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A Private Tour with the Wexners

Leslie and Abigail Wexner give Columbus Monthly a behind-the-scenes look at the art collection they've been building for decades, soon to be the subject of a major exhibition.

BY ANTHONY DOMINIC

Leslie Wexner grew up in a house with one piece of art—an unremarkable painting his mother found in a furniture store. “Real art was something that wasn’t part of (his wife) Abigail’s growing up or mine,” says the chairman and CEO of L Brands. After purchasing Willem de Kooning’s “Pink Lady” in 1978, he fell in love with abstract expressionism from the New York School of artists. Gradually (albeit unintentionally, he adds), he and Abigail amassed a collection that could now fill a museum.

In the coming months, it will do just that.

On Sept. 21, the Wexners will unveil *Transfigurations: Modern Masters from the Wexner Family Collection* at the Wexner Center for the Arts as part of the institution’s 25th anniversary season. Here, they open up about six of their most-treasured pieces from the show, which will be on view through the end of the year. 1871 N. High St., Campus, 614-292-3535, wexarts.org



“THREE SPOKES”

Susan Rothenberg, 1977

Abigail: “I just love her horses. They come up rarely; we bought the last one within the last year. They’re just so emotive, very powerful and interesting.”

Leslie (on buying another Rothenberg, his first): “Abstract contemporary art often looks unfinished. I liked the painting. I didn’t think it looked unfinished. [Susan] heard I had bought it through her dealer, contacted me and told me she never felt she finished it. She said, ‘I’d like to finish it.’ I said, ‘Sure!’”

“NU AU FAUTEUIL NOIR” (NUDE IN A BLACK ARM-CHAIR)

Pablo Picasso, 1932

Abigail: “On one account, it’s probably the most important piece in the collection. Apart from that, I love it the most, just from living with it. There’s something so deep about the experience of it, so interesting. [In our home], it’s in a big hall, and it carries the whole space. The way the light is, it changes color and changes mood throughout the day.”



“PINK LADY”

Willem de Kooning, 1944

Abigail: “There was a time when there were many more de Kooning pieces [in our collection]. We thought about maybe selling [‘Pink Lady’] and buying another Picasso, but Les can’t part with that one.”

Leslie: “I recognized the ‘Pink Lady’ as something important to me, let alone important to [art]. It’s an incredible piece, so powerful and so representative. ... It is one of the odd pieces in the collection. Another collector may say, ‘That doesn’t really fit.’ Yet I have this attachment and admiration for it.”

PHOTOS: LEFT, WEXNER FAMILY COLLECTION © 2014 THE WILLEM DE KOONING FOUNDATION / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK; TOP, WEXNER FAMILY COLLECTION © 2014 SUSAN ROTHENBERG / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK; BOTTOM, WEXNER FAMILY COLLECTION © 2014 ESTATE OF PABLO PICASSO / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK



“L’HOMME QUI CHAVIRE” (“FALLING MAN”) (featured on page 33) and “WALKING MAN”

Alberto Giacometti, 1950 and 1947–1948, respectively

Leslie: “I was in London on business, and my dealer called me up about some contemporary drawings, and I saw something I was interested in: the ‘Walking Man’ and the ‘Falling Man.’ Unless you’re really foolish, you really have to live with [artworks] to see if you’ll love them. It wasn’t this idea of collecting Giacometti. The dog is just really interesting, and the ‘Falling Man’ and ‘Walking Man’ just settled into the collection.”



“LE CHIEN” (“DOG”)

Alberto Giacometti, 1951 (cast 1959)

Leslie: “My interest in Picasso led to an interest in Giacometti. [In the mid-1980s], my dealer contacted me and said, ‘I have this interesting thing. I’ve got a Giacometti dog.’ I said, ‘I’ll take it,’ and wrapped it up in bath towels and went back to my office. The dog still remains the centerpiece of the entire Giacometti collection.”

PHOTOS: TOP LEFT, WEXNER FAMILY COLLECTION © 2014 ALBERTO GIACOMETTI ESTATE / LICENSED BY VAGA AND ARS, NEW YORK, NY; TOP RIGHT, WEXNER FAMILY COLLECTION © 2014 ALBERTO GIACOMETTI ESTATE / LICENSED BY VAGA AND ARS, NEW YORK, NY; BOTTOM, COURTESY PIZZUTI COLLECTION



“The People’s Republic” by Ann Hamilton

THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

If one thing unites the more than 100 pieces of art in the *Now-ism: Abstraction Today* exhibition opening Sept. 6 at Pizzuti Collection, it’s color. Lots and lots of color.

“*Now-ism* is an explosion of color,” says Pizzuti Collection director and curator Rebecca Ibel. “It’s dynamic, overwhelming. You just walk into this great, eye-popping color. And it comes in all kinds of different forms.”

Ibel was inspired to create the show as she familiarized herself with developer and art collector Ron Pizzuti’s vast collection. She noticed his penchant for emerging contemporary artists and used that as a story line for this show, which doesn’t have the same narrative arc as, say, a show featuring just one artist, one medium or works from one place and time. “The artists live in Berlin, Bogota, LA, Chicago. ... There are so many currents that connect us,” Ibel says.

Every single piece in the show—including paintings, glasswork, sculpture, video, furniture—was made after 2000. “These are not household names,” Ibel says. “They’re very accessible and fun, and you can just feel the energy.”

Now-ism is open through June 2015; several of the artists will be in Columbus this month for a members-only reception. 632 N. Park St., Short North, 614-280-4004, pizzuticollection.org —Kristen Schmidt