

OUTSIDER ART MUSEUM



MAX AMMANN: PASSIONATE
COLLECTOR

Swiss-born Max Ammann is one of the best-known collectors of Outsider Art. Together with his Dutch wife, Korine, he regularly visits the Netherlands to seek new additions for their collection. But these new additions do not disappear behind the impenetrable doors of a safe. 'We feel a responsibility to the artist and try to make their work as visible as possible'.

Art collector Max Ammann spends his childhood in Ermatingen, a picturesque village on Lake Constance in Switzerland. Far removed from major art institutions, but close to artists. When an artist in the village offers a young Max an artwork in return for a favour his lifelong passion for collecting gets a kick-start. His collection originally only features works by local artists from the village, but quickly expands to include Swiss and international art. After Max moves to New York to pursue his career as a journalist, his collection is put on the back-burner. In 1973, he returns to Switzerland, together with his wife Korine and their two children. His work for the International Alliance of Equestrian Journalists and the World Cup Jumping allows the couple to travel the world in the following years and visit artists, museums, galleries and studios in a plethora of countries. Roughly 20 years later, their apartment is packed with thousands of artworks, covering various genres.

In 1994, Max and Korine visit the Venice Biennale, but see little that impresses them. 'There was nothing hanging on the walls; it was mainly conceptual art, lots of video screens and installations', explains Max. Later that year, he visited the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne. 'A whole new world opened up for me, I was astounded by what I saw'. Several of the artists featured in Lausanne are also represented in their own collection, but their work is not (yet) labelled 'Outsider Art', a term

that he was still to discover. Work by Hans Krüsi (1920-1995) and François Burland (1958), for example. Driven by this new fascination, he purchases all the books and catalogues that he can get his hands on. In Halle Saint Pierre in Paris, Max is once again taken aback by the amount on display and the quality of the works, which have long captured the couple's imagination. The pieces of the puzzle gradually begin to fall into place. They abandon their interest in mainstream art and throw their collection policy overboard, heading on a quest to find the sincerity, purity and candour of outsiders.

However the art is categorised, the couple does not collect labels. 'We collect work that appeals to us, that captures our interest and refuses to let go'. It may be the colour, the theme or simply the artist themselves. 'But we also consciously seek out high-quality work by acclaimed artists or surprising work by new talents. We are always interested to know more about the artists, but in the end their background is irrelevant. What matters are the aesthetic qualities of the artwork and the underlying source of emotion'.

Both art lovers thoroughly enjoy collecting. The personal encounters with artists or gallery owners, the excitement of bidding for a work at an auction and the challenge of transporting an impossibly large work are all part of the ride for a collector. An exhibition is often the icing on the cake, 'especially if the artist can also be present to see the public admire their work'. The works that Max and Korine purchase do not disappear behind the impenetrable doors of a safe. 'We feel a responsibility to the artist and try to make their work as visible as possible through exhibitions and publications'.

Max and Korine retired years ago, but their love of collecting is not about to fade. In the future, they hope to extend their search for intuitive and expressive art to far-flung places. 'I am very much looking forward to discovering and meeting new artists, and to putting work on display that has never before been seen by the public'. This last aspiration shouldn't be a problem: museums all around the world are queueing up to display works from the well-documented Max & Korine Ammann Collection. The Outsider Art Museum is also proud to announce that it will be organising an exhibition of Finnish Outsider Art in Amsterdam in 2018, and a large proportion of the featured works will be drawn from the inspirational collection of two passionate Outsider Art collectors from Switzerland.

QUESTIONS

Which museum do you think is the most impressive?

'I am very impressed by the wealth of French Outsider Art museums. Bègles has an intriguing collection and organises fantastic exhibitions. The same goes for Villeneuve d'Ascq, with their Aracine Collection. There's also La Fabuloserie in Dicy, and since last year, I can add another name to this list: the recently established private museum for Art Brut in Montpellier. Outsider Art in the Netherlands was given an enormous boost with the arrival of the Outsider Art Museum, which has already hosted various international exhibitions'.

What is your favourite artwork?

'My wife and I do not agree on every purchase. But luckily, we do have the same taste. One of our favourites is an early work by Belgian artist Martine Copenaut, but we are also happy with the vivid drawings of a woman made by Johann Hausser in 1968. I am personally very fond of a pencil drawing

by Philippe Saxer, using a single line to depict a horse and its rider. His work is his reality. It is suffering, aggression and anger, but it also expresses love, and sometimes loneliness’.

Which talent should we look out for?

‘Six names have caught our attention in recent years: Coen Ringeling from the Netherlands, Patrick Siegl from Germany, Matthieu Evrard from Belgium, Gildas Baudry from France, Justyna Matysiak from Poland and Bruno Knechtle from Switzerland’.

BIOGRAPHY

Max E. Ammann (1938) was born in Switzerland, the eldest child in a family of seven children. He was Editor-in-Chief of Luzerner Tagblatt, the Swiss American Review and L’Annee Hippique, and worked as a foreign correspondent in New York for many years. In addition to an impressive career in journalism and equestrianism – he secured a golden medal at World Cup Jumping – Max owns an extensive collection of Outsider Art, together with his Dutch wife Korine.