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THE TOP 100



COLLECTORS IN AMERICA

By *Bobbie Leigh & Rebecca Dimling Cochran*

Selecting this year's list of the "Top 100 Collectors in America" was an exciting challenge. While there are many fantastic collections in the United States, two main criteria set the standard. First, each of the collectors listed has an outstanding collection of art or antiques. (Collectors who asked to remain anonymous were omitted.)

Only individuals who reside in the United States more than six months a year, are currently active in their field and whose collections have been validated by respected authorities were included. The collection's size was not a determining factor; rather, the focus was on collectors with a discriminating eye for quality and historical importance.

The second criterion was the extent to which the collectors' philanthropic pursuits reflect their collecting passion. Just as there are stages in any profession, true collectors progress in their interest and commitment to the field in which

they collect. At a certain point, inveterate collectors begin to see themselves not just as connoisseurs, but also as stewards of their possessions. Many then begin to develop a desire to share their expertise and love of great works of art with a wider public.

On the following pages, meet the collectors who have advanced the appreciation of new or established fields of art. This action takes many forms, from donating major portions of their collections to museums to giving scholarships to art students to financing traveling exhibitions and the catalogs that accompany them. Many of

these people serve on the boards of institutions as benefactors, trustees and committee chairs. Still others organize symposia and give lectures on their specialties. Whatever form their philanthropy has taken, these collectors deserve recognition for the time, energy and financial resources they have given to share their erudition and enthusiasm.





The Gaurs surrounded by works from their collection of contemporary Indian art, which is considered to be one of the largest in the nation. Madhvi Parekh's "On My Way Home" (facing), 1999, watercolor on paper.

Sunanda & Umesh Gaur

North Brunswick, New Jersey
Post-Independence Indian art

Given that Indian writers working in English are among the most admired novelists today, it should come as no surprise that Indian painters are providing a body of work proving equally exceptional. Increasingly, thanks to collectors like Sunanda and Umesh Gaur, contemporary Indian painting from the post-Independence (1947) era is gaining widespread respect and admiration. The Gaurs collect contemporary works that defy simple categorization. "Our only criterion is that we must enjoy the work aesthetically," says Umesh, whose collection is one of the largest devoted to contemporary Indian art in the nation. The works range from abstract to realist, from mythic to minimalist, and from primitive to psychological. What often unites them are the subtle and often difficult-to-detect aspects of contemporary Indian culture for Indians and others alike.

"We started to collect about 10 years ago," says Umesh. Born in India, he came to the United States in 1974 as a Ph.D. student in chemistry. Today he runs a money management firm; Sunanda is a pediatrician. The collection, which consists mainly of works by well-known and accomplished contemporary masters, was acquired for the most part in U.S. auction houses. "We have about 25 artists whose work we go after," says Umesh, who just last summer bought six major works.

At first glance, many of the Gaurs' paintings seem more Western than Indian. But as Umesh emphasizes, the Indian influence is subtle. The monumental nudes of Krishna Hawlji Ara have a palette of bold color in an almost impressionistic treatment, but as Umesh points out, images like a bird in a cage symbolize the parrot Indian men used to give their wives to keep

them company when they traveled on business, hoping that on their return the birds would reveal any marital indiscretions. Fewer traces of ethnicity tend to appear in the work of Tyeb Mehta, whose paintings now are sought by museums and collectors worldwide. Mehta uses Matisse-like flat colors and figures to convey the almost existential pathos of his mutilated abstract figures.

Along with variety and diversity, another aspect of the Gaurs' collection is a predominance of women artists, such as Madhvi Parekh, Arpana Caur and Arpita Singh. "Their work expresses significant statements about liberation, sexuality, psychology and death—all traditional themes in Indian painting, but now transformed into contemporary realities," Umesh says.

Recognizing that the art-going public needs to be more aware of the scope and talent of contemporary Indian painters, Umesh contacted the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University in New Jersey and suggested an exhibition. The result was last year's show, "India: Contemporary Art from Northeastern Private Collections," which included more than 100 works from more than 20 collections. "The public reaction was overwhelming," Umesh says. "Most did not expect this post-Independence era art to be so all-encompassing. They expected more figurative and mythological paintings. Now we are exploring the idea of putting together a smaller show that can travel." "Post-Independence Contemporary Indian Art: Selections from the Sunanda and Umesh Gaur Collection" made its debut December 5 at Rutgers University's Robeson Gallery in Newark where it can be seen through March 14.

—Bobbie Leigh

George S. Abrams

Boston
17th-century Dutch drawings

Martha & Dan Albrecht

Phoenix & Santa Fe,
New Mexico
Northern Native American art

Mary Margaret & Harry W. Anderson

San Francisco
Modern & contemporary art

Nancy & Philip Anschutz

Denver
American art

Katharine & Robert Booth

Philadelphia
Folk art

Irma & Norman Braman

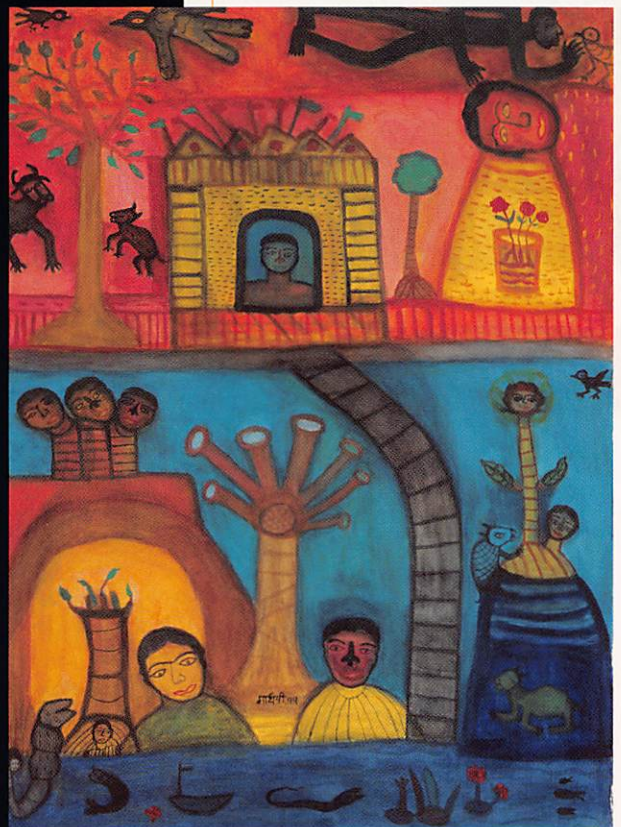
Miami
Modern & contemporary art

Edythe & Eli Broad

Los Angeles
Modern & contemporary art

Andrea & Charles Bronfman

Palm Beach, Florida
& New York City
Contemporary decorative arts



A striking Britannia standard silver wine cooler (below), 1718–19, marked by David Willaume. An ornate Paul Crespin silver-and-ivory teapot (far below), 1740–41. The Hartmans (facing) display a few pieces from their renowned collection of English silver.

realm. “We like to share our things because we want to make sure that the love of objects does not die,” Simone explains. So the works stayed at the MFA,

where they were acquired by the museum as a partial gift/partial purchase.

The Hartmans, who continue to collect, admit that they miss having the objects around, but say they visit them often. “We have a summer home in Cape Cod, and we often go to Boston,” says Simone. “We’re fortunate that we were able to place the collection in a situation that was advantageous to us as well as the public.”

—Rebecca Dimling Cochran



William Morris's "Raft" (above), 1998, hand-blown and sculpted glass, in the collection of Simona and Jerome Chazen.

Linda & Walter O. Evans
Savannah, Georgia
African-American art

Daphne & Peter Farago
Key Biscayne, Florida
Contemporary decorative arts

Berthe & John Ford
Baltimore
South Asian art

Maxine & Stuart Frankel
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Minimal & abstract contemporary art

Anne & Bill Fraumann
Chicago
Pre-Columbian ceramics

Melinda & Bill Gates
Seattle
Impressionist art

Sunanda & Umesh Gaur
North Brunswick, New Jersey
Post-Independence Indian art

Alice Rae Yelen & Kurt A. Gitter
New Orleans

17th- to 20th-century Japanese art & 20th-century American self-taught art

Nancy & Robinson Grover
Hartford, Connecticut
Contemporary photography

Agnes Gund & Daniel Shapiro
New York City
*Modern & contemporary art (Gund)
West African art (Shapiro)*

Dianne & Bruce Halle
Phoenix
Modern & contemporary Latin American art

Simone & Alan Hartman
New York City
Late 17th- to mid-18th-century English silver

Preston H. Haskell
Jacksonville, Florida
Contemporary art

