

Friends of CODART

NEWSLETTER, AUTUMN 2014

Welcome dear Friends,

It is with great pleasure that we send you the first Newsletter of the Friends of CODART Foundation. This past year our group of friends has grown considerably. We are proud and thankful that so many of you wish to support our strong and inspiring network. Thanks to our Donors and Patrons, we have been able to realize a number of special projects in recent years. For example, our first eZine - the only digital magazine devoted entirely to Dutch and Flemish art in museums worldwide - appeared in the spring of 2012. The Friends of CODART Foundation also makes a substantial contribution to the maintenance and development of the website www.codart.nl, an important digital source of information for all those who have fallen in love with Netherlandish art. Thanks to your support and to the Rijksmuseum's exceptional collaboration, we were able to celebrate our fifteenth anniversary at the newly opened Rijksmuseum in the autumn of 2013 by holding a public symposium at which curators of Dutch and Flemish art from around the world - all of them members of CODART - gave lectures and engaged in discussions with one another and with the audience. One special event was the meeting, at a panel discussion moderated by Rudi Ekkart, of four collectors of Dutch and Flemish art, who talked about their collections, their "collecting mistakes" and their dreams for the future. A summary of this event appears in the pages of this Newsletter.

In the coming season our program again includes a number of activities aimed to bring you closer both to the Old Masters and to our curators. The planned events range from a private viewing at the Metropolitan Museum in New York for our American friends (October 2014), a "Friends' afternoon" at the Bredius Museum and Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder in The Hague (December 2014), and, for the Patrons, our annual congress, which will take place in London in January 2015, and of course the traditional Patrons Salon held during the TEFAF in Maastricht (March 2015). We look forward to seeing you at these events!

*Thomas Leysen, Chairman of the Friends of CODART Foundation
Gerdien Verschoor, Director of CODART*



Dutch and Flemish masters worldwide

CODART, the international network of curators of Dutch and Flemish art, connects over 600 curators from more than 300 museums in almost 50 countries. Dutch and Flemish art is valued and collected all over the world. The production and dissemination of works of art remains one of the greatest cultural successes in the history of the Low Countries. CODART continues to build on this achievement, bringing together hundreds of people responsible for Flemish and Dutch art collections in museums worldwide within a single international organization, thereby giving a contemporary dimension to a historical phenomenon. It is therefore not surprising that CODART, which was founded in 1998, has attained such a prominent position within the international museum community.

Royalty, individuals and businesses have served as patrons of Dutch and Flemish art throughout the world. Our cultural heritage has always flourished well beyond the borders of the Low Countries thanks to private benefactors. You can participate in this rich tradition by joining the Friends of CODART Foundation.

Friends of CODART Foundation

We offer our friends contact with a unique global network of museum curators. Our network meetings offer the opportunity to become acquainted with curators from New York, Amsterdam and St. Petersburg; exchange thoughts with our members from Antwerp, Havana and Paris; and receive advice from our specialists from Bruges, Warsaw and Berlin. Naturally, our friends can count on the personal attention of CODART's director, board and staff.

The Friends of CODART Foundation was established in 2007 to help forge enduring relationships between members of CODART and private individuals and businesses with a passion for Old Masters. The Friends of CODART has supported this international network of museum curators since 2007. Thanks to its friends, CODART can maintain its prize-winning website www.codart.nl. They also underwrite important international gatherings as well as grants that allow curators from financially challenged countries to be involved in the network.



ABOUT COLLECTING DUTCH AND FLEMISH ART

On 15 October 2013, at the CODART Symposium “The World of Dutch and Flemish Art” in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, a group of four collectors were interviewed by Rudi Ekkart. This is a summary of that interesting conversation.

Read the whole interview at: ezine.codart.nl/collecting

Rudi: In recent years CODART has paid quite a lot of attention to contacts with private collectors of Dutch and Flemish art. Collectors play a major role in the international art world and many of them have collections that are comparable to museum holdings. Many private collectors are in contact with museums, but the nature of this contact is different in each case. George Abrams, you have been cooperating with museums for many years.

George Abrams: I really love museums. I love to spend time looking at artworks of all kinds, and I've been doing that my whole life. For many years I've been cooperating closely with museums. Many curators, particularly at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and at Harvard, were extraordinarily helpful when we started our collection. It became more and more important to exchange our knowledge and our experiences as collectors with other collectors and museum curators. For us it is also vital that works from our collection end up in museums, so that other people can have some of the same experiences we've had.

George Kremer: We also have a lot of contact with museum people and curators. It's nice to know that you can talk to people who know much more than you know yourself. In judging Old Masters, we often need help with such matters as assessing a painting's condition.

Rudi: Thomas, do you compete with museums?

Thomas Leysen: Yes, sometimes you compete with museums, but you don't always know who you're competing with. On the question of seeking advice: I often seek advice, but it's also happened that I've bought a painting immediately, because I was determined to have it. I would never work systematically with advisers for all my purchases, because then I would no longer feel that it was my collection. But I certainly learn a lot, and I enjoy interacting with curators tremendously.

Rudi: I'm also interested in your contact with other collectors and the competition with them. Let's start with contemporary art.

Marieke Sanders: Sometimes there is very stiff competition. You have to be very quick at times. We go to a lot of art galleries and art fairs, and there are previews and even preview previews. A while back we were at a gallery and we saw an artwork there, and we thought, “Well, that's a nice work, we'd like to have that,” but it was a three-story building, so we went up to the other floors just to see the whole collection, and when we came down we told the gallery owner: “We'd like to buy this work,” and he said, “I'm sorry, it's just been sold.” I don't think I've ever held a grudge against anyone though just because they had a more acute eye and were quicker to decide than we were.

Rudi: Do you also feel competition from other collectors, George?

George Kremer: Not really. I strongly believe that you must have your own ideas and your own vision of the collection, but you're also dependent on what the market has to offer. You have to do your homework, keep informed. But you still have to follow your own vision. We succeed in buying good paintings, and paintings that strengthen the character of the collection. And I agree very strongly with Thomas that you really must make your own decisions, because otherwise it's not your own collection. You might make mistakes that way; only time will tell.

Rudi: Do you feel that you've made serious mistakes?

George Kremer: We've made comparatively few mistakes, because we were willing to study and learn, and we had good teachers.



We have made some mistakes, we've exchanged paintings for better paintings by the same artist, paintings that were sort of rejected after a few years. You don't fight it, that would be silly, you just listen to what people tell you, and you agree or disagree and decide accordingly, whether or not to exchange a painting. But no big mistakes, no, I'm happy to say.

George Abrams: Paul Sachs, the great museum director and collector, once told me that if you don't make one mistake in ten, you're buying too cautiously.

Marieke: It's different with contemporary art. It all depends on what you call a mistake. You follow your instinct and feel triggered by a particular work at that particular time. That's part of collecting. Good works will stand the test of time, and you can only hope that the artist will continue to develop and stay on course.

Rudi: Thomas, do you have any experience with mistakes you've made?

Thomas: Well, who's to say? I don't collect to an absolute level of quality like many other collectors do. I have a number of paintings which I think many great museums would love to have on loan (and some of them do), and other paintings that I'd be hard pressed to get accepted by a provincial museum. Still, I had a reason for buying them, they all have a story. They're connected to my collection, and so I'm happy to have them. Actually, I find it very hard to part with anything that I've bought. I occasionally exchange something or sell something back to the market, but very rarely, because we always had a reason for buying it in the first place, and generally that reason still applies. So I'm happy to have works by minor masters in my collection, if I had a good reason for acquiring them.

Rudi: A question for both Georges. You've both had museum exhibitions that showed large parts of your collections. What's it like, having so many of your dear friends away from home?

George Abrams: I'm going to be embarrassed by my answer. I've now got 150 drawings that we've given to Harvard and they're over at Harvard, and I've got 200 on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts, and I have another 450 in some boxes, including a few under my bed. There are no empty walls; my problem is finding the space to put some additional things. I was talking with a great collector of the past, Ian Woodner some of you may have known him or perhaps know his catalogue. A woman came up to him and said, “Mr. Woodner, I really don't see how you can stand it, having your drawings away all the time. They're on loan. Doesn't that bother you terribly?” and he pointed to his head and said, “They're all up here, stored in my mind,” and in fact they are.

Rudi: George, you've also had large exhibitions of your collection. You don't have hundreds of other paintings.

George Kremer: I'm not going to be embarrassed by my answer either. We don't actually hang Old Masters at home for two reasons: we do a lot of lending and we live in different places. So it's totally impractical to have Old Masters at home.

So at home we hang nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century paintings and the Old Masters we essentially use for educational purposes. We love the idea of showing these things to the public. When we were in Holland during our show at the Frans Hals Museum, I went there every day just to talk to the people who came to see them and ask them what they think and you tell them what you see. I find this exchange with the public exhilarating. But we don't have Old Masters at home.

Rudi: Thomas, I know that quite a lot of your paintings are now on loan to museums, but you are working on your new house, and trying to acquire family portraits of former owners. Have you decided to have more artworks at home?

Thomas: Yes indeed, and I'm very much looking forward to the day when we will actually move in. The idea is to bring most of the paintings home, but we will still be happy to lend to exhibitions, if it makes sense to do so. In our current home the space is limited, though, so in recent years most of the paintings I bought went directly to a museum. I'm very happy about that, because I certainly wouldn't want them to be sitting in a depot for a couple of years. I learn a lot about these paintings when they're on display, and some of the museums research them thoroughly, so I find that a great experience. But it will be a happy day for me, the day I see my collection together for the first time.

Rudi: Well, there's always one other important question about private collections, and that is their future. George Abrams has already found a destination for parts of his collection. How do you see the remainder of your collection in the future? Do you hope that it will find a place in a museum, or do you think, as many collectors do, that it's good for the market when collections, or part of them, are put up for sale?

George Abrams: I keep hearing collectors say that they love the idea of putting their collection back on the market, so that other people can have the same pleasure they had which usually means that they need or want the money. I've made some decisions and I'm working out the details. At the moment I'm thinking of putting my collection into a foundation for Dutch art that would be affiliated with both Harvard and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I want these artworks to be accessible to the public and to students, and I would like to provide an opportunity for scholars and students to come from Europe to the Boston area to research the art collections at Harvard and the MFA and also to work with some of the other strong public and private collections in the Boston area. There are other collectors who would join in this effort right now. We haven't worked it out totally, but there are at least two other important collections that will be part of this initiative, and we're hoping that this plan will become a reality in the next two or three years.

Rudi: Marieke, do you think about having at least parts of your collection in a museum at some future time?

Marieke: Yes, we certainly do. However, we cannot envision one museum in the Netherlands that would have the whole collection, even if we were willing to say, "Feel free to sell whatever you don't want to keep." It's a difficult issue. Some years ago we contacted the Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed (Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage) and they saw many works that would fit in with their collection. We gave over a hundred works to the Institute. And we're now selecting other works and talking with a museum, to see if there are works that would fit into their collection. It's a very interesting issue, but it takes a lot of time, and it requires a lot of research into what Dutch museums and our collection have in common, and what it would make sense to donate.

Thomas: Well, I'm not quite at the same stage. It's not that I don't want to think about it, but I certainly haven't made up my mind at this point.

George Abrams: You're younger than I am, that's why.

Thomas: Yes, and when the time comes, it will also be a decision that would certainly involve my wife and children. I have to say, though, that I'm really inspired by an institution such as the Fondation Custodia: a collection that is intimately linked to its house, to its history as a research institute, and to its founder. I find the idea very appealing of seeing my collection at some future time as a living collection, in its intended setting, and also functioning as a place of scholarship.

Rudi: I want to thank all of you for this discussion. Thank you for being so open about your collecting activities and for sharing your experiences with us.

George Abrams built up his collection in close cooperation with his late wife, Maida Stocker Abrams (1938-2002). The Maida and George Abrams Collection is one of the finest collections of Dutch drawings with a focus on the seventeenth century ever brought together in the United States.

George Kremer and his wife, Ilone, collect Dutch and Flemish Old Master paintings. The artists represented in their collection include Hendrick ter Brugghen, Gerrit Dou, Frans Hals and Rembrandt.

Thomas Leysen, chair of the Friends of CODART Foundation, is a passionate businessman who, as he himself admits, suffers from a serious condition: the collecting bug. His collection focuses on Antwerp masters of 1500 to 1650, that is to say, from Quinten Metsys to Rubens, Van Dyck and their followers.

Marieke Sanders-ten Holte and her husband, Pieter Sanders, have been collecting contemporary art for more than forty years. The focus of their collection is the work of young and still relatively unknown artists primarily from the Netherlands but also from abroad. Their extremely varied collection includes paintings, sculptures, photographs, video art and works on paper.



Thomas Leysen during the CODART Patrons workshop in Maastricht in March 2012

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Thomas Leysen (chair)
Bob Haboltd
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Titia Vellenga
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CODART Agenda

2014

16-17 October:

Special Patrons Event (New York)

An event around the *Pieter Coecke van Aelst* exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

26-27 October:

CODART focus (Budapest)

In depth visit to the Szépművészeti Múzeum in Budapest, on the occasion of the exhibition *Rembrandt and the Dutch Golden Age*.

17 December:

Friends afternoon (The Hague)

Visit to the exhibition *Connoisseurship: Bredius, Jan Steen and the Mauritshuis* in the Bredius Museum and a visit to Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder.

2015

18-21 January:

CODART congress (London)

The **CODART** congress in London will focus on the relationship between museum professionals and those working in the art trade. The congress is organized in conjunction with the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection.

14 March:

Patrons Salon (TEFAF, Maastricht)

Program to be announced

Please consult www.codart.nl for up-to-date information on **CODART** events.

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Please send an email to friends@codart.nl or enlist via www.codart.nl/friends