out of the ordinary, incomparable, objects that people would travel from far and wide to gaze at in amazement—an allure that museums today still covet. After the mid-eighteenth century, art and nature went through a gradual divorce, settling for neighborly relations that are on view in Vienna, where the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Naturhistorisches Museum, facing each other, were jointly inaugurated in 1889.

The building that houses the graphic art collections of Duke Albert Casimir of Sachsen-Teschen—known as the Albertina—is more than a century older. His name lives on in the museum’s fame, and so people are prone to overlook the fact that Albert’s wife, Archduchess Marie Christine of Austria, took an active part in their collecting efforts from the early days of their marriage until her



FIG. 3 ARCHDUCHESS MARIE CHRISTINE, *SELF-PORTRAIT AT THE SPINNING WHEEL*, 1765

death in 1798. In fact, it may have been she who initiated the endeavor: the first portfolio of copperplate prints known to have been in Albert's possession was a gift from Marie Christine during their engagement, allegedly intended to encourage him to take an interest in fine art. The fifth child of Emperor Francis I Stephen and Empress Maria Theresia of Austria, she was not expected to assume political office yet was nonetheless given a comprehensive education in the arts and sciences. Her talent for drawing was noted early on and nurtured, as a painting produced by the workshop of the Flemish artist Martin van Meytens around 1750 shows (fig.). In an almost bour-



geois self-portrait she painted in 1765, she poses by a spinning wheel amid a modest picture gallery (fig.). The composition is based on an etching by Johann Kaspar Heilmann that is still in the Albertina's collection. Collecting, drawing, and presenting: the harmonious union of these three is Marie Christine's lasting legacy at the Albertina. She corresponded with dealers and let Albert know what she wanted to buy. Her acquisitions were not necessarily guided by a clear strategy; rather, she developed an unerring eye for special objects. Netherlandish drawings and prints held her particular interest. In 1778, she sent her husband a catalogue of works by the Flemish painter David Teniers and the Dutchman Frans van Mieris, writing that looking at the offerings *made her mouth water*. The classification of the collection's holdings based on geographic regions, periods, and styles grew out of Albert's ongoing work on enlarging their treasure.

The building of a collection and its presentation go hand in hand, as these venerable institutions and the edifices in which they reside illustrate. The motivations and interests that shape them are as diverse as the collectors' personalities. In 2011, the magazine *Kunstforum* dedicated not one but two issues to the figure of the collector and an attempt to chart a kind of typology that covers both the "beginners' generation" and their contemporary successors. Among the types listed are the intellectual collector, who cherishes his art collection as a wellspring of knowledge; the conceptual thinker, for whom art is the building material for his own edifice of ideas; the aestheticist, who seeks to furnish a world unto itself, wholly separate from the one around him; and the devotee for whom following one clearly defined tendency, even one outstanding artist, becomes his purpose in life. There are collectors who acquire only works they understand at first glance; and others for whom, on the contrary, collecting "strangers" opens doors to unimagined realms of experience. Investors factor expected profits into their calculations; adventurers thrill to the excitement of an auction; gut-feeling collectors make purchases on the spur of the moment, with the same intuitive certainty that fills someone who has fallen in love at first sight. These types are no more than rough categories, but they help us identify recognizable patterns. Duke Albert, for one, was presumably a collector for whom art brought the world into his home and lent order to things. His wife Marie Christine, by contrast, was a spontaneous and emotional collector. In this respect, the Albertina's first ardent female patron bears some resemblance to the collector Heidi Goëss-Horten, who is now transforming the former archducal office wing into a museum for her own art collection.

The path that Heidi Goëss-Horten has charted in assembling her collection is as personal as it is singular, and to describe it we must retrace several key phases.

Art played a vital role in her life from her earliest days. Her father was a professional engraver; in his spare time, he painted landscapes and portraits, and some of his pictures are now part of the Heidi Horten Collection. Goëss-Horten inherited his interest in the medium and still works on her own paintings in her studio on the shore of Lake Wörthersee (fig.). More importantly, her early contact with painting instilled the belief in her that art is an integral part of life.

This conviction also informed the years she shared with her first husband, Helmut Horten. When they were married in 1966, they already had art in their home in Düsseldorf. Paintings by Emil Nolde, Marc Chagall, Lucas Cranach, and others graced the walls of their villa by the Rhine,



FIG. 4 ROBERT LEBECK, *HELMUT AND HEIDI HORTEN*, 1962

which was otherwise furnished in the modern style. Together, they decided to make additional acquisitions, often as they traveled the world or in the cities and towns where they had homes. These purchases show that Heidi and Helmut Horten had a firm grasp of contemporary developments, though they do not yet add up to a collection in the strict sense of the word. The two were not part of the inner circle of the collectors' scene around the industrialists Irene and Peter Ludwig, Anette and Udo Brandhorst, and Marianne and Viktor Langen that emerged in the Rhineland in the 1960s. But they brought open minds to art and had compiled a library reflecting their interests, as we know from pictures taken by Robert Lebeck or the Düsseldorf-based photographer Liselotte Strelow, who portrayed the couple in the privacy of their home in 1961 (fig.). The record also shows that Helmut Horten shared his interest in art with his employees. An article in a 1964 issue of the company magazine *Der Einblick* reports on the restoration of Franz Marc's painting



FIG. 5 MARC CHAGALL,  
*LES SALTIMBANQUES*, 1971

*The Red Foxes* (1913), which Horten had gifted to the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf two years earlier.

Heidi Goëss-Horten did not take up collecting systematically until after Helmut Horten's death, and so she can take credit for transforming what was a "hodgepodge" of valuable paintings into a steadily growing and cohesive collection. In the early 1990s, she took her cue from the list of artists already represented in the collection, complementing her possessions by purchasing additional works by Chagall, Nolde, Raoul and Jean Dufy, or Moïse Kiesling. Over time, however, her focus shifted. Collecting as an active pursuit gave her life a novel direction and quality, became an expression of her personal passion.

I have supported Heidi Goëss-Horten since these early years, offering guidance as she navigated the



art market's peculiar rules. We had known each other for quite a while when, in June 1996, I assisted her in her first truly major move as a collector. I was managing director of Sotheby's Austria at the time, and it was a special honor to be able to put my expertise in modern and contemporary art at her service, consulting with her on her purchases at the auctions in London and joining her on the phone to place bids. Those auction days in London were an experience I will never forget. I vividly recall the incomparable atmosphere in the room when we won bidding after bidding; all in all, we bought thirty paintings of modernist and contemporary art. In just a few days, Goëss-Horten had succeeded in securing iconic masterworks for her collection.

This remarkable feat lent the collection a profile that it had not had, and opened up a fresh perspective for it. Figurative art was now complemented by abstraction; classic modernism, by international contemporary art. And, most saliently, the acquisitions were unmistakably guided by a woman's perspective, lending a more feminine complexion to the collection as a whole.

The spectacular birth of her personal collection caught the media's attention. Summarizing the London auctions on June 30, 1996, the *New York Times* speculated that the "mystery buyer," as the reporter called Heidi Goëss-Horten, would "eventually open a museum or establish a foundation for the art." The overwhelming public response to her grand coup strengthened Goëss-Horten's belief that she was on the right track, and over the years that followed, she grew more courageous in her choices. More than twenty years would pass before she would actually resolve to establish her own museum. For the time being, her decision to actively and methodically buy art reflected her wish to enhance and embellish the scenes of her own life.

Patently built up over more than three decades, the collection now stands out for its clearly defined international profile, with foci in classic modernism, the abstract painting of the 1960s, American pop art, sculpture, plastic arts, and contemporary art, including by artists—women and men—who have only recently begun to attract the art world's attention. Thematic emphases in-

FIG. 6 MOÏSE KIESLING,  
*MODELE AU REPOS*, 1930





FIG. 7 VIEW OF THE EXHIBITION  
*WOW! THE HEIDI HORTEN  
COLLECTION*, LEOPOLD MUSEUM,  
2018

clude figure paintings, and especially of women; animals and nature; and applied art. In these fields, the Heidi Horten Collection now rivals the holdings of leading museums in quality, boasting treasures that are unmatched in Vienna, in Austria, even in Europe, including works by Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana, Francis Bacon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and others. The most recent acquisitions, such as John Armleder's light piece *Target*, bought at an auction in the winter of 2020, resolutely bring the collection into the present. One might think that its evolution is gradually coming to an end. Yet—and I believe this is a blessing for all of us—Heidi Goëss-Horten is determined to keep thinking forward. By building a new museum, she has launched her collection toward a cultural future in which it will help define the canon of public art history. The museum is a gift to her native city and lets her exquisite collection shine in new ways. Rather than seeking the spotlight for herself, Goëss-Horten is sharing with the visitors to her future museum the pleasure of contemplating objects that have hitherto kept her company in the privacy of her home, that have been sources of positive energy in her life.

Heidi Goëss-Horten joins a long line of women collectors whose vision led them to create forums of public engagement with art. In recent years, in particular, a growing number of women have built extraordinary exhibition spaces for their private collections. Inaugurated in June 2021, Luma Arles, the center dedicated to exhibitions and scholarship endowed by the Swiss collector Maja Hoffmann, has been hailed as spectacular. The Polish businesswoman and collector Grażyna Kulczyk's Muzeum Susch in the Engadin was completed in 2019. The tradition of women benefactors in the arts also includes Julia Stoschek, Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Ingvild Goetz, and Peggy Guggenheim and goes back at least to Helene Kröller-Müller, reportedly one of the wealthiest women in the Netherlands around 1900; the museum in Otterlo still has one of the world's largest



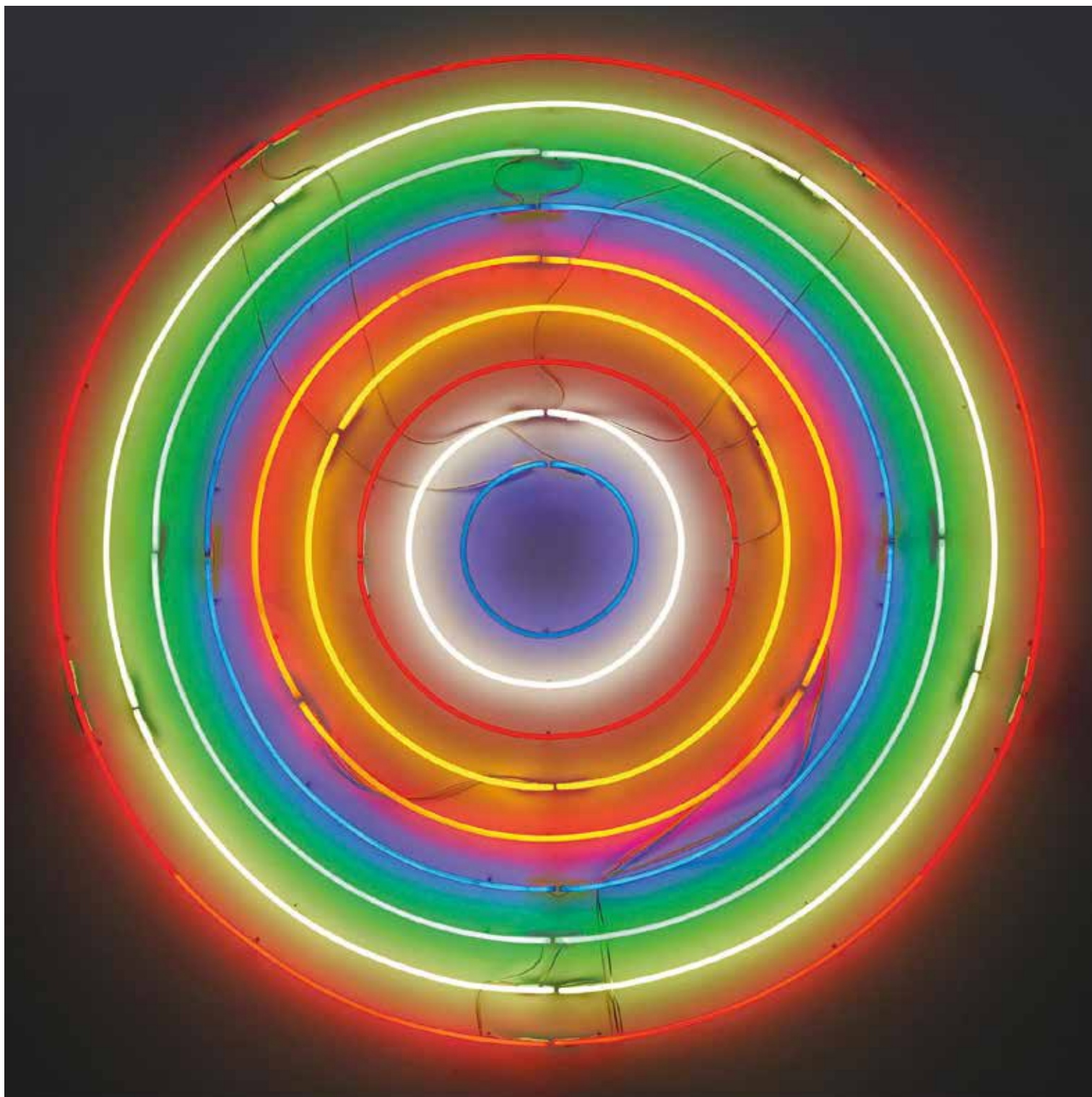


FIG. 8 JOHN M. ARMLEDER,  
*UNTITLED (TARGET)*, 2001

collections of Van Goghs. Her motto, “Collecting for eternity,” might be applied to a whole number of new museums founded in connection with a private collection.

Private museums are a growing trend, not just in Austria but around the world. In Europe, it has been fueled by the decline of an alternative form of endowment, the permanent loan to a public



FIG. 9 LENA HENKE, *NICHE*, 2020

institution, which has turned out to be fraught with complications. The establishment of a private art museum like the one devoted to the Heidi Horten Collection is not about the widely criticized entanglement of art and the market. Rather, its objective is to safeguard the individual collector's ideas and wishes, the vision that shaped the development of the collection. Private collections evolve in accordance with their own logic and do not represent a government mandate; they reflect a personal perspective. The growing number of private museums add to the visibility of art and culture outside the public institutions, if often on a more intimate scale. Newly created spaces—spaces that, in the present instance, display a very personal touch—showcase the art and encourage and guide audiences' engagement with it. The museum we are building for the Heidi Horten Collection is designed to forge new forms of such engagement, and we are working with a number of contemporary artists to put this idea into practice. We are profoundly grateful to the project's patron, Heidi Goëss-Horten, for the boldness of her vision and the dedication with which she has pursued it.

Bibliography  
*Die Gründung der Albertina. Herzog Albert und seine Zeit*, ed. Christian Benedik (exh. cat., Albertina, Vienna 2014), Ostfildern 2014.  
"Die heilige Macht der Sammler" and "Die heilige Macht der Sammler II," *Kunstforum International*, nos. 209, 211 (2011).