

As the legendary Victor and Sally Ganz trove goes on the auction block, their would-be successors are

# The Contemporary Collector's Art

By Amei Wallach

**After Victor Ganz died in 1987**, his widow, Sally, spent much of her time in the room they had painted Picasso-red to set off the five paintings from Picasso's variations on Delacroix's "Women of Algiers" that hung there. Sally Ganz would curl up near a table piled high with books by Virginia Woolf and Nabokov, fondle a diminutive bronze Picasso bull and light another cigarette. "Art isn't just buying that picture on the wall," she told me one afternoon. "It adds a measure of grace to one's life."

One paradox of collecting is that the art the Ganzes bought for grace has proved a spectacular investment. On Nov. 10, 1988, 12 paintings from the Ganz collection sold for \$48.4 million at Sotheby's, the third-highest gross for a collection of modern and contemporary art sold at auction. Sally Ganz died last winter, and this Nov. 10 the four Ganz children are selling 115 more works at Christie's. The auction house expects the sale of paintings and works on paper by Picasso, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and Eva Hesse to realize more than \$125 million. In fact, Christie's chairman, Christopher Burge, says — as do some executives at his competitor, Sotheby's — that the sale could break the \$135.3 million record for a single-owner collection sold at auction.

"They were collectors who looked at art in an extraordinarily intelligent way — a way you don't see anymore," Burge says rather recklessly for someone in the business of collecting collectors. But Victor and Sally Ganz were a paradigm — focused, informed, oblivious to fashion and willing to go into debt for what they wanted. On Saturdays, during the 40's and 50's, the couple set out to visit galleries, and no matter what

they saw, they bought Picasso. As Kate Ganz Dormant explains her parents' obsession, the artist expressed what Victor Ganz hid with distance and wit.

By the time Victor Ganz died, collectors in his mode seemed to be endangered. International investors were buying anything by a recognizable name at any price, and a kind of collector emerged who didn't just want to find the next Picasso but to create him. Foremost among them was Charles Saatchi, the advertising executive who so adroitly promoted new artists that rumors of a Saatchi purchase could sell out a show. Once the art market crashed in 1991, the investor-collectors disappeared.

Now a new generation of contemporary collectors is surfacing. Some bought low after the crash and became more enmeshed with art as they learned about it. Others, like many of the artists who became prominent in the last decade, see art as an agent for social change and want to play a role in the process. Three examples follow: Peter Norton and his wife, Eileen, wield purchases and patronage in a crusade to challenge and racially integrate the art world. Kent Logan began buying what 80's collectors were dumping at fire-sale prices. He now competes with Saatchi, who has returned to high-profile collecting with artists adept at shock techniques, to assemble a definitive 90's collection. Ydessa Hendeles uses the art she buys in her own exhibitions. Grace may no longer guide these collectors, but passion still does, a passion that could lead them to the Picassos of the future.

On top of an artwork: The Nortons, at home with their collection, sitting on "A to Z 1994 Living Unit Customized for Eileen and Peter Norton" by Andrea Zittel. Also moving in are two of four sections of Yasumasa Morimura's "Portrait (Futago)," near left, and "Bag Lady in Flight," by David Hammons, far right.

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Portraits by George Lange





busy acquiring what they hope are the Picassos of the future.



## Peter and Eileen Norton

**W**HEN THE 1980'S ART MARKET CRASHED, SO DID THE STAR SYSTEM that had kept all eyes focused on the New York gallery scene. Beginning in 1990, curators and collectors began to take a closer look at artists with audiences elsewhere — in Los Angeles, London, Cologne, Harlem. Capitalizing on this expanded vision, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the New Museum of Contemporary Art and the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (now closed) mounted a three-venue New York show of issue-oriented art outside the white, male mainstream. "The Decade Show" not only introduced the African-American artists Lorna Simpson, David

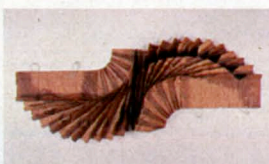
Hammons and Melvin Edwards to a wider public but also reignited the careers of the socially critical artists Leon Golub and Ida Applebroog and allowed such established stars as Cindy Sherman and Jean-Michel Basquiat to be seen in a different light.

Peter and Eileen Norton were central to the moment. He is the first of the new, computer-world multimillionaires to commit to collecting, and art that challenges the status quo is crucial for the Santa Monica couple. In a sentence only a technophile could invent, Peter Norton describes the art that engages them as "relatively new, challenging, conceptually based, and we have a strong bias for artists who come out of that very interesting cultural milieu that is now called African-American because it's given us some



**Peter and Eileen Norton** own more than 1,500 works, 200 of which they bought this past year. It is a collection that has a strong focus on African-American and contemporary art. The artworks below represent some of the Nortons' favorite artists; they are, from left, **Lorna Simpson's** "The Park" (1995), **David Hammons's** "Bag Lady in Flight" (1982), a detail of **Kara Walker's** "African't" (1996), **Kim Dingle's** "Priss Room" (1995) and **Charles Ray's** "Family Romance" (1993).

### Simpson, Hammons, Walker, Dingle, Ray



wonderfully interesting things which I can summarize in one word: jazz."

The Nortons started collecting 16 years ago, buying a Miró print, a Rembrandt etching and a kachina doll. They developed their taste by frequenting galleries and museums and by meeting artists. They started a foundation that gives \$50,000 purchasing grants to curators bent on taking chances. In 1990, the Nortons bought 100 works by such relatively invisible black artists as Carrie Mae Weems and Adrian Piper, and the collection found its focus. By now the Nortons own 1,500 works, with a particular emphasis on Weems, Kim Dingle, Charles Ray, Simpson, Hammons and Kara Walker. This spring, the couple will become bicoastal and plan to install works by Walker, Weems and Zoe Leonard in their New York condominium.

Peter Norton, who serves on the board of the Whitney and on several committees at the Museum of Modern Art, continues his gallery and art-fair rounds and last month invited American curators to join him at the Johannesburg Biennial. With the help of a staff headed by Susan Cahan, a curator, he sifts through proposals to underwrite the museum shows of artists who interest him and keeps abreast of what is happening in their studios. Each year the Nortons commission, produce and mail Christmas editions that expose under-known artists to more than 5,000 of their closest friends. "Peter's not just someone who is collecting your work," says Gary Simmons, 33, who sold one of his first works to Norton eight years ago. "He gets to know you as a person, as a producer of ideas."

## Kent Logan

**K**ENT LOGAN MAKES FLOW CHARTS OF HIS COLLECTION. HE MAPS what he has, what he wants, how it fits. In San Francisco, between visits to New York, he compiles lists for maximum efficiency. This means that, by the time he stops into the Gagosian Gallery on Wooster Street on a recent autumn afternoon dressed in the only pinstripes in SoHo, he has bought and studied the catalogue for Dinos and Jake Chapman's installa-

tion "Unholy Libel (Six Feet Under)." Logan already owns works by Damien Hirst and Marc Quinn from the British Sensation school, but he murmurs, "Too much shock, even for me," as he checks out prices at the desk.

No one in the gallery recognizes him. He has a collection of more than 250 works by 90 artists and the ambition of assembling, he says, "the definitive collection of 90's art" with a view toward giving it to a museum someday. But he's too new in the New York art world to be on its radar screen.

Logan collects psychologically charged, media-influenced figurations. Before arriving at the Gagosian Gallery, he bought the 1991 photograph "Fan" to add to his collection of self-portraits by Yasumasa Morimura, a male Japanese artist who photographs himself as figures from art history or female icons of American pop culture. Over the course of an afternoon, Logan will also buy "Good Evening Hamas," a 1997 diptych by Lisa Yuskavage, who paints Playboy cartoon-style dissections of women as seen through a sex-obsessed male gaze. Logan had to wait nearly a year for a suitably important painting by Yuskavage to become available because Saatchi had got there first.

All through the 80's, Logan worked on Wall Street by day, went home to Greenwich, Conn., at night and noticed art collecting only from a bemused distance. But in San Francisco, where he is a partner with Montgomery Securities, the art world is faster growing and more welcoming. Besides, by 1991 the art market had crashed. "I thought it would be an opportune time from a market standpoint to be a buyer," he tells me. He acquired Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Anselm Kiefer and Francesco Clemente — all 80's darlings whose prices were the most depressed. He now sees these artists as anchors to his collection of the young and new.

The collection began to change three years ago, when Logan bought a work by Jerry Kearns, an artist who since 1970 has collaborated with the Brooklyn Black United Front and Lucy Lippard, a feminist critic. Kearns introduced Logan to the New York scene and now acts as his guide and theoretician for a \$3,000 monthly retainer. Logan recently joined Kearns on the board of Exit Art, the alternative art space in SoHo. Getting to

**Kent Logan**, a San Francisco collector, amasses his art in true corporate fashion: with flow charts mapping what he has and what he doesn't.

His most extensive acquisitions include, below from left, **Francesco Clemente's** "Self-Portrait" (1984), **Mark Tansey's** "Occupation" (1984), **Cindy Sherman's** "Film Still #6" (1977), **Gottfried Helnwein's** "Untitled (Child)" (1996) and **Anselm Kiefer's** "Operation Sea Lion" (1975).

### Clemente, Tansey, Sherman, Helnwein, Kiefer







The Logans amid 3 of the 250 artworks they own (excluding the dog). Yasumasa Morimura's "Futago, Olympia After Manet," in the hall; "Voyeur," by Mark Stock, center, and "The Photographer," by Chris Brown, right.





**Ydessa Hendeles**  
posing at home  
with "Willy and the  
Wall Spider," by  
Liz Magor.

know artists is the key to Logan's modus operandi. "If artists see you spend the time to go to their studios, look at the work, engage them in dialogue, then they're going to feel better about saying to a dealer, 'This should go to so-and-so's collection,'" he says. "I have the opportunity to create a collection that really is a snapshot of a society through time."

## Ydessa Hendeles

**'M**Y COLLECTION IS NOT AS TOTEMIC AS MANY OF THE MALE COLLECTIONS I've seen, where I have the sense that there are these phalluses on the wall and I'm to admire each one of them," Ydessa Hendeles says as she takes me through the gallery of her Toronto art foundation. "I want people to feel as though they've walked into the artist's head." Hendeles is unusual among collectors because she creates exhibitions to

experiment with ideas about how art can be experienced intimately. "She's like a curator with cash," says Allan Schwartzman, a friend and an art writer.

Hendeles was educated as both an art historian and a psychotherapist, and while she declines to credit the fact that her parents were Polish Holocaust survivors, it clearly informs her collecting. The contemporary artists she owns in depth are engaged either in making order out of memory, loss and history (Hanne Darboven, Christian Boltanski, Bernd and Hilla Becher, On Kawara, James Coleman) or in exposing contradiction and extremity (Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Louise Bourgeois, Bruce Nauman).

Hendeles often finds her works at big international art fairs like the Venice Biennale. Usually, she is the first to buy a contemporary artist extensively, and sometimes artists, like Boltanski, are so touched by her commitment that they give her their new work. She is also a fierce competitor at auctions. In 1993, she paid \$398,500 for Alfred Stieglitz's solarized palladium print, "Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait — Hands With Thimble, 1920," still a record price for a photograph, she says. She used it to complete a 1995 exhibition, "Projections," that explored how photographers earlier in the century exposed some of the same concerns through documentary photographs that contemporary artists probe with staged scenes and cinematic techniques. It included 50 Weegee prints; 24 Brassai photographs; four computer-manipulated tableaux by Jeff Wall, a Canadian artist, and 20-odd "Untitled Film Stills" by Cindy Sherman.

"She uses exhibitions as a way of phrasing her thoughts, and she buys the works that will make the sentence complete," says Robert Storr, a curator in the Museum of Modern Art's department of painting and sculpture. "It happens that she's a very smart woman, and therefore the sentences are extremely interesting and unpredictable." Michael Govan, the director of the Dia Center for the Arts in New York, says that Hendeles has the eccentric flair of Peggy Guggenheim, who introduced Surrealist painters and Jackson Pollock to American viewers during World War II.

At this summer's Venice Biennale, Hendeles acquired a video installation by the Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist. It shows a field of flowers on one screen and on the other, a young woman carrying what appears to be a flower. Every so often, she swings the flower, which is metal, and smashes a car window. An approaching policeman in the distance turns out to be a woman, who smiles and walks on. Hendeles is in some ways both: the woman who smashes assumptions and the authority who gives it a wink. ■

"She's like a curator with cash," says a friend of **Ydessa Hendeles**. A Canadian collector, Hendeles creates her own exhibitions in her own space, a former factory. The works below represent art she owns in depth. From left, **Jeff Wall's** "The Stumbling Block" (1991), **Bernd and Hilla Becher's** "Pennsylvania Coal Mine Tipples" (1992), a detail of **Hanne Darboven's** "Quartet 88" (1988), a detail of **Louise Bourgeois's** "Cell III (Arch of Hysteria)" (1991) and a detail of **James Coleman's** "Box (Ah-hareturnabout)" (1977).

## Wall, Becher, Darboven, Bourgeois, Coleman

