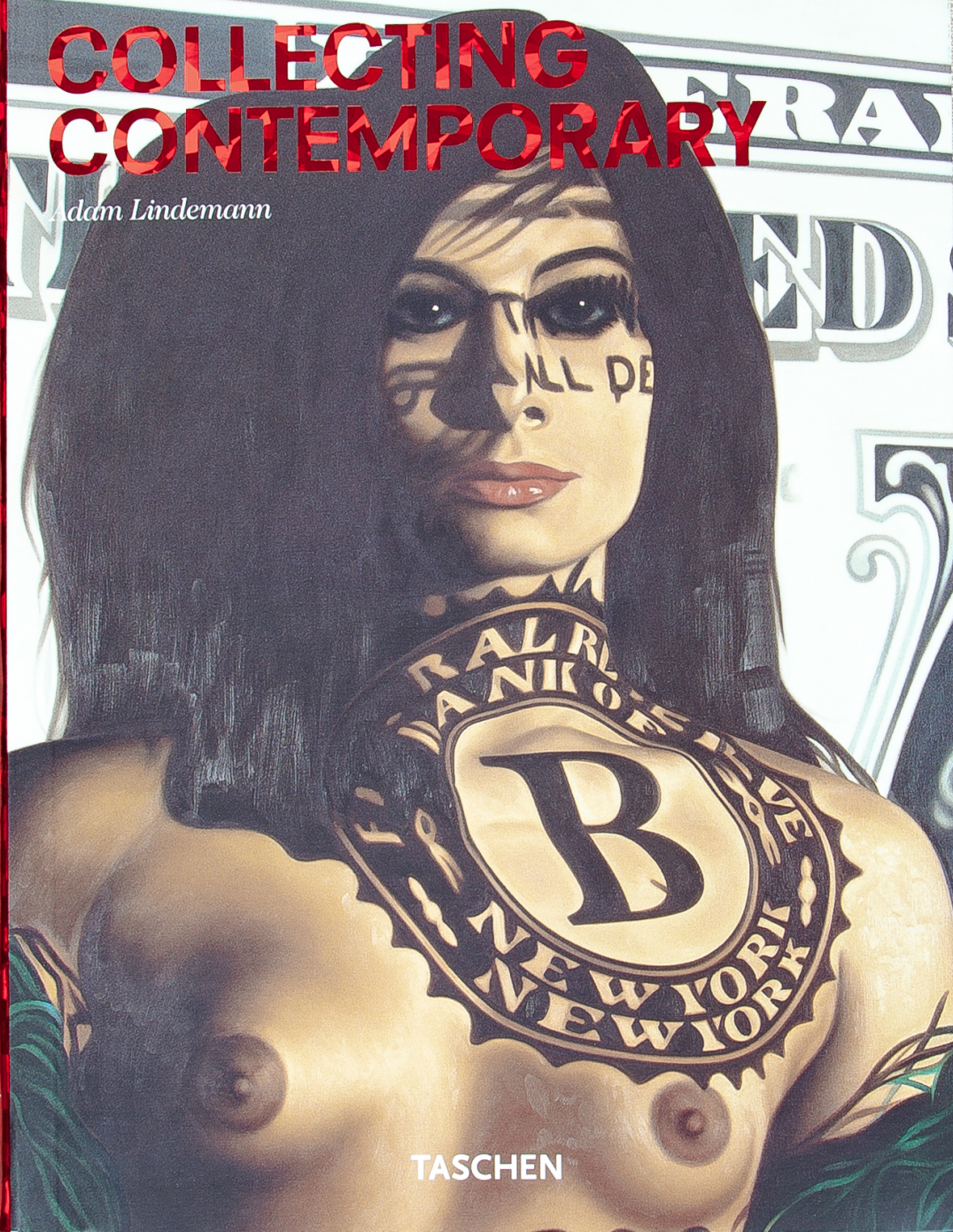


COLLECTING CONTEMPORARY

Adam Lindemann



TASCHEN

Charles Saatchi

Collector, London

Charles Saatchi has been collecting art for the last thirty years and showing it, for the last twenty, in his own gallery in London. In its early days, the Saatchi Gallery mounted landmark exhibitions of American artists, including Donald Judd, Brice Marden, Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Jeff Koons and Robert Gober, giving British audiences unprecedented exposure to this work. Following the stock-market crash of 1989, Saatchi sold most of his blue-chip works to become Contemporary British art's most enthusiastic champion, in the process launching the careers of some of today's best-known artists, collectively known as the YBAs (Young British Artists); they include Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, the Chapman brothers, Rachel Whiteread, Chris Ofili, Tracey Emin and Glenn Brown. He exhibited and promoted the YBAs in several shows, including the Royal Academy's historic *Sensation* blockbuster, which travelled to the Brooklyn Museum in 1999.

Always the subject of controversy, he is renowned for buying an artist's work in quantity and then selling the work years later at a large profit. He has been the largest and most successful art collector/speculator in the market for the past twenty years. In London, his reputation for not granting interviews and not attending his own openings, such as the blockbuster *The Triumph of Painting* (2005), has served to insure that the art world is constantly speculating on his next move.

On being a "super-collector"

Who cares what I'm described as? Art collectors are pretty insignificant in the scheme of things. What matters and survives is the art.

I buy art that I like. I buy it to show it off in exhibitions. Then, if I feel like it, I sell it and buy more art. As I have been doing this for thirty years, I think most people in the art world get the idea by now. It doesn't mean I've changed my mind about the art that I end up selling, it just means that I don't want to hoard everything forever.

Charles Saatchi as art patron

I don't buy art to ingratiate myself with artists, or as an entrée to a social circle. Of course, some artists get upset if you sell their work. But it doesn't help them whimpering

about it, and telling anyone who will listen. Sandro Chia, for example, is most famous for being dumped. At last count I read that I had flooded the market with 23 of his paintings. In fact, I only ever owned seven paintings by Chia. One morning I offered three of them back to Angela Westwater, his New York dealer where I had originally bought them, and four back to Bruno Bischofberger, his European dealer where, again, I had bought those. Chia's work was tremendously desirable at the time and all seven went to big-shot collectors or museums by close of day. If Sandro Chia hadn't had a psychological need to be rejected in public, this issue would never have been considered of much interest. If an artist is producing good work, someone selling a group of strong ones does an artist no harm at all, and in fact can stimulate their market.

The rules and advice to consider

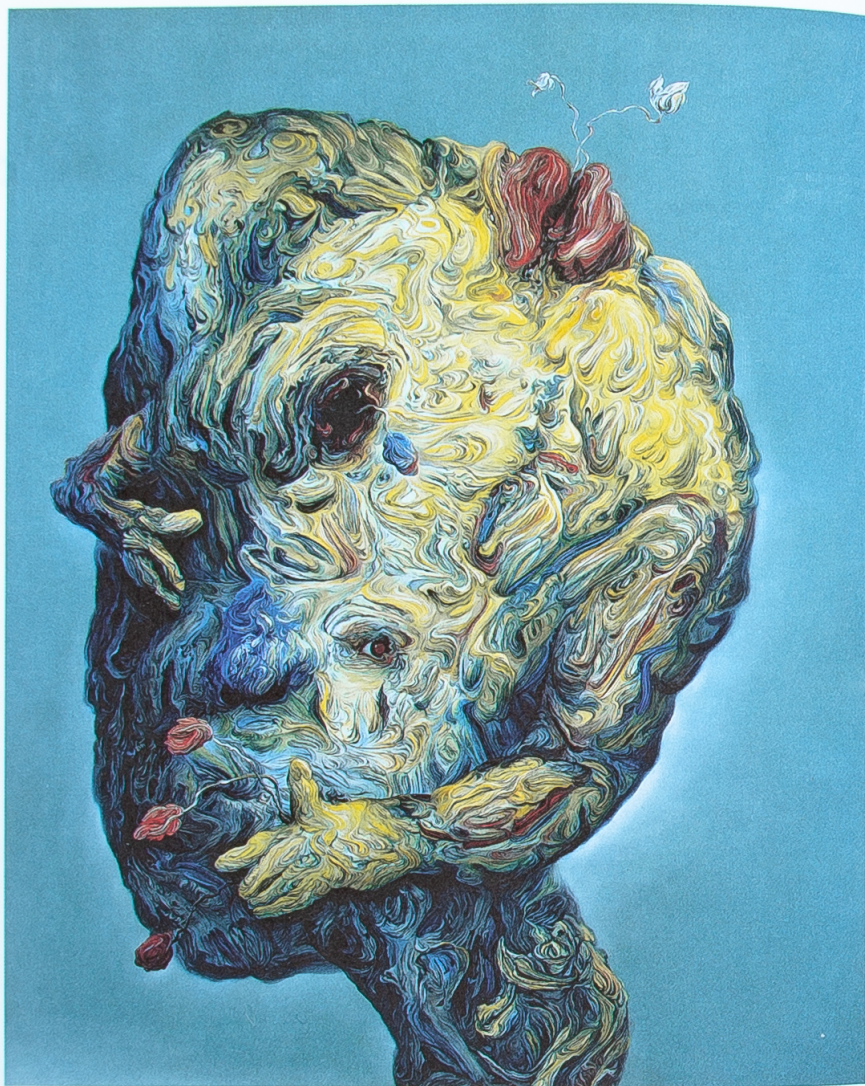
There are no rules I know of. Nobody can give you advice after you've been collecting for a while. If you don't enjoy making your own decisions, you're never going to be much of a collector anyway. But that hasn't stopped the growing army of art advisers building "portfolio" collections for their clients.

On the right price to pay

I never think too much about the market. I don't mind paying three or four times the



Ron Mueck
Mask II, 2001, mixed media,
30 1/2 x 46 1/2 x 33 1/2 in. (77 x 118 x 85 cm)



Glenn Brown
The Hinterland, 2006, oil on wood,
 58 1/4 x 48 1/4 in. (148 x 122.5 cm)

market value of a work that I really want. Just ask the auction houses. As far as taste is concerned, as I stated earlier, I primarily buy art in order to show it off. So it's important for me that the public respond to it and Contemporary Art in general.

What and when to sell

There is no logic or pattern I can rely on. I don't have a romantic attachment to what could have been. If I had kept all the work I had ever bought, it would feel like Kane sitting

in Xanadu surrounded by his loot. It's enough to know that I have owned and shown so many masterpieces of modern times.

"I don't buy art in order to leave a mark or to be remembered; clutching at immortality is of zero interest to anyone sane."

Buying art that is not "commercial"

Lots of ambitious work by young artists ends up in a

dumpster after its warehouse debut. So an unknown artist's big glass vitrine holding a rotting cow's head covered by maggots and swarms of buzzing flies may be pretty unsellable – until the artist becomes a star. Then he can sell anything he touches.

But mostly, the answer is that installation art like Richard Wilson's oil room [purchased by Saatchi in 1990] is only buyable if you've got somewhere to exhibit it. I was always in awe of the Dia Center for the Arts for making so many earthworks and site-specific installations possible. That is the exception: a collector whose significance survives.

In short, sometimes you have to buy art that will have no value to anyone but you, because you like it and believe in it. The collector I have always admired most, Count Panza di Biumo, was commissioning large installations by Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Dan Flavin at a time when nobody but a few other oddballs were interested.

On painting

It's true that Contemporary painting responds to the work of video-makers and photographers. But it's also true that Contemporary painting is influenced by music, writing, MTV, Picasso, Hollywood, newspapers, Old Masters. But, unlike many of the art-world heavy-hitters and deep thinkers, I don't believe painting is middle-class and bourgeois, incapable of saying anything meaningful anymore, too impotent to hold much sway. For me, and for people with good eyes who actually enjoy looking at art, nothing is as uplifting as standing before a great painting, whether it was painted in 1505 or last Tuesday.

Art as investment

There are no rules about investment. Sharks can be good. Artist's dung can be good. Oil on canvas can be good. There's a squad of conservators out there to look after anything an artist decides is art.

Museums versus galleries

I like everything that helps Contemporary Art reach a wider audience. However, some-

Julia Peyton-Jones

Director, Serpentine Gallery, London

Julia Peyton-Jones has been director of the Serpentine Gallery since 1991, where she has commissioned groundbreaking exhibitions and initiated inventive programmes in architecture and education. Under the patronage of Diana, Princess of Wales, the Serpentine completed a £4 million renovation in 1998. Since then, visitor numbers have increased almost threefold. The Serpentine is well known for holding solo shows of mid-career artists like John Currin, Takashi Murakami, Glenn Brown, Gabriel Orozco and many more. Exhibitions of this kind have contributed to heating up the market for these artists.

The Serpentine

Interestingly, the character of the Serpentine's exhibitions used to include, you might say, Modern Masters, artists like Giacometti and Jasper Johns, with young emerging artists, usually in group shows, principally from Britain. It had a tradition of annually doing something called the Serpentine Summer Show – where young British artists' works were presented to the public, probably for the first time in an exhibition. I thought that the strength of the Serpentine's programme was its breadth, and to a degree it differentiated us from our colleagues in other organizations. So that was something I very much kept. When we programme the work of Modern artists like Piero Manzoni, it has to be because they relate to the art of today. That's a very strong guiding principal when we do those shows.

When I started, the work of Contemporary artists was less known in the U.K. than it is now; people travelled less, they saw less. So it felt very important to show to a British audience – since we're publicly funded – artists who were under discussion internationally, and whose work hadn't been seen here. Now we've changed significantly, and people are better informed with a tremendous appetite for Contemporary Art and, indeed, it's covered considerably in the media.

Deciding on the next show

Obviously we get exhibition proposals. And Rochelle Steiner, my curator, and I devise the programme together. It's a pooling of resources



Glenn Brown
Dali Christ, 1992, oil on canvas,
107 7/8 x 72 in. (274 x 183 cm)



John Currin
Fishermen, 2002, oil on canvas,
 50 x 41 in. (127 x 104.1 cm)

and also a balance, from time to time, doing what I call a Modern Master and also wanting to introduce younger artists whose work, perhaps, has not been seen in a public space, like Monika Sosnowska, a young Eastern European artist who is doing a special commission in the Gallery. Another example is Tomoko Takahashi, who is known; she is a past Turner Prize nominee, but has had relatively little exposure since then.

On choosing to show Glenn Brown

It is very important that we show British artists. I think this will be the third time Glenn's been shown here. He's been in two group shows. He was ploughing his own terrain then and continues to do so now. His artistic language is really so particular to him

"I come from a tradition, or an age, where a celebrity artist is a contradiction in terms."

– it's figurative, but he references historical figures and also other painters of today, coupled with an incredibly interesting technique. He's the same age as the group that became known as the Young British Artists (YBAs), but absolutely set apart from that. He's

somebody for whom there hasn't really been an opportunity to survey his work, and I think he's just remarkably good.

The artist as celebrity

I come from a tradition, or an age, where a celebrity artist is a contradiction in terms: I mean, it didn't exist, certainly not in Britain. In fact, the whole point about being an artist, when I was a student, was that you needed to be incredibly responsible about your work. That's what you lived for; it was very, very serious. You know, the idea of celebrity shows – if five people came, it was considered to be a big success. We live in a time of celebrity. If the question was, "Do you think the celebrity culture is a good thing," that's another discussion.

The market really doesn't influence us at all, except insofar as it is an element of the whole art world. If the art market suffers, then the value of people's collections goes down, and, psychologically, they might have mixed feelings about supporting institutions like ours. You know, it is a very fragile house of cards. However, the prices of works of art really are not a consideration for us. For example, I don't go to the sales. If we had a collection, I would definitely go because then that would be part of the job. I don't collect privately, and we don't have a permanent collection.

Luckily, commerce is sitting across the table, and the voice of reason, the non-commercial view, is sitting on the other side. Do I like the idea of people, dealers, selling art from a show that's at the Serpentine? No, I hate it. Because it's an affront. Mostly I don't know about it, 99.9 percent of the time I don't know about it.

The thing about an exhibition is that it gives collectors, and the public alike, an opportunity to review the contribution that an artist has made. As a result, it may therefore be possible for people to say, "My God, this artist is incredibly better than I thought he was." And therefore, as a result, the prices go up. Alternatively, and there are all sorts of examples of this, an exhibition can really *not* enhance an artist's reputation.



5

The Past Deconstructed

| LUC TUYMANS |

| WILHELM SASNAL |

| EBERHARD HAVEKOST |

| NEAL TAIT |

| MICHAËL BORREMANS |

| ZHANG XIAOGANG |

| ANNA BJERGER |

| GLENN BROWN |

| MATHEW WEIR |

| JOHN CURRIN |

| RICHARD WATHEN |

| BÉNÉDICTE PEYRAT |

| ROSSON CROW |

Photography came into being in 1839, thanks to the scientific advances of Louis Daguerre and Henry Fox Talbot. In the aftermath of its invention, artists and critics worried about what the new genre of photography would do to painting (a question that is doggedly still raised today). But in truth, photography opened up more doors to painters than it closed. Eadweard Muybridge's time-lapse photographs of bodies in motion, for example, were echoed in cubism and works such as Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1912. The decreasing cost of printing and the subsequent ability to print effectively in colour meant, for the first time, artists could see colour copies of masterpieces that previously they had journeyed around the world to see for themselves.

Artists have always used the latest developments to further their work – even Vermeer, in seventeenth-century Holland, is thought to have used a camera obscura to plot his compositions. Nowadays, the camera is as valid a tool for painters as a sketchbook and pencil, a way of recording thoughts and working out ideas. All of the artists in this book have used photography in some way to complete their work; for many of the artists in this chapter, photography has provided the subject matter too.

In 1977, Susan Sontag, in her highly influential book *On Photography*, wrote that photographs provide 'knowledge dissociated from and independent of experience'. They literally offer a snapshot of the past, a temporal fragment of an ongoing moment in which we can no longer see to the right or left of the frame, can no longer judge the scene for ourselves, first hand, can no longer experience the event in real time. Everything in the photograph carries the same importance; visual prioritization of 'what matters most to each viewer has been eliminated by the camera's objective eye. So, in a photograph, a smile can be as



Gerhard Richter
Uncle Rudi, 2000 [above]
Uncle Rudi, 1965 [below]

important as a chimney stack or a reflection, a button given the same attention by the camera as an eye or a dapple of light. For German artist Gerhard Richter, a former photo-laboratory technician, who first started using photographs as source material for his paintings in the early 1960s, photography's sheer objectivity appealed to him. In conversation with author Peter Sager in 1972, he said: 'It (photography) has no style, no composition, no judgement. It freed me from personal experience. For the first time, there was nothing to it: it was pure picture.'

Photographs offered Richter a 'subject' that was devoid of meaning, one that he could manipulate to explore what it was to paint. Painting itself was his real subject, as he explored the relationship between the object depicted and the abstraction implicit in any kind of representation of it on canvas. In his 1965 painting of his Uncle Rudi, based on a family photograph of his mother's brother in Nazi uniform, Richter wanted the potentially loaded subject matter to be neutered by using a photograph that had already reduced the man to a flat image, and to be further leached of content by switching the focus from subject to process. The black and white painting, seemingly painted in a photorealist style and then 'blurred', refuses to deal with the person depicted (Uncle Rudi) and instead deals with issues of representation in paint. We, as viewers, feel frustrated that the painting is blurred, as if we are distanced from the original image by this device (which of course is his intention). But at the same time, Richter is implicitly pointing out that in fact a painting can never be blurry or second-rate: it simply is what it is. Unlike the photograph, its aim is not direct representation. A painting is not reality, he implies, and neither is a photograph. (Richter added another layer to this complex work when he photographed the painting of Uncle Rudi, and re-presented it as a Cibachrome editioned photographic print in 2000.)

Glenn Brown, who graduated from Goldsmiths College, London in 1992, has consistently worked from reproductions to question similar presumptions of viewing and authenticity. In his recent work he has bound together the subject from one masterpiece with the style from another. Seemingly impastoed figures painted in the style of Cobra artist Karel Appel and Vincent van Gogh are dressed in historical garb in poses taken from masterpieces by Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Anthony Van Dyck. Brown, prior to this fusion, spent much time reproducing other works



Frank Auerbach Head of J. Y. M. II, 1984-85

of art directly on to his canvas, exploring the gap between the reproductive copy and the original. In fact, he has achieved such success in this *trompe l'oeil* verisimilitude that, by a twist of fate, his painting *Beautification*, 1999, based on a Frank Auerbach portrait, sold for £200,000 at Sotheby's in February 2005 – twice the price of an 'original' Auerbach portrait.

Luc Tuymans also questions the trust we place in photographs. Like Richter, he uses found photographs to construct his muted paintings of Nazi sympathizers, Belgian politicians and fighter pilots. He studies news images – taken from magazines, newspapers and television reports – until, by the time he paints them, they are near-monochrome reductions of the original source material. He sucks out the colour from them, and in turn the content appears contextless, ahistoric, as adrift as an anonymous snapshot of an unknown person in your family album.

Over thirty years ago, John Szarkowski, then curator of photographs at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, surmised that there must already be more photographs in the world than bricks. By 1980, when Roland Barthes wrote *Camera Lucida* he concurred by saying: 'I see photographs everywhere, like everyone else, nowadays; they come from the world to me, without my asking; they are only "images", their mode of appearance is heterogeneous.' The power of photographs – as Warhol, Richter, Tuymans, and a cluster of younger artists such as Eberhard Havekost, Wilhelm Sasnal and Neal Tait have explored – is annihilated by their unchecked reproduction and their levelling of everything they depict, from a Nazi criminal to a bowl of fruit.

Other artists featured in this chapter use photographs as a means to access history. Photographs function like an image bank for artists such as John Currin, who repeatedly mines the past to create paintings that reinterpret old themes in today's visual language, or for Michaël Borremans, whose works seem rooted in the 1940s. Photography and images provide many artists with a convenient way of accessing the past. But this convenience – to tour galleries and private collections virtually, to compare works across centuries and continents at the touch of a button – comes at a price: visual and mental dislocation. Artists such as Rosson Crow and Richard Wathen delve into the past with alacrity, to create paintings that turn out to undermine our understanding of our own place in history.