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To the left in the living room is John Wesley's *Untitled*, 2011-12, acrylic on canvas.  
In the hall is *Odalisque with a Turkish Chair after Henri Matisse (Pictures of Pigment)*,  
2006, chromogenic print, edition of 6, by Vik Muniz.



# Visual Appeal

The private collection of art dealer Lillian Heidenberg features dynamic work by modern, up-and-coming and Asian artists.

BY JOHN O'HERN PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCIS SMITH



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The English novelist E. M. Forster wrote, “One person with passion is better than forty people merely interested.” The wisdom and humor of his remark is embodied today in the life and work of Lillian Heidenberg, a collector and a dealer specializing in modern masters and cutting-edge contemporary art.

Although quality comes first, she often looks for humor in the work she collects. “I’m passionate about art,” she says, “and I like other people to be passionate about it.”

She explains, “I’ve always been interested in art. I became hooked on it when I went to Florence and studied Italian Renaissance art. I worked in a New York art gallery but was later able to open my own. My dream had always been to open a gallery. I had wanted to be an art historian but it was difficult to get a job in New York, and I didn’t want to move to the Midwest or to California. I decided it would be easier to be an art dealer. It was the only way people sold art at that time. Galleries were the meeting place for artists and collectors. I opened Lillian Heidenberg Fine Art as a physical gallery in New York. Times have changed however, and now I operate a virtual gallery.

She says, “I had seen an exhibition of Henry Moore’s sculptures in Florence and knew I wanted to sell his work. I went to see him and he said ‘No.’” She then gathered together pieces from other galleries and collectors and put on her own exhibition in New York.



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When Moore learned of the exhibition he told her, “You’ve proven yourself. I’ll work with you.”

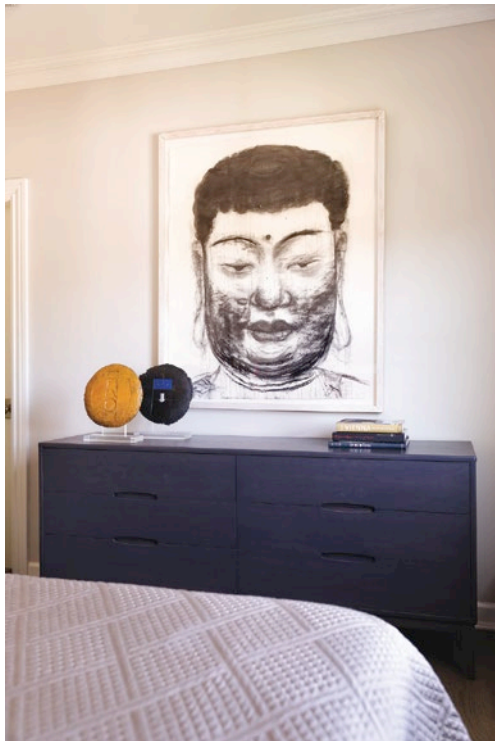
She recalls, “Moore was a kind and sympathetic man and truly devoted to his art. His work was often monumental but he did themes that touch everybody—the mother and child, figure as landscape. They’re personal but they’re totally universal.”

Her personal collection is a microcosm of her interests and the work she represents. The modern

2 Above the sofa is John Wesley’s *Untitled*, 2011-12, acrylic on canvas. On the coffee table is the bronze, edition 2 of 9, *High Wind on Stairs I*, 1992, by Lynn Chadwick (1914-2003).



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masters meet up-and-coming artists meet Asian artists, both contemporary and ancient. “I love the Asian aesthetic and always mix Asian art with contemporary work,” she says.

Among the masters in her collection are Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist, both of whom are represented by works on paper: a Rosenquist collage and a Lichtenstein screen print. The two hang in her Southampton living room where an antique Chinese animal sculpture and a cluster of William Ryman’s blue flowers are on the coffee table. “I like the Ryman flowers,” she says. “They don’t have to be watered.”

She comments on the established artists and their having developed distinct styles. “They have a certain vision,” she says. “You can always tell Lynn Chadwick’s work, for instance, or John Baldessari’s. All the artists I deal in have been consistent. They haven’t disappeared.”

She points out four large photographs by the Chinese artist Huang Yan titled *Four Seasons*. “In these images, Huang Yan paints the surface of the face in the *shan shui* landscape tradition. Beginning with these early pieces, the artist has created his own radical conceptual context, and has given us one of the most enduring and recognizable images of the early avant-garde years of Chinese Contemporary art.”

Huang Yan and Yan Pei-Ming grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution, a period of repression that began in 1966. Pei-Ming left for France when China opened

to the west in 1980 and is known for his monumental portraits of Chairman Mao and other famous public figures. The collector comments on his *Buddha X*, 1999, in which “he takes an old image of the Buddha and humanizes it, making it into a modern person.”

Displayed in front of the Pei-Ming are two painted bronze masks by Robert Courtright, which play off the modernized portrait above them. Courtright had been inspired by masks he saw in a shop in Nice. Based on *Commedia dell’arte* masks, the artist found them to be haunting.

Heidenberg finds work on the internet, at estate sales and auction houses, and occasionally is able to buy pieces back from collectors. One of the appealing aspects of her collection and of her art establishment is the emphasis on quality already vetted among her master artists, and the result of her discerning eye in her selection of contemporary artists.

She first saw John Wesley’s paintings “in London at an art show. His images are strong, very graphic, direct and simple. They’re also very amusing. I love his sense of humor. At that time he hadn’t been discovered.” In 2009 the Prada Foundation put on a retrospective exhibition of his work in Venice.

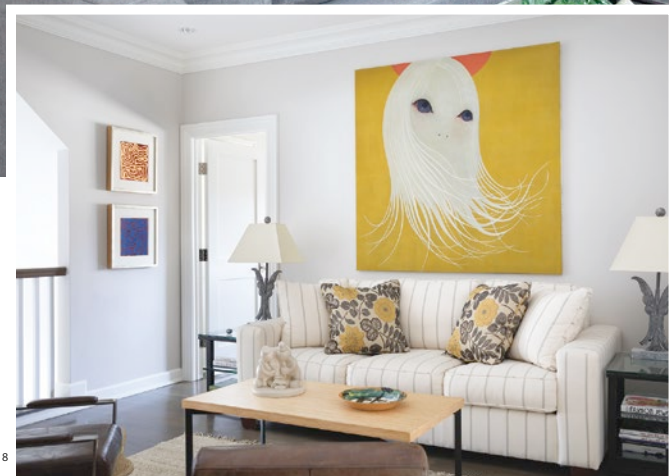
Commenting further on the changes that have occurred in the art world since she first opened her gallery, she says, “The market has changed. It’s huge, international and instantaneous. People

**3** Above Jeff Koons’s *Puppy*, 1989, ceramic, is Robert Montgomery’s digital print *People You Love*, 2012, edition of 10.

**4** In the basement adjacent to the pool room are Huang Yan’s C-prints, *Four Seasons: Autumn, Winter Spring and Summer*, 2005.

**5** Mee Wong’s *Dim Sum Girl*, 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, hangs above the bed.

**6** Yan Pei-Ming’s *Buddha X*, 1999, charcoal on paper, hangs above the dresser. On the dresser are *Yellow Mask and Blue Mask*, 1990-92, painted bronze, edition of 5, by Robert Courtright (1926-2012).



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*Star Way*, 1974, pencil, acrylic, ink, charcoal and paper collage on paper, by James Rosenquist (1933-2017), is to the left of the window. Above the fireplace is, 1996, 14-color screen print, by Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997). William Ryman's *Small Blue Flowers* is on the coffee table. The fantastical animal is a Chinese antiquity.

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**8**  
On the stair wall is *Southern Belle*, 2013, pencil on cut paper, by Karl Haendel. To the far right is *Untitled 1\_B*, 2014, pigment print with hand collage, edition of 16, by El Anatsui.

**9**  
Above the sofa is *Aerie*, 2009, color screen print, 4 of 128, by Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011).

**10**  
Hideaki Kawashima's *Ascension*, 2005, acrylic on canvas, hangs above the sofa. Two gouache on paper works by Sol LeWitt are on the wall by the door, from top, *Parallel Curves*, 2000, and *Parallel Curves*, 1999.

**11**  
Lillian Heidenberg sits in front of Christopher Winter's *The Vortex*, 2007, acrylic on canvas. The glazed pottery figures and house are Chinese Ming Dynasty.



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don't have the time to reflect. Art isn't a commodity. It should be bought for pleasure and enjoyment. It's wonderful if the value increases. I've made collectors wealthy," she continues, "but that's not the purpose. It's not the reason for buying art. Robert Motherwell's work has increased significantly over the years but what is more important is that he was an amazing artist, a great colorist with an extraordinary sense of space and depth."

She advises collectors, "If you love a piece of art you should just buy it," and encourages them to "go and see as much

as you can. Go to museums, see every gallery show, ask questions, read about the exhibitions. The more you see, the more you'll know." She also advises that if a collector "can't afford to buy a good painting, buy a drawing or an original print. It's quality that matters, not the medium."

Heidenberg cites the late American collector Sally Ganz who, when she was asked why she and her husband collected, said, "It brought grace into our lives." She affirms, "I can't imagine living without art. Bring art into your life. It will change it forever." ●

John O'Hern, who has retired after 30 years in the museum business, specifically as the Executive Director and Curator of the Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, N.Y., is the originator of the internationally acclaimed Re-presenting Representation exhibitions which promote realism in its many guises. John was chair of the Artists Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts. He writes for gallery publications around the world, including regular monthly features on Art Market Insights and on Sculpture in *Western Art Collector* magazine.

