

## On Collecting: Private and Public A Round Table

On Friday, October 29, 2004, Anton and Annick Herbert joined Peter Pakesch, director of the Kunsthau Graz, Austria, and Manuel J. Borja-Villel, director of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Spain, for a discussion moderated by Hans-Joachim Müller. During this conversation, they analysed various aspects of the Herbert Collection, such as its purpose, the collecting strategy that shaped it, key moments for the collection and its collectors, and its place within the larger art world. The differences and the relationship between private and public collecting came broadly into this discussion.

### The Annick and Anton Herbert Collection

Hans-Joachim Müller: Let's go back to the origins of your collection in the early seventies. Tell us something about the beginnings, about your inspiration and stimulation. Do you remember your first acquisition? Did you have, at that time, a plan, an idea or strategy to build up a collection step by step?

Anton Herbert: We were very impressed with what happened in 1968 and astonished when the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels was occupied, with Marcel Broodthaers as leader of this action. Until that moment we were spectators not actively participating in art statements, but from then on we had to make choices. We had to take a position – for or against it – and engage ourselves. One had to participate in a creative way, and we did so by starting a collection. Our moves in 1973 were radical: we bought a Lawrence Weiner sentence, an Ian Wilson conversation, Daniel Buren stripes. Starting a collection with such works was a challenge. The first work we bought was a Carl Andre floor piece entitled *64 Lead Square*, and



Marcel Broodthaers, occupation of the 'Salle des Marbres' in the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1968

our following acquisitions were along the same lines: works by Gilbert & George, On Kawara and Dan Graham. Once we had made these choices there was no turning back.

As soon as this was done, we became part of a small family: Konrad Fischer, Jack Wendler, Art & Project, Harald Szeemann, Rudi Fuchs, and especially Fernand Spillemaeckers.

Through them, we gained direct contact with the artists such as Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth. These artists did not work in ateliers, but were nomads, going from one city to another, mostly in Europe, as there was little interest for them in America at the time.

Hans-Joachim Müller: Collecting as a way of taking part in a cultural and political movement is quite far from what motivates many collectors today.

Peter Pakesch: In the seventies, however, by starting a collection you could enter into a discourse in which your participation was more important than the possession of a work of art.

**Anton Herbert:** It was a different kind of possession. If you chose a Lawrence Weiner sentence, you completely changed mentality. For us, it was more important to be part of a group that wanted new situations in the art world and beyond. 1968 brought about huge mental, cultural and political changes. Collecting this group of artists was not about possession of the works, but an appropriate way of participating in a social structure. If we wanted to take part, we had to become fully engaged in both the intellectual and material aspects. We collected because we wanted and needed these works of art around us, like books, and our involvement was intensive.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** Around 1968 we witnessed a revolutionary movement which questioned the very structure of the system in a way not seen since the mid-nineteenth century. The general perception was that the revolution could be successful, making a radical political transformation of the world a real possibility. We know today that the governments of the period were quite scared. For once, intellectuals, students and workers were all fighting for change together. The revolution was political in scope, but it also had dimensions that had to do with the way a subject is constructed, sexual differences, and education, which implied the questioning of institutions. Since collecting was traditionally associated with patronage and possession, one can imagine that it could have been perceived by artists at the time as a form of institutionalization; that is, a way of turning art into a commodity. As you say, many of the artists you knew and collected were reacting against the market and the art institutions. I wonder how they reacted to collectors and collections? Lawrence Weiner or Dan Graham, for example: did they have anything to say about your collecting their works?

**Anton Herbert:** We all felt there was no difference between artists, galleries and collectors. Participating and being a member of this group meant opposing the existing art world.

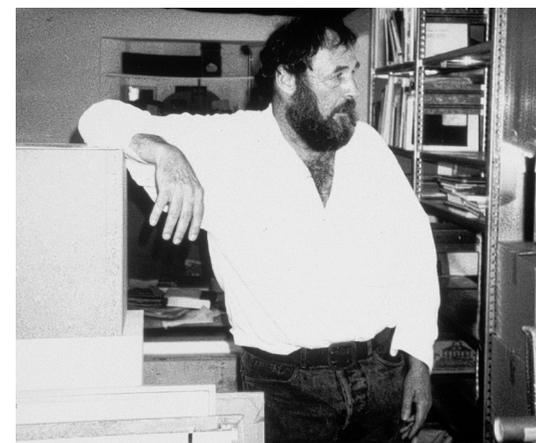
**Peter Pakesch:** It is interesting that a group of people in Belgium became so strongly involved in this new vision of contemporary art. That is an important aspect of this period.

**Anton Herbert:** We were obsessed with making a strong and solid collection and distrusted the superficial collecting mentality – buying this artist today and that one tomorrow, moving from one easy opportunity to another. So, we started long discussions, mostly with Konrad Fischer and MTL. These long and difficult discussions were necessary to decision-making. It took a lot of time to build up a concept. For instance, when we decided to have Carl Andre in the collection we had already selected four or five works we wanted to acquire in the following years. We never made rushed decisions. It was more like constructing ‘brick by brick’; as Duchamp puts it, ‘painting a collection together’. We didn’t have much money, so we had to be careful with our priorities. We had to make difficult choices, deciding what was essential and what would fit perfectly.

In the Netherlands, for example, we knew the work of Stanley Brouwn, Jan Dibbets and Ger van Elk. We opted for Stanley Brouwn and Dibbets, overlooking van Elk, though he is, of course, a very important artist. In Belgium we chose Broodthaers and not Panamarenko, and



Konrad Fischer, 1984



Harald Szeemann, 1987 [Tegna]



Fernand Spillemaeckers, exhibition Stanley Brouwn, 1976 [Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven]



Rudi Fuchs, exhibition Daniel Buren, 1981 [Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven]

in Germany, Richter – through Konrad Fischer – completely overlooking Polke.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** Collecting is about personal and historical reasons, but it also means building a past and a future around the artists. Now, we have witnessed the case of some artists who were extremely good when you began collecting but, with time, became repetitive. Did you reconsider a work you had acquired and thought maybe it was not so interesting anymore? Did you keep the work, or did you attempt to change it for another one?

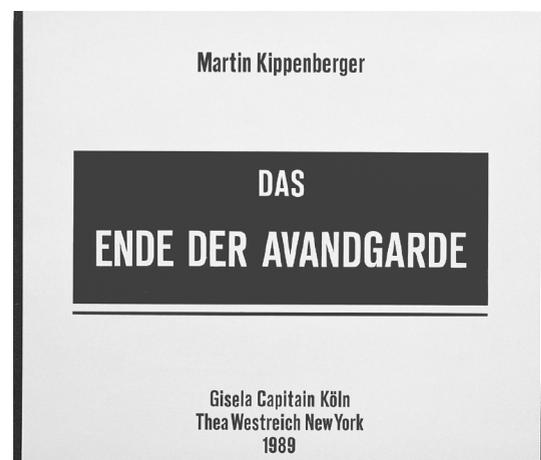
**Anton Herbert:** We all have our limited period of essential creativity: artists, curators, collectors. At the beginning I did not accept that, but now I think it is absolutely true as long as you believe in exceptions. Some artists, for example On Kawara, have a creative capability that lasts a lifetime. Others have a very short career – though I know that stating this seems rough and brutal. And there are other great exceptions, certainly. John Baldessari was born in 1931, so he is now 73; and yet including his works in our collection is one of our recent decisions. We have selected a real masterpiece: *All Getting On Together*, of the *Tetrad Series*. It shows the influence of Goya, Hitchcock, and has the essential elements of the Baldessari vocabulary. And look when he made it: 1999! This is an example of the limited validity of the rule stating that everyone has only a restricted period of essential creativity.

**Hans-Joachim Müller:** The Herbert Collection has an obvious time span. Two dates, 1968 and 1989, establish its time frame. Both years evoke weighty political experiences. 1968’s student revolt, the emphasis on emancipation, and a belief in self-liberation put an end to the dark post-World War epoch, all of which is reflected in the radical forms of Minimal and Conceptual Art. 1989 saw the collapse of Communism and ushered in a new era of technological revolution which led to other possibilities. The utopian era has become a virtual era. Nowadays, ‘superficial’ items such as display, screen and internet are attracting all kinds of attention.

**Anton Herbert:** We are fully aware of that, but do not want to change the definition of our col-

lecting activity: partiality, subjectivity, independence. We started with Minimal Art, moved to Conceptual Art and continued with Arte Povera. Today this evolution brings us to Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger and Franz West. All these artists are American or European individuals. 1989 is the crucial year, in this second period of our collection. The Cold War was over and the art world was quickly driven to extreme mercantile behaviour. The earlier idealistic views and illusions were gone. In this new context, how does contemporary art play its avant-garde role? Is it possible? What is the place for the individual artist, and what is his relationship to audience, media and public? Our collection is built of art works from about 1968 to around 1989. Our personal goal today is to create a Foundation which will offer opportunities to analyse in depth what happened in our generation and in our collecting period. Peter, do you agree with this vision of the collection's temporal frame and the reasons for it?

**Peter Pakesch:** Yes. It makes sense to me and reflects a certain purity of the sixties' approach, and it became, with the time, more and more important to me. Not just for reasons of biography, but also within a larger historical scale, if we look at the way things are dealt with now and how the relevance of art has changed. 1968 is a strong starting point, especially in relation to 1989 as an end point. We are now able to describe this time-span, this historic shift, and



Martin Kippenberger, *Das Ende der Avantgarde*. Cologne/New York: Gisela Capitain/Thea Westreich, 1989

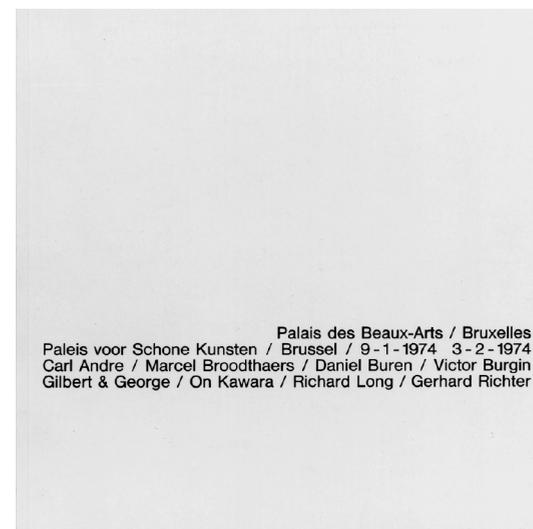
to understand how it ended. *Documenta* is a good example of it. To see *Documenta 9* in 1992, which reacted to the shift of 1989 in relation to the events of 1968 and *Documenta 4* and *5* in 1968 and 1972. By 1992 this show was the big public success it has been ever since. The art of the sixties and whatever followed entered the general discourse, an interesting genesis. This 'conceptual movement' – an elitist enterprise, radical by definition, with minor attention – became common and popular some thirty years later. The classical avant-garde definitely needed more time. But there may have been a price to pay. Later on, under some circumstances and in some collections, these pieces looked like decoration.

My intention, in showing this radical collection, is to reflect more on this development of an art movement and re-evaluate the period. I am confident that by showing a collection of this quality in the context of the still very young Kunsthaus Graz, and within the 'non-minimal' architecture by Peter Cook and Colin Fournier, we will be able to achieve a broad reflection of that period.

The conception of this collection as a radical and politically aware catalyst to change is of great significance. It came to my mind when you expressed the importance of the year 1968, especially from our current point of view, as we are nowadays overloaded with images. There is an iconoclasm that sets it apart from other contemporary collections, and especially from more recent collections of Minimal and Conceptual Art. I wonder if this was an important aspect to you. In fact, you once said that you wanted to 'clean up your house'.

**Anton Herbert:** 'Cleaning up my house' means 'cleaning up one's mind'. We didn't collect art works, but a new way of thinking. The art works were an expression of what was happening. Of course in a way, collecting means possessing, but this was not our main goal. When we started the collection we wanted to avoid that way of thinking. It was more about a creative engagement in line with the new visions of our generation.

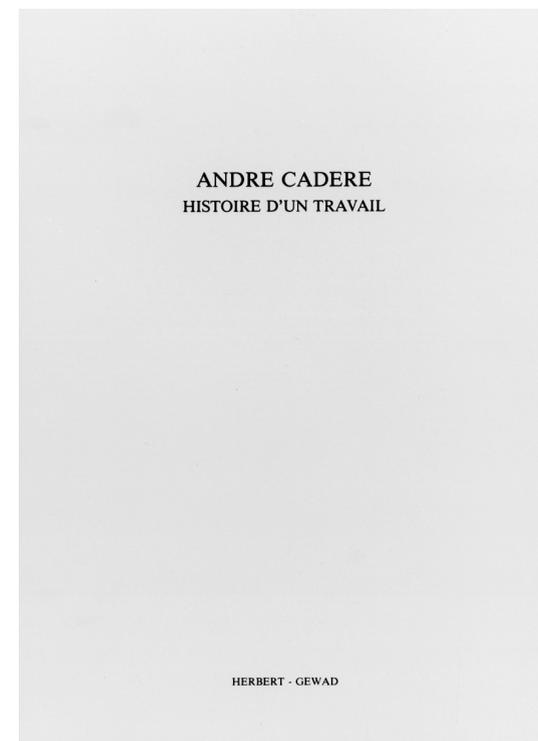
In 1974, the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, housed an exhibition curated by Yves Gevaert which displayed works by Carl Andre, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Gilbert & George, On Kawara, Richard Long and Gerhard Richter which was an early statement of our beliefs.



Catalogue of group exhibition curated by Yves Gevaert at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1974

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** Another key point in your collection is its archival side. The relationship between objects and documents is extremely interesting. It is clear that to you, documents are not just an explanation for major pieces, but pieces in and of themselves. I would even say that the significance imbued in this material cancels out the separation between piece and document, and opens up the possibility of representing territories other than those designated by galleries and art institutions. We have to remember how central all types of publications, artists' books, announcement cards, posters – not to mention the various magazines and reviews – were for the artists of the sixties and seventies. They aimed to discover new forms of relation and exchange. In some cases I would say that the real work was in the printed page rather than in the original. At a time when collecting has so much to do with social prestige and power, this is very important, and it appears to me that this is an aspect that attracts you more and more.

**Anton Herbert:** The document part, which of course was extremely evident in the Conceptual Art movement, was difficult for us to understand at first. Some intellectual visions – for example, the open letters that some artists wrote against certain political situations and



André Cadere, *Histoire d'un travail*. Ghent: Herbert – Gewad, 1982

their left-wing sympathy – we found dubious and not essential to our thinking. We were not looking for a view against something or someone, but the positive view that was to be found in art works. Later on we learned to read the content of these documents, and they are now an essential part of our collection. In fact, we eventually became involved in the publication of artists' books by Dan Graham, Ian Wilson, Joseph Kosuth and André Cadere.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** In the nineteenth century, art history was one of the most advanced disciplines in social sciences. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, it was showing signs of an extreme weakness. Artists such as Marcel Broodthaers – we must remember how perceptive his view of the art structure was in 1968, when he opened his fictitious museum in Brussels, or in 1972 when, during the *Documenta 5*, he decided to close it – were very articulate in their own work and had a precise understanding of the fast transformations that

# Donald Judd

## Complete Writings 1959–1975

Gallery Reviews Book Reviews Articles Letters  
to the Editor Reports Statements Complaints

Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975*. Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975

our social system was undergoing, including the unrepentant commodification of our lives. In contrast, art theory and art criticism during those years lagged behind other disciplines, displaced by the new ideas coming from philosophy, linguistics, feminism, history, and sociology, which contributed much more to the comprehension of the world and of new forms of art practice.

Anton Herbert: Artists themselves wrote about art: Art & Language, Joseph Kosuth, Donald Judd, Dan Graham, Daniel Buren.

Peter Pakesch: In this period, those interested in art could play different roles: another important paradigm was the *Ausstellungsmacher*, or 'exhibition maker'. These were, among others, the Dutch and German museum directors, the people at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam as well as those in Eindhoven, Krefeld and Mönchengladbach. They all created a modern role for curatorship. Criticism was expanded and the gallery model transformed and became

very successful in fulfilling a public role, especially the need for project-specific space. It is interesting that many gallerists came from other professions. Konrad Fischer started as an artist; Paul Maenz began his career in advertising. There were no more classical art dealers, and these new people became more and more 'middle-men'. Museum people also became 'middle-men'. An entirely new structure developed.

Anton Herbert: We did this collecting in our own way. Of course, we respected collectors like Reiner Speck and Martin Visser very much. We visited Count Panza in Varese and Urs Rausmüller in Schaffhausen. On the other hand, we were confronted from the beginning with the public image of collectors that had been established by Peter Ludwig. He was the 'Kaiser' everywhere and it was as if we were dwarfs reacting against the Moloch – against Ludwig! And today we have exactly the same problem, now with Saatchi-Power and Flick-Money.

Peter Pakesch: Again, another aspect that fueled the collection's iconoclasm.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: I think that the Herbert Collection is private in the Benjaminian sense. Though not private by market standards, it is made so through experience, dialogue, history and interpretation. It does not respond to the urges of the market and the aura has been removed from the works. The archive's role is fundamental in this way. When we see Richter's *Permutationen*, for example, next to Niele Toroni, what comes to us is not the wealth or market status symbolized by a major artistic icon of our age, but the telling of a story of our recent past. Undoubtedly, this collection includes pieces which would have a high status in any private or public collection. However, rather than promoting homogenization and reinforcing the status quo, the relationship between artworks and archive generates displacements that allow for another narrative to be told and a counter-model to be established. They offer us not only knowledge and aesthetic experience, but also the possibility of understanding – in a form which is perhaps close to Peter Weiss' *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* – a historical moment; one that Annick and Anton have lived intensively through collecting. Their

collection, therefore, has nothing to do with the Ludwig-type ones. It is not about favouring consensus and obscuring antagonism, but about history and education. I would also add that it has little to do with the way public organizations collect today. Unfortunately, this is not because public collections carry a mandate which is broader and more encompassing in their approach, but because they behave more and more according to the regulations of the market or the imperatives of political functionaries. So many institutions are obsessed with expanding their audience to increase profits that they plan their programs lightly so that they can be easily consumed and digested.

Hans-Joachim Müller: I would like to emphasize the fact that concentrating on Minimal and Conceptual Art has some other implications as well. Your collection represents only the Western art world. It builds a bridge between Europe and America, but shows a complete lack of interest in all other countries. Who were you consulting at the time? Could you tell us something about the decisive people in the art world and the leading galleries back then? How important were philosophers and art critics to your collecting?

Anton Herbert: Certain art galleries became important references for us. They were the family for these artists, their home; and they created a sort of circuit. This was evident, for instance, in Robert Barry's amazing *Invitation Piece* (1972–1973): eight exhibitions, eight galleries, each gallery announcing the exhibition of the next one: Paul Maenz, Cologne, Art & Project, Amsterdam, Jack Wendler, London, Leo Castelli, New York, Yvon Lambert, Paris, Galerie MTL, Brussels, Galleria Toselli, Milan and Galleria Sperone, Turin. These people worked with extremely low budgets, making art history with practically nothing.

We concentrated on Western art because we believed that we belong to a generation and a culture, so it would be very difficult for us to understand, for instance, the Latin American mentality. And I don't think it is our job, but that of museum people who are expected to have a wider vision. Ours is a collection of 'Westkunst', of course, and why not? Within that classification, however, one must accept



Count Panza di Biumo and Anton Herbert, 1996  
[Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas]



Daniel Buren, *Transparency*, 1976 (from *Art & Project Bulletin* April 1976) [Art & Project, Willemsparkweg 36, Amsterdam]

that Marcel Broodthaers was a Belgian, Daniel Buren French, and Bruce Nauman American. They are all related to their own cultures and at the same time make international art. We consider ourselves Belgian collectors working internationally. And besides, I must admit that I don't understand much about Chinese art!

**Peter Pakesch:** Collecting art from other cultures can be a way to appropriate or deal with those differences. I know of an art collector in Switzerland who has had a long-term relationship with China. His obsession with that country and its art scene is very much his way to get deeper into it; to understand more about it.

**Anton Herbert:** Today European and American museums are obsessed with dealing with rapid globalisation. However, is it possible to give an accurate vision of what is going on in Istanbul, Taipei or Shanghai from London, Paris or Berlin? It is certainly not our cup of tea, but we fully respect the information that we get about the art scene of such cities, mostly through Biennials.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** However, this is quite different from the spirit of your collection, which you have described as radical, quiet and not spectacular. Continuing with Walter Benjamin's notion of history, we could say that every generation is endowed with a kind of weak Messianic power that makes it feel responsible for what has happened in the past and is rooted in the present. To be truly effective, remembrance must always be critical, bringing certain elements of the past into the present and establishing their relationship. I am sure that you feel this kind of responsibility in your collection. Your collection is very coherent, but are there some other artists that you think would fit into it?

**Anton Herbert:** We like to undertake regular private overviews of the collection – 'un examen de conscience', a virtual selection of our *Collection Imaginaire*, 'the present, the past and the future' – by listing those artists whose works we would have in an ideal context without material limitations. The 'present' does not mean the present of today, but the present of our generation. By 'past' we mean those artists

who are our mentors, and by 'future' we mean our own availability for future choices and the limits of our involvement. Allow me to explain. For the past we would select, of course, Marcel Duchamp, Brancusi, Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni... quite normal. But look who would be the other mentors: Francis Picabia, James Ensor and Andy Warhol – the latter, essentially, with his films. In the present selection we would list the artists who are already in our collection – around forty artists nowadays – but also the ones we don't have. Eva Hesse, Helio Oiticica, Sigmar Polke, Dieter Roth, Blinky Palermo, Michael Asher, James Coleman, Robert Gober, Paul McCarthy, and Jeff Wall could all certainly be essential for the collection. None of them are in our collection currently, but had we the responsibility of a public museum, these names would certainly be integrated.

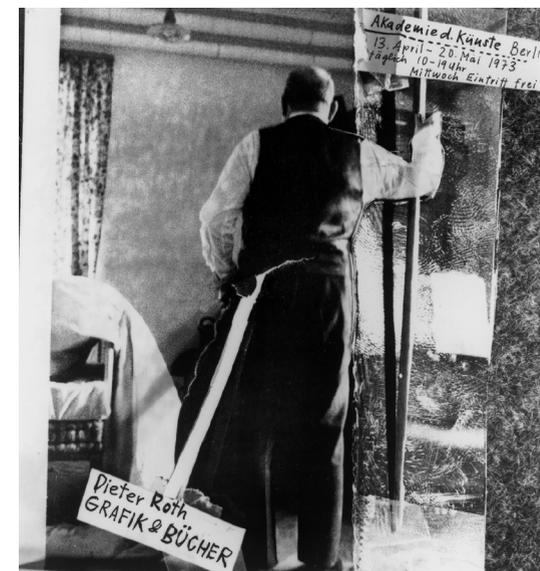
After we stopped collecting Arte Povera around 1986–1987, we had a difficult time making our next moves. We already had some works by Thomas Schütte and were interested in Reinhard Mucha. Through a show of Harald Szeemann in Vienna (*De Sculptura*, 1986) where we saw Mucha's *Bonn* we met Peter Pakesch, who owned that piece at the time. To acquire the piece we got involved with him and the situation there, with artists like Franz West, Heimo Zobernig, Günther Förg, Martin Kippenberger and Jan Vercruyse. First, we came to a better understanding of Jan Vercruyse's work through Peter Pakesch who showed it in Vienna. And through Jan Vercruyse we became involved with Franz West, whose works are essential for us as a counterpart to Reinhard Mucha and Thomas Schütte. West, in turn, was the link to Mike Kelley and Martin Kippenberger. All are related to each other, which made the continuity of our collecting concept possible. So we were able to go ahead.

**Peter Pakesch:** Again, though, wasn't it the iconoclastic aspect that held it all together? Even Kelley and Kippenberger are able to take a consciously radical (op)position against Minimalism.

**Anton Herbert:** I accept your point, but I believe that our selection of artists follows its own continuity. From Kippenberger there is a link to Baldessari, from Baldessari a link to



Posters by Dieter Roth, 1973



Weiner. Starting early with Weiner and bringing in later on Mike Kelley was quite logical for us.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** One aspect that I like about your collection is the contrast between those artists who believe in the possibilities of language – in the utopian dimension of language – such as Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre and Donald Judd; and those who outright reject any sort of utopia, developing instead an aesthetic of failure related to abjection. Mike Kelley is such an artist. It is pertinent to remember here that even if his later work is situated in the context of the West Coast, he was born in Detroit, a city which entered into a cycle of permanent deterioration with the decline of the automobile industry, an example then of the failure of Fordism and modernity. In 1989 it became clear that that process, which had more or less begun in 1978, was unstoppable. In 1978 it was also clear that the revolution of 1968 was over, and that it was necessary to propose a different type of art practice and strategy. Kelley began his performances around then, with obvious conceptual origins. For him, as had been true of the previous generation, writing was important, but in a very different way. Text was expanded to include not only analytical systems, but also consumer culture and comics.

It was also unavoidable to deal with the absorption of the avant-garde into leisure culture. Thus, we feel the urge to deal with pictures – how they are formed and how their systems are related; to deal with the kind of kitsch Surrealism which, during the sixties, became a common language; or with the recycling of modern inventions such as the readymade into forms that reflect on later capitalism in America (I'm thinking of *Craft Morphology Flow Chart*, 1991). The work of this second generation of artists has an infantile character in relation to its predecessors, which reflects a dysfunctional reality having to do with the way we transmit our knowledge and foresee our future. I remember Kelley saying, in an interview to Jean-François Chevrier, that there is certainly an adolescent dimension in his work. He believes that an adolescent is a dysfunctional adult just as art is a dysfunctional reality. In this situation it is obvious that the utopian language is no longer relevant. Kelley's jokes (and those of John Baldessari for that matter) expressed this changing situation.

**Hans-Joachim Müller:** Manuel Borja-Villel has described the techniques or tools of the joke and the grotesque as language of an anti-utopian period. Jokes are also visible in the intact

utopian period of the sixties. In art movements like Fluxus or Happening you could discern many jokes. Anton, why didn't you include such works or documents in the collection?

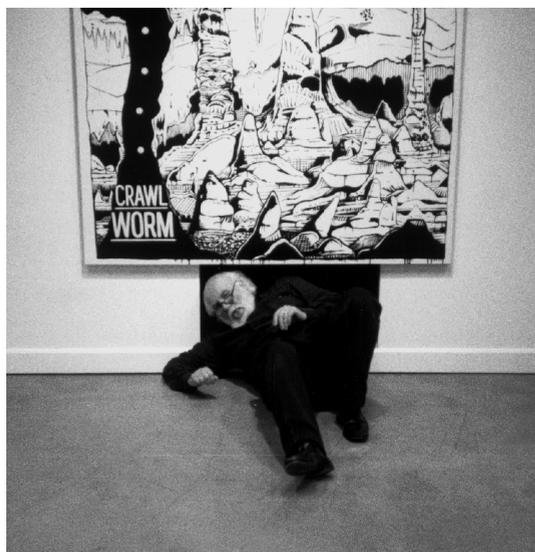
**Anton Herbert:** We had an in-born distrust of these art movements. We were suspicious of their beginnings: too much social action, too much body behaviour. This art is certainly not our belief, nor our obsession. Body Art was at its height when we started our collection of Conceptual Art. Fluxus and Happening seemed to be the other way you could go. We were not involved.

**Peter Pakesch:** In this context we have to talk about Mike Kelley, Franz West and Martin Kippenberger. None of them would have been possible without the Vienna Actionists, as their experience with Viennese Actionism is crucial, but in a very critical and ironic way. They question the drama of this movement and put in context the excitement that it generated. Perhaps in those days body-related art was too expressionistic, so one needed Kippenberger, West and Kelley's brand of purification.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** I don't think that traditional Body Art was compatible with the paradigm shift that this collection expresses. In a way, more traditional Body Art was like illustration; too descriptive. Its interest in the object was all but structural. The same could be said about many Fluxus artists: there is not a real rupture of subject in their performances nor in the way that text and image are associated. It was normal that you were not attracted to those ideas, the possible exception being John Cage. I think John Cage would fit perfectly in your collection.

**Anton Herbert:** Indeed, through Kelley and partially Kippenberger we perceived a growing questioning of events and activities related to body behaviour. Thanks to Kelley's performances, we eventually shed our initial suspicions and our opinions were able to evolve.

**Peter Pakesch:** But there is definitely a different approach in regard to Günther Brus and the Vienna Actionists. Fluxus is playful while Viennese Actionism is more dramatic, though



Mike Kelley, *Entrance to The Trajectory of Light in Plato's Cave*, 1997 [Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven]

not so much of an intellectual game. In that framework that was more the role of the critical positions like Valie Export and Peter Weibel which were as important in the Austrian tradition and less known elsewhere. They can be seen as a kind of comment on actionism with Fluxus' playfulness and intellectual wit to counteract the dramatic severity and pathos. It became possible for a generation later, for Kippenberger, Kelly or West to interact and play with these ideas and strategies, as a historical and intellectual discourse, with all the forms they could derive from Actionism and Fluxus as well as from Minimalism and Conceptual Art. They developed a new concept by interacting within different models. For an actionist artist, Actionism was the one and only true model, while the minimal artist followed a reductive model. However, you could interpret Actionism through Minimalism and vice versa.

**Anton Herbert:** Could you explain why Franz West was so opposed to Viennese Actionism?

**Peter Pakesch:** West was suspicious of the drama associated with Viennese Actionism. It seems that he was, in a way, traumatized. He grew up within the Viennese art world, which was quite radical in those days, and early in his

youth he was a spectator of actions by Nitsch and Mühl. In 1967, at the age of 16, he saw the *Fest des Psychopathologischen Naturalismus* and was impressed but also depressed for weeks, as we can read in his 1995 biography. Franz was always very close to the Actionism scene. In Vienna, his mother was a lot of those artists' dentist, and his half-brother Otto Kowalek was an important personality within the Wiener Gruppe writers. But still, he was repulsed by the brutality and drama surrounding the whole Actionism situation, and as an individual, he felt excluded within the very hierarchical social systems that Nitsch and Mühl had established. On the other hand, Mike Kelley had an early connection to Actionism. In 1975, he and Stephen Prina played in a Los Angeles performance of Hermann Nitsch. Both musicians are still proud of having taken part in that event. Kelley was profoundly interested in Actionism. He was knowledgeable about German Romanticism and all its aesthetic and philosophical radicalism, which was rather subversive, and he saw it as a way to resist the prevailing ideas of Minimalism and Conceptual Art. Franz West, on the other hand, resisted Actionism and was fascinated by Conceptual Art.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** It is important how we use specific words. In some languages there are many words for 'joke', but they are used on different levels. When we are talking about the joke or the grotesque in the case of Mike Kelley or Jeff Wall, 'joke' implies space, languages, body and history. These elements have little to do with Fluxus or Actionism. We have to be careful when using such a word.

**Peter Pakesch:** Fluxus was a playful journey of discovery, whereas the joke – especially in the work of Martin Kippenberger – was a conscious strategy. For Kippenberger, the joke became something like a sculpture. I remember the birthday party of a friend of his where Kippenberger's sole entertainment for the whole evening was to tell a joke; a very stupid, simple children's joke. He spent one and a half hours telling this joke. The whole situation could be seen like a sculpture in a space which was built up by all the techniques of reflections that Kippenberger used. And this was very different from what people did in the early sixties.



Franz West, 1997 [Reims]

**Hans-Joachim Müller:** I think we should discuss the genesis of the more recent part of the collection, which doesn't seem so coherent. Tell us the story surrounding the decisions behind the Kelley, Kippenberger and Franz West acquisitions.

**Anton Herbert:** In those years, there were a lot of other possibilities. We could go different ways. For us it was West at that time who was the most radical. We found the conceptual link in his work and he was extreme in his lifestyle. Through Jan Vercruyse we were prepared and available for this new situation. So Franz was the first, followed by the others; Kelley through Rafael Jablonka and Kippenberger through Gisela Capitain. She has the same mentality as Peter and wanted to build a strong relationship with the collector. Nothing to do with the situation today: the collector, the gallery and the art fair in between. They proposed specific works for the collection. Once, Peter and I disagreed on a choice and I asked him, 'Why should we not have this work by West?' He answered, 'It's not the right one for your collection. You need these twelve 'Sitze' with the two video pro-

grams.' The price of that installation was three times higher, and the work was huge, but the content was extreme and, of course, he convinced us. He was right, and we did it. The same with Gisela. She brought the Kippenberger dossier of *Spiderman Atelier* at the precise moment we were mentally ready to include him in the collection. The 'Spiderman' project came in and Gisela Capitain was open to discussions with us. We were quickly convinced even though the work was far outside of our price range. The gallerist plays a huge role. After our decisions on West and Kippenberger, we were attracted to Kelley's work. Again, this was a complete change of mentality for us. The Kelley double drawing proposed to us by Jablonka, *Trickle Down and Swaddling Clothes*, seemed extremely vulgar to us, but we were open to the challenge, and once those drawings were in the collection, we were ready for – and even in need of – a large body of his works.

**Peter Pakesch:** It was also a very important moment for me. I had a high respect for what Annick and Anton collected, but am from a different generation and had a different position in regard to what art could be. Within these twenty or more years, the situation had changed quite dramatically. The whole field of art in the early- or mid-1980s was much broader and less structured, making orientation difficult. Communication and discussion with the Herberts became extremely important for me in forming my generation's position. Contributing to this collection and having this exchange was crucial.

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** I would like to say something about Pistoletto and Arte Povera. The piece you have, *Segno Arte*, is not really Arte Povera. This installation fits perfectly with the younger part of your collection. And Franz West's piece *Ordinary Language* is a place for activity. It is not really a sculpture any more, but a work in which you find different elements having to do with narrative and popular language. I see Pistoletto's *Segno Arte* on that level.

**Hans-Joachim Müller:** How could we define the status of the West/Kelley/Kippenberger satellite in the collection? How does it function in relation to the other artists?



Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Segno Arte*, 1976–1998

**Peter Pakesch:** Many of these artists are very strong at navigating on their own with this integrated approach. West, Kippenberger and Kelley can be a cosmos of their own, as are the cases of Nauman, Broodthaers, and Gilbert & George; and on the minimal side, Sol LeWitt. They create whole systems which work for themselves and which could possibly create an independent universe. It is about communication and not about structure.

**Anton Herbert:** Therefore, as we present these shows in Barcelona and Graz, it is essential to have a strong sixty-day program. The artists have to be involved, and not just by showing works and documents, but by integrating themselves – for example to have Dan Graham in a panel with Daniel Buren, or Mike Kelley with Franz West and Pistoletto, or Lawrence Weiner

together with John Baldessari. We need to confront the publics of Graz and Barcelona directly with these artists and give them the last word. They are the centre of the play.

### Private and Public Collections

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel:** For me – coming from a public institution – collecting creates models. Why do we collect? Collecting is a way to understand history, the present, and the future. The basic function of a public art museum is always to create these models. It is an educational process similar to that of the 18th-century bourgeoisie which started creating educational structures – libraries, schools, universities, museums. It was important for them to understand the world. However, all of that has changed due to the paradigm shift of the 1960s and 1970s. Sometimes changes are not well understood in their own time. Certainly, art museums have the same central importance they had before – as opposed to universities, which are now less important to education than museums. However, the museum's educative role is not truly respected. The respected modalities of museums today are about consuming, not educating. I think that the mission of public institutions today is to demonstrate the museum's educational function.

What does this context mean for Annick and Anton's collection? The importance of such a collection becomes evident when we consider how public collections have become, more and more, a way of consuming elements that have a shared history, which is universal. Nowadays, every museum shows basically the same history, which is canonical, universal, and homogeneous. It is a kind of multicultural history that is unable to create identity or dialogues. On the other hand, most private collectors are going into power-related collecting that has to do with the market. Look at the most prominent collections in Germany!

And yet, an aspect of Annick's and Anton's collection that is very intriguing to me is its precision: the right pieces are collected at the right moment so that they express this paradigm shift from work to document. They are building a complex, non-linear history, which is why it makes sense to me to show this private collection in our public museum in Barcelona.

**Peter Pakesch:** I very much support what Manuel is saying, but want to stress something even more important for me, which explains why I am going to show this collection in Graz. I think that the Herbert Collection has an epistemological aspect that we hardly find in any other private collection. Each detail of the works is concerned with the idea of knowledge and how to gain it, which makes what Manuel said about the role of the collection very interesting. It is a tool of knowledge and a way to put ideas in order.

The other point, following Hans-Joachim, lies in the importance of 1968, which is well crystallized in the collection. On the one hand, it presents a revolutionary way of dealing with art, and on the other, it actively participates in the iconoclasm we discussed before. These are two significant aspects of this very special collection that make it so different from other private collections like Count Panza di Biumo's, or Rainer Speck's, which are both great examples but conceived completely differently. In the Herbert Collection the selection is non-linear. That means that it is a very sculptured collection, a very space-related collection, whose works create a field of ideas that interact with one another.

For me, the physical embodiment of the collection strongly reflects what Anton said before about the interaction with galleries and artists in Belgium that you had in the late sixties and early seventies. This way of thinking can be perceived in the collection. This was always the feeling I had when I visited your home. Also, I have always been strongly interested in the small changes you have made regarding the collection's installation. I am interested in the way single pieces of art will react to each other. It became really something like an embodiment of an art work: each work had its precise place as part of the whole.

No collection can give a whole view, but can certainly act as a convincing fragment of totality, which is, for me, what makes the Herbert Collection really special. Besides, this collection relates to the museum that I am working in, which is an institution that comes directly from the late-eighteenth-century spirit of cataloguing the world and trying to find a bourgeois continuation of it. I agree with Manuel: collecting is an important challenge today as there are so many radical shifts that change and determine

how the public, the museum, and in the end, society, behave. Showing the Herbert Collection might clarify some aspects – on a very abstract level, of course.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: I want to add two things. First of all, I agree with you that all collections are fragmentary – especially a private collection which is voluntarily non-linear. When we are born, we are literally ‘thrown’ into language and we can use it only to say what it allows us to say. Yet, at the same time, we cannot think in terms of totality. The days of the big systems are over. We are closer to the *minor literatures*. That implies that the stories we tell are always incomplete and that the reader is the one who has to complete them. The beholder is no longer a spectator, but an agent – in the literal sense of the word – which makes that which s/he perceives his/her own.

This fragmentation and displacement is, in my view, one of the traits of the works included in the Herbert Collection. Because of that, Anton has insisted on several occasions that their collection needs a work by James Coleman. Coleman’s work is, by definition, fragmentary; the displacement of the image and text, the tension between still and moving image, the relation between space and time, and the confrontation of gazes all need to be gathered together by the spectator, who must then decide what to do. To me, this is an extreme opposition to the modernistic tradition of the significant moment, and very relevant in this collection.

The second thing I wanted to add is that we are at the beginning, not the end, of a process of social change. Because of that, we need intellectual tools; new mechanisms for learning. We know from Foucault that knowledge is not just a given discourse, nor just what translates the fights and the systems of domination, but what constitutes the same power that we want to obtain. Its principles of exclusion, both external (sanity and insanity, truth and false, etc.) and internal (systems of cataloguing, authorship, forms of interpretation, modes of use, etc.), are well known. We have to invent new methods and categories as well as new tools for learning. The works in this collection provide us with such an opportunity. We should probably reconsider the way in which we collect and

think more in terms of relationship as opposed to monumental work; focus on what each work implies in an expanded field as well as the relationship between work and spectator.

Peter Pakesch: For me the word ‘tool’ is important in this connection. It certainly is not about possession, but placement in a cultural field and, of course, about giving the spectators – and whoever is active in that field – the tools to deal with our knowledge and frame their own past and history in a specific way. There is a lot of work to do in developing this, all of which competes with the traditional model which has enjoyed some success. Indeed, it no longer works as it did one hundred years ago, but the real competition is that of the market model. Nobody ever expected that the market would develop as it has. In fact, in the late nineteenth century the market developed similarly, but art still survived, and a lot of things which were very hyped at the time became unimportant. The crucial function of museums is to define lasting models. What we can do in museums like MACBA in Barcelona or the Kunsthaus in Graz is create spaces which are different from certain mainstream situations; more experimental and challenging. Here, in Graz, at the Joanneum, one of our founding statutes requires us to take stock of the collection. It was the idea of a sentimental and conservative Habsburg prince who was also a revolutionary and big reformist. This concept is open enough to allow for the definition of a strategy that goes beyond the classical bourgeois collection of the 19th century. The model we have defines the museum as integrated. Today, though, it is very difficult to find adequate definitions that are practical and work on an institutional level.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: For me collecting is a way of dealing with death, and is therefore intrinsically embedded in time. As such, it is inimical to a self-enclosed identity, and therefore never to be finished. Such a collection is alive, and as long as it lives can never be completed, as there will always be something unfinished, outstanding or yet to be incorporated. It is a non-object of desire in the sense that Katja Silverman describes it. To be passionate about works of art and collecting them means ‘that one’s capacity to care is rooted in the past, but



Tony Herbert (1902–1959)

that – until the moment of death – it will always be subject to retroactive re-articulation. It also means to love and cherish the precise forms in which the impossible non-object of desire can be miraculously reborn.’ Collecting, then, is a form of memory; one which is free from the straitjacket of identity. While it cannot help but be focused on the situation in which it has been put together, it can orient us towards the future. In this sense, I wonder how different you feel your collection is from that of your father? Your father was an important figure in Flanders and had strong nationalistic ideas, from what I know. He collected Flemish Expressionism, and I think that somehow he must have aimed to represent the Flemish national spirit. Your collection, however, is international in scope. The work of the artists in your collection is cold in nature, far from expressionism and gesture (and I would say this is the case of Mike Kelley or Franz West, in which the expression is clearly mediated through language). Was this a conscious reaction? And if collecting had so much to do with your own personal development, why, at one point, did you say that you had finished your collection?

Anton Herbert: In our view, it is essential that private collectors stick to their generation and to their subjective choice within it. The collection we brought together covers one large generation of artists, no more. That is what we are able to do. A museum collection has to work on continuity through different generations. However, this privilege does not apply to private collectors, who are lost if they try to go for con-

tinuity through generations. Private collectors must present their own twenty or thirty years of full activity and involvement. They have to be partial, flexible and open. And then, maybe in the end they will be able to show something that is of interest to the art community, making their collection significant in a wider context.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: Collecting is a kind of collage. It is about putting things together. Therefore, it is relevant to present this new idea of collecting to those for whom collecting has become an astonishing source of power.

Peter Pakesch: We have also defined collecting as a social process, which it has always been, in a certain way. Critical as I am of the American museum system, with its strong emphasis on trustees and private money, I have to say it is ahead in creating active social models. Groups of collectors as a part of a community become more important and the interactions between the collections seem to be stronger. Here in Europe collections work more on an individualistic basis and are sometimes monolithic. Therein lies a certain quality that should be defined with strategies of individual and social interaction.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: I wouldn’t say that private collectors in America don’t have power, because they do, since they are already in museums.

Peter Pakesch: But I think generally in Europe the dominance of certain collectors is a relatively new phenomenon, whereas in America the system is more developed, and there is more of a balance between collectors and museums.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: We shouldn’t forget that in America there is a tradition of modernism which was interrupted in Europe by the Second World War. If you analyse why MoMA became the true museum of modern art, the talking symbol of modernity, you will see that it is due to the fact that it had directors who clearly defended modernity’s agenda. Also, there was a society – Rockefeller and others – helping to crystallize modernity’s ideas in their museum. This link between society – you can also call it community – and the museum is very well



Raas Van Gaverestraat, Ghent 1986

developed in the United States, whereas in Europe the relationship is more fragmented. The only way for us to be strong and to make these models work is to create a community. Unless we establish models and systems of education, it will never happen. The situation here is very fragmented: we have the collections, we have the knowledge, but we don't have the society to crystallize it.

Anton Herbert: The frustrations of museums and the arrogance of some private collections today should be analysed by looking into the essential aspects of museum structure and the limitations of the private collections. To start with, private collectors will never have the essential *objectivity* that museums have in an historical context. A second feature of museums is their *continuity* through generations: from

Ingres to Mike Kelley, from Beckmann to Franz West, from Caspar David Friedrich to Kippenberger. No private collector can do this. Museums, through their collections and through their exhibitions, play a phenomenal role in society. Most collectors are like meteors: they last ten, twenty years – then they go to Sotheby's and sell, and their collection disappears. The third feature is that museums are responsible for *education* and didactic work through generations, whereas private collectors don't have this social role.

Our goals, with the private collection in Ghent, are – contrary to the art boom – to go in depth and work on a Foundation as a research centre, a study organisation and an archive, so as to analyse in a broader context the essential aspects of art and study the changes of 1968 and 1989. We want to look,

if possible, for some historical continuity through the subjectivity of our collecting activity. Of course we have no experience in doing this, and don't even know where to begin. Indeed, it is 'Utopia'. But we know it is necessary.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: Going back to the current crisis of museums, I agree that one of the problems is lack of funding; but the main problem is lack of ideas and models, which is more problematic today because we cannot try to perpetuate the classical concept of the museum. I also agree with the fact that education is the responsibility of museums. But we should discuss which type of education. People are obsessed with education in terms of transmission, whereas I think we should think in terms of education as negotiating (as if we were an ignorant teacher teaching an ignorant student). That would create new models in terms of collecting, but also in terms of education. Otherwise our battle is lost, as it is a power struggle and we have no power.

To create a new model of contemporary museum means basically three things for me. First of all, there are the stories you are telling; how you collect, how you create a narrative model, etc. The narrative we are creating plays on different areas: one is today, after the early nineties. Another one took place in the seventies, and meant a huge change – even bigger in Spain as we moved from Franco to democracy. And then – something like a golden age – there is the fifties: modernity in cinema and photography.

Second, a collection should not only be new content. It should be done in a different way. My point here is the following: you were saying, Peter, that we are still operating in terms of museums of the nineteenth century. Perhaps it is a broad statement, but the museum is still the white cube. We have moved from the white cubes of galleries and museums to the black box of cinema, with nothing in between. It would be very important to develop other kinds of playing and curating, and I think that collecting challenges us to do so.

Third, we must think about how to redefine the public and the work of art so that it becomes active. It is important to develop a model that allows us to present collecting as a fragment of history. We must think about the fact that there is no longer a periphery. We are



Entrance of the exhibition *L'Architecte est absent*, 1984  
[Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven]

living in a global world, in a kind of network, and in that sense everything is a fragment.

Anton Herbert: Through all these years, when we visited galleries such as Konrad Fischer, MTL, Paul Maenz, Peter Pakesch or Gisela Capitain, we saw exhibitions of an individual artist. Group shows were rare. Exceptionally, mostly in Germany, there were huge group shows on specific places: exhibitions like *Skulptur*, *Zeitgeist*, *Metropolis* or *Westkunst*. So it is obvious that we made our collection through individual gallery exhibitions. We were intrigued by the processes of Bruce Nauman, Broodthaers, Richter, and Dan Graham. We looked for the personal concept of the artist. When we use the term 'individual mythology', it means the lifetime vision and obsession of the artist. Most of these artists don't even want to be classified in a group, to be pushed into an historical structure. They want to be respected for their individuality. I am not so sure if the work of Kounellis has much to do with the work of Mario Merz, or the work of Donald Judd with Carl Andre's floor pieces.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: I understand what you mean, but it is very important to be wary of the term 'individual' from what Harald Szeemann called 'individual mythologies'. For me, an outsider, what you describe as 'individual' seems to be very coherent. You can say that your collection is European and deals with a very specific



October 30, 2000. Large 'family reunion' on the occasion of the exhibition *Many Colored Objects...* at the Casino Luxembourg with among others Carl Andre, Roland Augustine, Michael Baldwin, Robert Barry, Christian Bernard, Marie-Puck Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Jean-Marc Bustamante, Gisela Capitain, Herman Daled, Jan Debbaut, Luciano Fabro, Yves Gevaert, Gilbert & George, Maria Gillissen, Marian Goodman, Julian Heynen, Rafael Jablonka, Mike Kelley, Kasper König, Nicholas Logsdail, Lawrence Luhning, Enrico Lunghi, Reinhard Mucha, Suzanne Pagé, Giulio Paolini, Mel Ramsden, Tucci Russo, Wilhelm Schurmann, Thomas Schütte, Pietro Sparta, Vicente Todoli, Niele Toroni, Gijs Van Tuijl, Didier Vermeiren, Lawrence Weiner

moment in Europe in which three or four aspects became important: the redefinition of the public, the poetic aspect of works of art, the language of art, and the change of the role of the artist. All these aspects are very European in the sense that they come from an enlightened tradition, which makes your collection coherent.

Peter Pakesch: The collection also represents a confrontation with America: a major political topic of the late sixties – embracing the American popular culture on the one hand, and on the other, maintaining a critical relationship with the big power. This was a different political position from what it was twenty years later, at the end of the Cold War. I think the role of intellectuals in this political game has changed a lot.

Hans-Joachim Müller: In the past years, quite a few private collectors have striven for their own museum. What do you think about that?

Anton Herbert: From my point of view it makes no sense. It's about power and ego and has no historical significance. It is certainly not our way of thinking, as we are not interested in power. There are only a few exceptions of private collections which have successfully turned into museums with good buildings. And there are still some good collectors around who are working with more discretion.

Peter Pakesch: It's also a question we discussed before, about what a collection is. A collection itself can be seen as a sculpture of a mental space. It has to do with the creation of the collector or the curator as a super-artist, and we are dealing with the idea of masterpieces that

came out of the nineteenth century. The collection is very much a nineteenth-century masterpiece. But there are situations to develop as part of the creation of new fields. Pistoletto with his *Cittadellarte* is certainly such a model. We have to redefine some models in regard to our museum systems. Circumstances call for really different strategies and they are not easy to find.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel: We have to work in two ways. One way is to understand that the money is not in the public sector any more. It is private, truly private. And sometimes powerful public institutions behave like private ones in the sense that they lobby. When we want to write history and collect the way they do, we will have lost the battle. Maybe that is not so bad, because it means that it is possible to write history differently. Perhaps papers, books, and small things will become more interesting. The second way we must work is by re-mapping. We should not forget that history has changed a lot. We have moved from the history of the kings to the history of the people. So history of art should not be the history of big names. And this leads us back to our original question: why show this collection in a public institution? Because such a collection can create models of history and models of present times, giving the people the necessary tools to understand them.

Hans-Joachim Müller: The Herbert Collection has been shown only twice in the past. Is this due to a fear of too much publicity, or a desire to conserve the intimacy of your collection?

Anton Herbert: We did Eindhoven in 1984 and Luxembourg in 2000. There were other opportunities to show the collection which we did not follow through on and don't regret. The presentation *L'Architecte est absent*, at the Van Abbe-museum in Eindhoven, was essential for us. We started collecting in 1972, so this show meant confronting the public for the first time, after twelve years. It was Rudi Fuch's idea. He, along with Jan Debbaut, visited us in Ghent at the end of 1983 and proposed that they would both choose works from our collection, and we could choose works from the Van Abbe Museum's collection. This was for us a unique opportunity: integrating a Beckmann, a Mondrian,

a Schwitters in our collection meant achieving the utopia of continuity, at least for the show.

So we made our choice, and then Rudi wanted, of course, to influence us. He said: 'I agree with your selection, but you should add to it a painting from the Van Abbe collection that you don't like: a Baselitz', which was his preference. We accepted the challenge, and decided to hang his Baselitz in the same room with our works by Lawrence Weiner and Carl Andre. It was a powerful experience.

After the presentation at Eindhoven we felt pressure from the public and media which caused a black gap in our intimacy. As a reaction, we reinstalled the collection in Ghent differently. Our ideas about installation became still more precise. One should go for the maximum of what the works can give, without compromises.

In 2000, Enrico Lunghi invited us to hang a selection of works at the Casino Luxembourg, entitled *Many Colored Objects*. Again an excellent opportunity for us. The Casino Luxembourg is a small place outside Belgium, not too far away, where a precise selection of essential works could be made. We asked the Casino to invite the artists. Most of them accepted the invitation, so on October 30, 2000 a large 'family reunion' took place, and we – the collectors – had the odd sensation of being fully supported by the artists whose works we had collected.