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Connoisseur – art collector

Summary of the doctoral dissertation

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Gdańsk 2017

Abstract

Despite the seemingly limiting title 'The Connoisseur – The Art Collector', this PhD thesis is addressed to all those who have a desire to be surrounded by art. Modern society is far more concerned with the problems of common everyday existence than with the matter of artistic creativity. The figure of an art collector and their passion are, therefore, somewhat unusual in the modern world and through my dissertation I hope to reveal their hidden lives. I aim to show the difference between gathering pieces of art and collecting works of art, the way to ascertain the main thread of a collection, and, further, to explain the relationship between the preferences of a collector and the level of their education, as well as the connection between the two. The subject matter is thus quite wide - for this reason I have limited my work to Poland. On analyzing a collection, the main questions of interest to me were the following: what is the theme, aim and *raison d'être* of collecting and what is the common thread between various works of art in a given collection. I have attempted to discover what Polish collectors buy, how they buy it and where they keep their collections. I have tried to approach the subject from the perspective of an artist - with the assumption that the process of creating an art collection is a process of writing a particular story, and hence not too dissimilar from the process of creating a work of art. I have always seen my future as that of an active and practical artist, and it is far more natural for me to express my ideas graphically than in a written form. Thus I have created a series of linocut graphics as an additional way of elaborating on my research.

The thesis starts, unusually perhaps, with a chapter devoted to graphic arts, containing a detailed, technical description of the linocut creation process. The series of my own linocuts included in the dissertation is my way of exploring the subject matter of this work. It is my personal interpretation of who or what a 'connoisseur' is, with reference not only to the film 'The Best Offer' (*La migliore offerta*) by Giuseppe Tornatore, but also referring to the phenomenon of art collecting on a more general scale. The theme of the thesis appears as the prevailing thread through all the linocuts and brings them together into a cohesive story. Using intuitive and experimental methods I have tried to ascertain the extent of the expressive possibilities of linocut technique. While doing so I believe I have destroyed my original assumptions as well as previously learned principles. The technique seems simple and one might assume that there is little more that can be said about it that has not already been said. However, the opposite is true - the capabilities are, as we discover, limitless. I attempt not only

to explain the roots of each work of graphic art but also to reveal at the same time the whole range of methods I have used, together with technical details such as the technology of creating the linocut, technical parameters, materials and equipment.

The second chapter of this work is devoted to art collections. Through critical analysis I describe the function of collections, collecting and collectors in our world today. These descriptions create, in my view, a theoretical summary of my fascination with linocuts, and my artistic inspiration. In this way I explain the following proposition: that a collection, an entity which by its nature is subject to constant change, also possesses the ability to infiltrate the sphere of arts and become a medium for artists. On observing an art collector carefully we notice that simply possessing a piece of art of historical value is not their main intention. They desire to excel at finding and appreciating a work which is above all unusual; one which is beautiful in its structure and authentic on the art market. Collecting has become an inherent part of human history and no crisis has affected it yet. Quite the contrary: numerous collections thrive all around us, not least because the number of miscellaneous items in one's surroundings and one's possession is ever-increasing. This is evident from the number of museums, which truly exist as centres for collecting. If one tried to describe in detail just a few of them it would soon become apparent how complex, emotional and full of passion they all are. Each collection is a living entity for its collector, just like a work of art is a live object for its creator. I submit the proposition that collecting is not just a union of passion and the business of financial investing but also an 'art', in a loose sense of the word, of gathering knowledge, following exhibitions, collecting publications, creating catalogues and putting up one's possessions for public viewing.

My series of works comprises colour linocuts devoted exclusively to one subject. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly, I had had a concept for such an exhibition for quite a while. The final result is, of course, different from my original vision but the concept has stayed the same. Secondly, it is impossible for me to ignore the fact that during the last 10 years the majority of my time has been spent in a linocut workshop cutting and printing ever new-fangled projects. Every crevice of my house is littered with tiny lino off-cuts. If for some reason, in any particular week I were not able to imprint a new colour layer, I would feel quite lost. My passion means that I am unable to accept my works of art as a simple addendum to my written thesis. I am a student-member of the Academy of Fine Art and as such I believe it is my artistic work that should be the main focus.

The theme for my thesis was assigned to me but it has allowed me to reveal an interesting trend. In the eyes of collectors there is a marked return within their world to those branches of art which combine traditional craftwork with artistic talent. Graphic art is one such branch and in the recent years it has notably become more desirable for collectors. The American, German and Asian markets have shown the increased popularity of graphic art portfolios. Historically, one has to remember that European graphic arts began to flourish greatly soon after the introduction of paper, with the new material making this medium ever more popular. The 15th century saw the establishment of great printing houses and that meant the production of illustrated books. They became a source of artistic samples which were then sought after by many a bibliophile. The love of books, print and paper soon incorporated a love of graphic art and this in turn led to the love of graphics amongst art collectors.

The theme of 'The Connoisseur – The Art Collector' has turned out to be an ideal means of combining my artistic and literary output into one work which I am now pleased to be able to present.