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Bringing art TO LIFE

Extraordinary art museums of the past few decades have raised the bar for art lovers (and their architects) looking to create homes that best showcase their collections. Emma Crichton-Miller reports

Last October, at Frieze Masters, the art fair for Old and Modern Master artworks, located in a vast white marquee at the other end of Regent's Park from Frieze itself, one exhibition stand stood out. In between decorous cubicles where world-renowned galleries offered masterpieces under careful lighting, against walls painted contrasting shades of grey, London-based dealer Helly Nahmad had created chaos.

In four small rooms, exposed in the round like a stage set and crammed with 1960s furniture and teetering piles of art magazines, shockingly valuable paintings by Picasso, Miró, Jean Dubuffet, Giorgio Morandi, Lucio Fontana and Max Ernst, sculptures by Giacometti and other modern masterpieces jostled for attention with old-fashioned radios, encrusted ashtrays, towers of books, socialist posters and bundled issues of Paris Match. Meanwhile, antiquated black and white television monitors ran clips from the Winter Olympics, news footage of the Paris riots and old Godard movies.

The work of music video production designer Robin Brown, commissioned by Nahmad to create the imagined Parisian apartment of the fictional Corrado N, or "The Collector", it proved a magnet for visitors.

For some, the display was a poignant exercise in nostalgia – one dealer was heard remarking that he still knows collectors like this. For others, however, it was a startling reminder of how differently most art collectors choose to live with their treasures. Today, it is minimalist aesthetics ... that governs. Where major works of modern and contemporary art can now cost many millions, and even Old Masters can set you back a substantial amount, serious collectors are generally not just in the position to buy the art but, increasingly, to commission its home too. Moreover, the past 40 years have seen a tremendous boom in ambitious museum building throughout North America and Europe. These extraordinary buildings – from Louis Kahn's magisterial Kimbell Art Museum and Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao, to Zaha Hadid's Maxxi: Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome and

Renzo Piano's latest creation, the new Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan – have raised the bar for imagining the kind of spaces that might best serve the artworks they house. Living with works of art, however, is very different from visiting them in a museum. An architect or interior designer is required not just to honour and guard the artwork, but also to ensure that it is fully integrated into the domestic life of the collector – whether that involves entertaining on a grand scale, small children or inquisitive cats. Where a museum acts as a mute and neutral backdrop, a domestic interior should express the characters of the collectors and reflect their own feelings about their artworks.

Contemporary architects are not the first to have explored this territory. You have only to think of William Kent in the 18th century designing Houghton Hall to house Robert Walpole, his family and his art collection (with equal importance given to each), or Jeffrey Wyattville building the 6th Duke of Devonshire a sculpture gallery in Chatsworth House...

Architect Thomas Croft was invited to renovate an apartment for international art dealer Per Skarstedt in London's prestigious Albany. Skarstedt travels constantly and has multiple homes in Europe and the United States. His new Long Island home has just been designed by Annabelle Selldorf. Everywhere he lives, he places works of art by his favourite 20th- and 21st-century artists – Martin Kippenberger, George Condo, Georg Baselitz, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince – alongside midcentury-modern furniture. Croft was aware that given planning restrictions, his would need to be a job "editing spaces to facilitate the display of art". His interventions have been discreet so far: hiding speakers behind walls, painting the walls and woodwork white, inviting interior designer Sarah Delaney to add the subtly sumptuous curtains and carpets that give the drawing room its luxurious softness. Here, Skarstedt has taken great pleasure in displaying his George Nakashima table, his George Condo and Martin Kippenberger paintings and his Rebecca Warren sculpture. "The art needs to feel like it is his, and he needs to feel at home," says Croft.



Below: Thomas Croft in the London apartment he created for Per Skarstedt, with *On the Waterfront (Charlie)* by George Condo (back wall), *Untitled* by Martin Kippenberger (left wall), *Untitled #212* by Cindy Sherman (right wall) and *Dou Dou Ché*, a sculpture by Rebecca Warren