



SF art collector Pamela Joyner reframing art history

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Photo: ♦ Estate Of Norman Lewis, Courtesy Of The Art Institute Of Chicago



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Norman Lewis, with works like "Afternoon," is particularly well represented among the Joyner Giuffrida Collection's earliest objects.

San Francisco art collector and philanthropist Pamela Joyner is rapidly becoming an influential figure around the world. A trustee of the Art Institute of Chicago and a member of support committees at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Britain's Tate museums, Joyner was **elected last month** to the 14-member Board of Trustees of the J. Paul Getty Trust. At that time, Getty Trust President James Cuno called her

“an art collector of distinction,” and praised her commitment to education and her “deep understanding of the value of a research library.”

A scholarly catalog of the works she and her husband, Fred Giuffrida, have amassed, “Four Generations: The Joyner Giuffrida Collection of Abstract Art,” was published in September to strong reviews.

Now, an extensive exhibition drawn from the collection has been announced. It will tour to at least five prominent museums throughout the United States, beginning this fall at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art and making stops at the Baltimore Museum of Art and the museums of Duke and Notre Dame universities. Current plans call for the tour to end at the UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive in August 2019, though additional venues are under discussion.

This kind of attention would please any committed art collector. The Joyner Giuffrida Collection, however, has a particular distinction: It comprises some 300 works by leading African American artists, and artists of the African diaspora. And it has a mission. Joyner, by phone, said that is “to try to be a catalyst to reframe art history around artists of African descent who have been overlooked by the full arc of the canon.”

Christopher Bedford enthusiastically embraces that goal. He is director of the Baltimore Museum of Art and co-curator of the exhibition with Baltimore Museum curator Katy Siegel.

“Her collecting practices are astoundingly topical,” he said by phone. “In the history of collecting, we have never seen this mix of commitment to the quality of the objects and to their social import.”

The exhibition, titled “Solidary and Solitary: The Pamela J. Joyner and Alfred J. Giuffrida Collection,” will look at the work of the “four generations” of artists on which Joyner and Giuffrida have focused. It will span from the 1940s to the present.

The work of Norman Lewis, in particular, but also Alma Thomas, Beauford Delaney and others associated with Abstract Expressionism and its offshoots are well represented among the collection’s earliest objects. Other significant first-generation artists include Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Richard Hunt and Jacob Lawrence.

Venerable artists like Sam Gilliam, Charles Gaines, Melvin Edwards, David Hammons, Raymond Saunders and Jack Whitten are among the second generation. The “Freestyle” generation, named after a groundbreaking 2001 exhibition at the Studio Museum of Harlem, is a large group encompassing many key artists of our day, from Mark Bradford — who will represent the U.S. this year at the Venice Biennale — to Kara Walker. The final group is defined, according to “Four Generations” essayist Joost Bosland, as artists “connected to the African continent by birth or recent family history.” It includes Odili Donald Odita, Moshekwa Langa, Robin Rhode and others, with a strong representation of the British portraitist Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Bedford, the Baltimore Museum director, said the show is “a particular passion for me. As museums, we do a really poor job of representing the interests of all our audiences.” He said his museum will devote 12,000 to 14,000 square feet of galleries to an expanded version.

“We are just taking the first step here,” he said. “When all is said and done, the story to be told is not one of exclusion

but integration.”

Asked whether she had models in building such an extensive and incisive collection, Joyner said, “We started 20 years ago, like a lot of people start, with a need to enhance our living environment by hanging things on the wall. But as we got into this more deeply, what emerged was a strand of stories that really has been of interest to me.”

Over time, she came to love the Anderson Collection, now permanently installed at Stanford University, where works from her collection hang on loan as part of Stanford’s effort to broaden the story it can tell. She also admires the scholar and collector Estrellita Brodsky, “who really has shined a keen light on Latin American artists who’ve been overlooked.”

“It took me some time to develop a strategy, a mission statement — we have all of that, you know. I actually write these things down. That’s the businessperson in me,” said the collector, who holds an MBA from Harvard Business School and retired early from a successful career in finance.

And, she said, “I have an acquisitions target list.” After buying about 30 works annually in recent years, the couple plans to slow down now. Although, in preparation for the exhibition, “we’re trying to fill a few holes or enhance a few story lines.”

“The collecting bug is a pretty bad bug to have — you become addicted to the process.”

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