

Art & Antiques
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The TOP 100 Collectors in America

By Sue Scott & Valerie Leeds

2001. One year into the new millennium and by all accounts collecting is as active as ever. This year's review of the *Art & Antiques* Top 100 is an eclectic mix from across the nation—many new names to the lineup—showing the full spectrum of collecting in the United States.

Collectors are a breed apart, with different interests but certain qualities in common. Most used the term "passionate" to describe their habit, necessary for an avocation that requires a premium of time and resources. Beyond that, we had several qualifying elements. In a year that boasted a strong art market, active buying over the past 18 months was essential,

whether for one or two blockbuster works or hundreds. We also feature niche collectors or those who had recently tightened their focus. Philanthropy was equally important: collectors who in the year 2000 shared their knowledge and collections with the public via a museum exhibition, the World Wide Web or publications. Our researchers canvassed scholars, dealers, curators and other collectors, and pored through publications and auction records for the most active collectors during the past year. The list is quite diverse but as philosopher David Hume observed, "Beauty is not a quality inherent in things; it only exists in the mind of the beholder." —Sue Scott



African Asbanti terra-cotta head from Agnes Gund's and Daniel Shapiro's collection.



Gloria & Sonny Kamm



Robert & Nancy Magoon



Michael & Gael Mendelsohn

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In the living room, Morris Hirshfield's "American Beauty" (top), 1942, hangs behind Bessie Harvey's "Face of Africa 2", 1994 (on table). G. P. Ailer's "Desk and Chair" (below), 1878, wood with polychrome.

FACING: "Woodbridge Figures" (above), 1920-40, Thornton Dial's "Smooth-Going Cats Going to the Top" (below), paint and mixed-media on canvas mounted on board.

Gael & Michael Mendelsohn

Hastings-on-Hudson, New York
Contemporary folk, outsider art & Americana

Imagine the perfect first date: she, an inveterate collector with limited means; he, an estate planner with the means but limited exposure to the world of collecting. They attend a flea market, where she agonizes over which salt and pepper shaker to buy. He buys the entire table. They marry five months later, and in the ensuing 20-plus years build one of the foremost contemporary folk-art collections in the country. Michael Mendelsohn became so enthusiastic about the world of collecting,

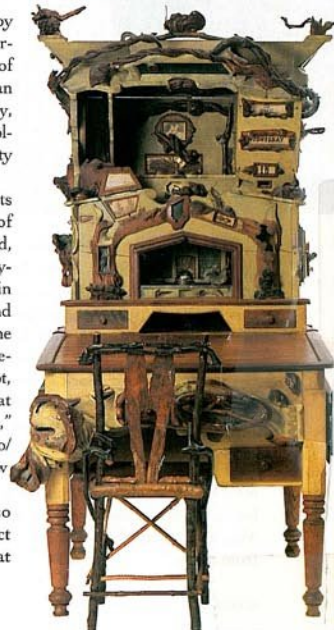
he expanded his practice and formed a specialized company called C.M. Bridgge. Today, it is the leading adviser for collectors in planning the course of their collections.

The couple's early days were marked by the same kind of frenzy exhibited on their first date—Gael once bought an entire wall of lunch boxes out of a restaurant in California. But during the past five years they have spent most of their energy—and resources—culling the collection, deaccessioning duplicates and lesser pieces while

adding exceptional works by masters in the field. As Gerard C. Wertkin, director of the Museum of American Folk Art in New York City, observes: The result "is a collection of stunning originality and aesthetic strength."

Today the collection boasts breathtaking examples of works by Morris Hirshfield, William Hawkins, Bill Traylor, Henry Darger, Martin Ramirez, Howard Finster and Thornton Dial Sr. It spans the late 19th century to the present and is "without a doubt, one of the top three of that breadth in the United States," notes Roger Ricco of Ricco/Maresca Gallery in New York City.

The Mendelsohns also understand an essential aspect of collecting folk art is that



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many of the most interesting works were created by anonymous artisans, often for utilitarian, spiritual or entertainment purposes. So much of their collection is not only about a name but about unique objects: a massive green desk from 1878 full of hidden drawers, wacky designs and an embedded kaleidoscope; a lifeguard training figure; puppets and mannequins and even a grouping of dozens of individualized dolls, called the "Woodbridge Figures,"

which probably were used for fertility rituals by a secret religious sect in Woodbridge, New Jersey.

For Gael, a compelling side interest is American kitsch, which is, according to Ricco, "one of the best collections of this type I have ever seen."

"This collection transcends folk art because of the common thread relating it to modern and contemporary art," says Fred Giampietro, a specialist in the field who advised the couple on the collection.

A recent acquisition, an

important stone sculpture of a mermaid by William Edmondson, was one the Mendelsons thought unattainable since it was slotted for purchase by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. When the museum acquired an Edmondson through other means, the couple leapt at the chance to get it for themselves, even if it meant facing the new year in debt. "No matter," Michael says. "The greatest innovation for collectors has to be the installment plan."

Jo Carole & Ronald Lauder

New York City
*Old Masters, tribal art, 19th-
c 20th-century drawings*

Robert Lehrman

Washington, D.C.
*Contemporary paintings
c 3 Joseph Cornell boxes*

Irving & Mari Lipton

Los Angeles
Contemporary woodturnings

Vicki & Kent Logan

Marin County, California, & Vail, Colorado
Contemporary art

Joel & Sherry Mallin

New York City
Contemporary art

Louis & Susan Manilow

Chicago
Contemporary art

Jeffrey & Cynthia Manocherian

New York City
Glass

