

ARTE magazine

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Interview with Harry Macklowe by Laura Leonelli

HARRY MACKLOWE'S AUCTION

The American businessman tells his passion for art while his contemporary art masterpieces are soon to be auctioned in New York

That small Miró, purchased when he made his debut in the challenging business world in New York, that he will never sell.

An immense **Twombly**, a **Rothko** that marks the abstract turn of the artist, a sculpture by **Giacometti** already on the cover of the Guggenheim Museum retrospective in 2018, **Warhol's Nine Marylins**, **Richter's** Sea and majestic sky, and sixty more masterpieces of the 20th and 21st centuries, these will instead be all auctioned by **Sotheby's New York** on 15th November, and May 2022.

The auction, valued \$600 millions, has the highest starting quotation ever offered for a private collection. It has already made history, and so has Harry Macklowe in New York, the city he redesigned.

Macklowe, New York born in 1937, real estate developer, investor and builder, a life spent building landmarks – like the Metropolitan Tower at 57 West Street, 68 floors and 217 meters high, the glass cube of the spectacular Apple store opposite to the General Motors building – purchased for \$1.400 millions - the super elegant 432 Park Avenue, 85 floors and 426 meters high, and finally his last creation, **One Wall Street**, the art déco masterpiece by **Ralph Walker**, with the spectacular Red Room by **Hildreth Meière**, soon to be reopened to the public after years.

This is to recall not simply the happiness and ease with which this extraordinary collection was built up over 50 years, but mostly to understand how modern and contemporary arts shaped the vision of this very special man.

The meeting is in Paris for breakfast. Mr Macklowe arrives right on time. He wears white trousers, a blue jacket and T-shirt, a scarf of the same colour, two Macklowe Properties branded white and orange bags and a tennis bag. A double espresso for him and we begin.

Mr Macklowe, when did art enter your life?

I never wanted to be an artist. Business has always been my very clear vocation. However, my mother painted landscapes and so did my brother. At a certain point I started to draw too and this way of jotting down ideas, feelings, details - the shape of a face like the elevation of a building - became a way of reflecting.

Is there any place in New York where you go pondering about things?

The MET, from a young age. I would go in and turn immediately to the gallery of Greco-Roman antiquities. I have never forgotten that feeling of calm, warmth, and solemnity.

When I redesigned the entrance to One Wall Street, I remembered those mosaic carpets and reproduced them faithfully.

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Before the paintings and the sculptures, it is important to create the place where you can experience art, which means looking and loving.

So, the 1890 spectacular windows - each measuring 2.7x2.7 metres – overlooking NYC in every direction and designing 432 Park Avenue, are they like a course in art history?

I could never have bought Richter's magnificent *Seestuck* without this idea in mind, nor could I have imagined a woman lying on the *dormouse* that I had built under each window, reading, drinking coffee, and watching the spectacle of time. The sunlight giving way to the lights of the city, without having Titian's and Giorgione's Venuses in mind. Same seduction.

And when you were confronted with Giacometti's *Le nez*, so fragile and dramatic, what kind of seduction did you feel?

The same as described by a great friend of Alberto Giacometti, Jean-Paul Sartre, who called this sculpture the emblem of the human condition. This masterpiece entered my life twice: in 1965, when I made my first trip to France and visited the Fondation Maeght - *Le nez* was already there, a modern sphinx. Many years later, a gallery owner called me and told me he had a 24-hour option for Giacometti's masterpiece. I didn't hesitate for a second.

And how did Cy Twombly enter your collection?

Again, I was in France, on a boat - my other great passion - and Yvon Lambert had invited me to a dinner in honour of Twombly in Avignon, during the great exhibition that the city had organised. I saw Twombly at work while he was still painting this epic canvas. I saw it and in an instant, I bought it.

Your collection boasts the sculpture of the monument that Picasso wanted to dedicate to Apollinaire and their friendship. Did you spend time with the artists you collected over time?

Yes, I have met them all and I would say that the criterion of my collection is in some way the friendship with all the involved artists. Each work, however different, continues in the one next to it. Real collections create a flow that makes possible unexpected dialogues.

Gallery owners you were friend with?

Today, Larry Gagosian, but I always think very fondly of Leo Castelli and especially of Robert and Betsy Miller.

The man who really guided me in my understanding of art was Alexander Liberman, painter, sculptor, photographer and the art director of Condé Nast for 32 years. I had the honour of opening my sculpture garden - in Dag Hammarskjöld Park, a few steps away from the United Nations building - with an exhibition dedicated to Alex's giant sculptures.

For him, who had to leave Russia immediately after the Revolution and had lived in London, Paris and then fled from Paris to New York because of Nazism, art was a cry, it was shouting out his pain. An elegant man like him, who always wore a black jacket, a white shirt and a thin black tie, could not have expressed his existential despair in any other way.

And you really don't 'shout out' at having to deprive yourself of your wonderful collection?

No, not at all. The time has come, and I do it with joy.

You have your Mirò anyway

I bought it in the very early 60s and it is really the first piece in the collection. I bought it for \$125 in a gallery at 681 Fifth Avenue, payment in instalments, \$10 a week.

But you really don't mind letting go of a masterpiece like Mark Rothko's *No.7?*

Not really, and then I have another Rothko.