

# dreamers & creators

A passion for Rodin set a Manhattan couple on an ambitious collecting journey covering the past century of art history.

By Margie Goldsmith • Photography by Billy Cunningham



Rodin, "The Thinker," conceived c. 1880 (this version was cast before 1952), bronze with dark brown and green patina.

Charles Ephraim Burchfield, "Sultry Day" (right), 1957, watercolor on pieced paper laid down on board.

FACING: Rodin, "The Age of Bronze" (left), c. 1875-76, bronze with black patina. Edward Hicks (1780-1849), "Peaceable Kingdom of the Branch," oil on cradled panel.

The collector looks up at his cast of "The Thinker." Perhaps he is recalling what Rodin himself wrote about his sculpture: "The Thinker has a story. In the days long gone by I conceived the idea of the Gates of Hell. Before the door, seated on the rock, Dante thinking of the plan of the poem behind him ... all the characters from the Divine Comedy. This project was not realized. Thin ascetic Dante in his straight robe separated from all the rest would have been without meaning. Guided by my first inspiration I conceived another thinker, a naked man, seated on a rock, his fist against his teeth, he dreams. The fertile thought slowly elaborates itself within his brain. He is no longer a dreamer, he is a creator."

Rodin's tale helps reveal why a boy from a small Midwestern town who became one of New York's most successful fund managers would identify with a working-class sculptor whose masterpieces created a bronze bridge between 19th-century Romanticism and 20th-century Modernism. "I identify with the creativity and the passion with which Rodin led his life," says the collector, who wishes to remain anonymous, as he continues to regard "The Thinker." "Look at the combination of strength, beauty and emotional passion that Rodin manages to put in a lump of bronze. It exudes strength, but it's more than just strength and beauty. You can feel the emotion and the passion in the hands, the feet, the way he sculpts bodies. Unlike the sculptors who came before him, it's not just a pictorial representation of a person or a body, it's much deeper than that, and it created a higher level of emotion, of passion, of feeling."

He picks up one of the hand sculptures. "Look at Rodin's hands," he says. "No human can put his fingers into that position, but the hands are molded in such a way that they are trying to express emotion. So it wasn't an effort to make a pictorial representation of a hand. It was to present a feeling, a passion and love. None of them look like real hands. Still, they give you the impression of being real hands, with emotion and expression of feeling. That's why I like them so much."







**John Philip Falter, "Wolman Rink, Central Park," 1948, and "Rush Hour on Park Avenue," 1947, both oil on canvas.**

This collector and his wife have amassed an impressive assemblage of 40 Rodin sculptures, including "Balzac in Dominican Robe," "Eve," "Eternal Spring," "The Age of Bronze," "The Three Shades," "The Centauress," "Vase of the Titans," "Head of Balzac," "The Head of Pierre de Wissant," "Eustache de St. Pierre" and five reduced casts of the "Burghers of Calais." While they do not talk about the worth of their collection, one Rodin hand, depending on size, can cost \$90,000, and a lifetime cast from \$3 million and up.

And their collection is not limited to Rodin. Divided among their residences in Westchester, Manhattan and Colorado are works by a veritable who's who of the last century of art history: Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Pablo Picasso, Edward Hicks, Charles Burchfield, Robert Knight, James Rosenquist, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Estes, JC Leyendecker, John Philip Falter, Jim Dine, Georgia O'Keeffe, Edward Curtis and Balthus. Their photography collection includes images

by Robert Capa, Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Ansel Adams. And that's not to mention the Byzantine and Grecian sculptures.

Growing up in a small town, the collector was not exposed to art until he took an introduction to art course while a freshman at an Ivy League university. His passion developed after his art teacher suggested a visit to Philadelphia's Rodin Museum. Mesmerized, he began to study the artist in more depth. "What drew me to him was that Rodin was the great bridge between classical sculpture and modern sculpture," he says. "Rather than have a statue simply be a representation of an individual, he made it come alive, both sensually and emotionally. For example, in 'The Burghers of Calais,' you can see the pain and suffering the six of them had knowing they were going out to die in order to save their city."

In 1962, the collector graduated from college, started work on Wall Street, and married a fellow alumna. His wife, too, had taken a freshman art class, and while neither knew anything about art beyond this introduction, "We knew what we liked when we saw it," says the wife. "On our honeymoon in Paris, we bought our first oil



painting by an artist named Cagazza. The piece we really liked was a Magritte, but of course, we couldn't afford it. At the gallery next door was this very colorful painting with big bold strokes like Picasso, which was in our price range." Today, the Cagazza is the first painting one sees upon entering their Manhattan apartment. "Of course," she adds with a laugh, "we now keep it in a frame worthy of Picasso."

Shortly after their honeymoon, the couple became friends with the late Bernie Cantor, former CEO of the investment firm Cantor Fitzgerald. Cantor was an avid Rodin collector, and in a continuous effort to encourage people to appreciate Rodin, sent part of his collection traveling throughout the United States. "Bernie sat us down and told us about the beauty of collecting—not necessarily of Rodin, but of art," says the wife. "There we were, sitting in his office, surrounded by all these fabulous pieces, and Bernie said that having these works near you is inspiring, the idea of being able to go back into history and touch something that a great master has done."

"Before meeting Bernie, collecting was not part of our culture, but Bernie inspired us," she continues. "We began

**Classical-style mahogany veneered side table, Continental, 19th-century, with black marble top. Pierre Bonnard, "Le Chapeau au Ruban Bleu," 1912, oil on paper laid on canvas. Rodin, "Large Clenched Left Hand with Figure," c. 1890, bronze. Rodin, "Portrait of a Young Girl" (top), 1875, terra cotta. Rodin, "Eternal Spring" (below), 1884, bronze.**

to pursue it a little and found 'The Man with the Broken Nose,' our first Rodin. He brought it home one night, he never told me he'd bought it," she says of her husband. "There was this mask, and I didn't know it was a Rodin, so I asked him, 'Why did you buy this?' And he said, 'I don't know, but something made me do it.'" The collector adds, "Maybe because this was an important sculpture, one of Rodin's earliest bronze pieces, probably his earliest." "After a while," says the wife, "we both became very attached to this piece—our first serious foray into the art world."

Their next purchase was Rodin's "The Age of Bronze," followed by "Eve." "We loved these pieces," says the wife. "Eve's shame, the bent way she covered herself contrasted to 'The Age of Bronze,' the upright, proud idealization of man." As the collection evolved, the couple sold some of





the less-important casts and retained only those from the best foundries. Until two years ago, they owned four of the coveted “Burghers of Calais” reductions. Finally, they located and bought the fifth. (Rodin didn’t want all six “Burghers” reproduced, so he only cast five.)

One day the wife said, “You know, I love Rodin, too, but enough with the sculpture. We need something on the walls with color.” Thus began their painting collection. The first pieces they bought were Corot’s “Chevrier Italian,” Matisse’s “Liseuse Sous les Oliviers” and Bonnard’s “Le Chapeau au Ruban Bleu,” chosen mainly because of the artists’ relationships with Rodin. “The Impressionists in France were actually very close friends, and Rodin was part of that group, and in many ways they influenced one another,” the collector notes.

The first time they saw one of Edward Hicks’ “The Peaceable Kingdom” paintings, they fell in love with it and bought it. The iconic painting became their first American acquisition and they became hooked on American artists. “We started studying and picked up some wonderful pieces, especially one by Charles Burchfield, which took us four years to get,” says the wife. “We’ve spent a long time on many of the things we’ve looked for—even the photographs—trying to get the ones we specifically wanted. They are not easy to come by, but we are very patient.”

“We do not go out and buy whole collections,” the

**Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, “Chevrier Italien (Effet du Matin)” (above sofa), c. 1865–70, oil on canvas. Rodin, “Portrait of a Young Girl” (on coffee table), terra cotta, 1875. Pair of Empire-style carved and mahogany stained wood open armchairs, late 19th century.**

**FACING: Classical Revival cream, bronze and gold painted wood side cabinet, 19th century. Henri Matisse, “L’iseuse Sous le Oliviers,” 1923, oil on canvas. Rodin, “The Head of Pierre de Wiessant” (left), c.1886, bronze. “Vase of the Titans” (center), terra-cotta. Rodin, “Jean d’Aire” (right), 1899, bronze.**

collector adds. “We buy things we like by proven artists, although we’ve gone for some younger artists, like Abelardo Morell, and photographers, like Will Mentor, whom we think are very special. Photography is a more recent art form, which is growing in importance and popularity.”

“You do not really own art,” says the wife. “You just sort of have it for a while, and then the masters who made the great pieces get to enrich somebody else’s life. So we get to be a part of something terrific, and then we get to pass it on to somebody else. There is something very meaningful about that.”

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*Margie Goldsmith, a Manhattan-based writer, recently profiled Laurence and Judith Goffman Cutler, founders of the National Museum of American Illustration (April 2006).*