

Broadening horizons

As a student, he had only been able to afford posters. In the meantime, Michael Hilti and his family have been acquiring valuable works of art for the Hilti Art Foundation. To the present day, the art collection includes around 250 paintings, sculptures and objects, of which 36 select works are on exhibit in Vaduz. Within the scope of an interview, the 70-year-old Liechtensteiner revealed his own connection to modern art, which criteria are essential when purchasing new works and which response to the first exhibition in the new building of the Hilti Art Foundation made him particularly happy.

Mr. Hilti, how is your interest in visual arts expressed?

Growing up, art has always been a part of my life, even in childhood. The same is true for my wife. So we live with art and grapple with it. Art always expresses and mirrors the culture at the point of time of its origination. Thus it's also a testament of history.

In particular, modern and contemporary art does not open up to the viewer straightaway. How do you develop a connection to the works?

That is a challenge that every viewer of modern art faces. And there are many works I do not develop any connection with. But that is not bad because, of course, everyone has their own preferences. I want to live with art. Consequently, I prefer artworks that inspire me and put me in a good mood. Moreover, one develops a connection over time and throughout the expe-

periences made as a collector. In connection with this, I purchase works today that I would never have bought 20 years ago. The eye of the collector is capable of learning. Furthermore, direct personal contact and especially direct dialogue with the artist can be very helpful.

Which artists would that be for you?

Actually, there are quite a lot – for example, Gotthard Graubner, Max Bill or Gottfried Honegger, with whom I was able to implement a museum for children in France. Or Sean Scully, Imi Knoebel, Heinz Mack, Keith Sonnier, Georg Malin, Hanna Roeckle or Thomas Struth – just to name a few.

Would you have liked to become an artist yourself?

Actually, we are artists in a way with what we are doing day in and day out, aren't we? At least as long as we are creative and critical and keep our eyes open all the time.

When you are thinking about the artworks of the second exhibition – to which of those do you have a special relation, and why?

Actually, I do relate to most of those works, because there is a certain story or happening connected to it – whether it was the first contact, the decision to purchase or the encounter with the artist in his studio. I like it that way, because it is the base for a kind of bonding. Certainly I do have some favorites, but don't want to name them, because that wouldn't be fair as far as the other artists are concerned.

Who decides on which art works should be acquired for the Hilti Art Foundation collection?

Actually, three collections are united within the scope of the Hilti Art Foundation: the collection of the family, the collection of my deceased sister Ursula, and the collection of me and my wife.

As far as the collection of the Hilti family is concerned, there is a clear strategy for determining what is of interest for the collection with regard to what type of art, from which time period it is, and by which artists created it. Naturally, the quality of the works plays a particularly important role and this also entails works that we can identify with - works that we want to live with. In the end, the decision is made by our art advisory board that is composed of experts. And if no agreement can be made, then a work is also not purchased.

As far as our own collection is concerned, we are absolutely free in what we want to do, so the scope is fairly big: from classic modernism over Zurich Concretists all the way to art of the present day and, latterly, photography.

There is a studio in the new exhibition building that is intended to convey art to all age groups. Why should children and young people occupy themselves with visual art?

Art is always a testimony of the culture in which we live. However, it is also a direct expression of our society. Therefore, it is also particularly important for young people to occupy themselves with visual art.

If there is the opportunity to gain knowledge of the artist, the background of his work or his thoughts regarding it, those are always good experiences. Experiences broaden horizons and teach us to see things that, unfortunately, are continually getting lost in our digital world.

The first exhibition the new building of the Hilti Art Foundation in the expansion of the Kunstmuseum is in the books. Which response were you particularly happy about?

Quite simply: that there were actually only positive reactions. I was approached by people who wanted to express their gratitude for the works and the exhibition building. It is fairly satisfying to know that the Hilti Art Foundation was met with such a positive response.

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More information: www.hiltiartfoundation.li and www.kunstmuseum.li

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