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THE LAUDER BROTHERS

Matching Each Other Step by Step

They are two of the world's top collectors. They are patrons, philanthropists, and chairmen of major New York museums. They talk every day and buy art almost as often

BY KELLY DEVINE THOMAS

For the first five minutes or so, Ronald Lauder is able to sit still. But then he is a man in motion. He stretches, he squirms, he leans over and back in his chair. He reaches with a lackadaisical arm to roll a therapeutic exercise ball with his fingertips. Austere, gray, yet handsome, the ball fits precisely into the room. "It could be a Joseph Beuys," says the chairman of the Museum of Modern Art with a low, rolling chuckle.

Ronald Lauder's office, 42 floors above New York City in the General Motors Building, near Central Park, is an idiosyncratic mélange of art and architecture, both tactile and arresting. The sensibility bears more than a passing resemblance to that of the Neue Galerie New York, the museum of German and Austrian art that he founded. It opened last year in a 1914 brick-and-limestone mansion almost directly across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Not far below, on the G.M. building's 40th floor, is the headquarters of the Estée Lauder Companies, the cosmetics company founded by his mother, Estée Lauder, and now run by his brother, Leonard. The waiting room for the executive offices is swathed in shades of blue, the company's signature color, and is decorated with an Old World sense of feminine zeal—flowered porcelain bowls, crystal light fixtures, antique gilt furniture, and Oriental carpets laid over blue carpeting.

Leonard Lauder's office on the 40th floor, by contrast, is a showcase of 20th-century American works by Agnes Martin, Claes Oldenburg, Joseph Cornell, Robert Rauschenberg, and Kenneth Noland. In private, he is a leading collector of Cubist work; in public, he is the chairman of the Whitney Museum of American art who recently led a donation to the museum of some \$200 million worth of postwar art.

Ambitious, wealthy, and powerful, the Lauder brothers are among the top ten art collectors in the world. They also occupy the highest positions at two major New York museums, each in the process of expanding its size and scope even as a skittish economy continues to bruise their income and resources. "The Modern and the Whitney have always been in competition," notes former Whitney director David Ross. "That you have two brothers heading the institutions adds a psychodynamic that makes things even more interesting."

Leonard, 69, and Ronald, 58, have matched each other nearly step for step since they became involved with the Whitney and the Modern in the 1960s, were named trustees in the 1970s, and were elected as chairmen of their institutions in 1994 and 1995, respectively. Their impact on the art world begins with a love of art and collecting, and converged most dramatically in the last year with Ronald's opening of the Neue Galerie, Leonard's gift to boost the stature of the Whitney's permanent collection, and the Modern's move to a converted warehouse in Queens while its 53rd Street building undergoes a massive expansion.

Worth more than \$5 billion combined, according to *Forbes* magazine, the Lauder brothers are men of immense resources and connections who have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars in cash and art to the museums, shaping their public collections and influencing the growth and direction of the institutions. "As a family, they are among the nation's best arts patrons in terms of quality, consistency, and generosity,"

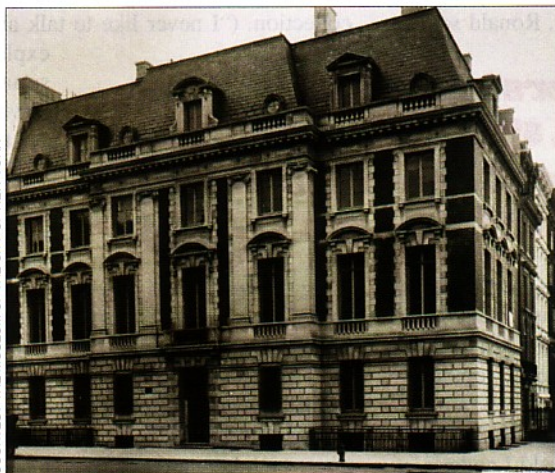
says Ross. "Here you have two New York boys, Leonard and Ronald, who have given back to their city with class, intelligence, soul, and a real commitment to art and the institutions they love. What more could you ask for?"

Through the Lauder Foundation, a private family foundation directed by Estée, Leonard, and Ronald, the family has provided annual financial support to museums and arts organizations, as well as to other nonprofit groups and institutions across the country. Aside from his involvement with the Modern and the Neue Galerie, Ronald and his wife, Jo Carole, have contributed to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and have donated arms and armor and medieval art to the Metropolitan. Leonard and his wife, Evelyn, have donated and promised works to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., posters and postcards to the Metropolitan, and a recent trove of 25,000 Japanese postcards to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

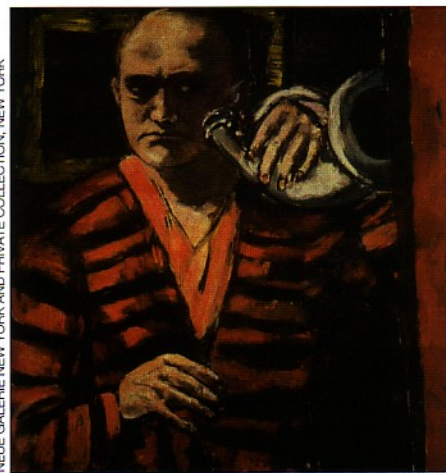
"Their generosity extends not just to giving money but to time and commitment," says Robert Hurst, president of the Whitney and vice chairman of Goldman Sachs. "They are willing to put their money where their mouth is." And they have given up some of their stake in the family business to do so. Leonard and Ronald have donated hundreds of thousands of their public shares in the company to endow the foundations and institutions that they support. To date, Ronald has endowed the Neue Galerie

with 1.08 million Estée Lauder shares, worth about \$30 million at press time. Between July 1999 and June 2001 Leonard donated more than \$100 million worth of his shares to finance and purchase artworks for the American Contemporary Art Foundation, which he set up in 1999 to support the Whitney, and which facilitated his recent donation. (By donating their Estée Lauder shares they avoid paying capital-gains tax on the sale of the shares and, at the same time, reduce their taxable income.)

Financially tied to one another through the family business as well as various trusts and partnerships, the Lauder brothers, who live only a few blocks apart on the Upper East Side, have supported each other's endeavors. They have also drawn strength from other family members. Estée, who is believed to be in her 90s and has been in declining health for several years, continues to make annual financial contributions to the Lauder Foundation and to the organizations supported by her sons. She has given more than \$10 million to help fund the Modern's new museum and Leonard's foundation.



COURTESY THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK



NEUE GALERIE NEW YORK AND PRIVATE COLLECTION, NEW YORK

OPPOSITE Leonard (left) and Ronald Lauder outside Ronald's office in the General Motors Building. **AT LEFT** is a 1967 Bruce Nauman drawing; at right, three works by Joseph Beuys. **ABOVE** The Neue Galerie New York, a museum devoted to German and Austrian art founded by Ronald last year. His gifts to the museum include Max Beckmann's *Self-Portrait with Horn*, 1938.

Evelyn, a photographer and senior corporate vice president at Estée Lauder, has been married to Leonard since 1959. Her second book of photographs, *An Eye for Beauty*, was published by Abrams in October, and her pictures were recently shown at Seattle's Winston Wächter and New York's PaceMacGill galleries to benefit the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, which she established in 1993. "It's a very, very happy family alliance," Evelyn says of their involvement with the museum. Their son William, chief operating officer of Estée Lauder, is a collector of contemporary paintings and photographs by American artists and a trustee of his father's foundation. Their other son, Gary, a venture capitalist in California, is a collector of American antiques.

Jo Carole, who became involved with the Modern in the early 1960s through the museum's Junior Council, married Ronald in 1967. Today she sits on several committees at the Modern and serves as president of the museum's International Council. She is also chair of Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies, a nonprofit organization that works with the Department of State to acquire works for display in American embassies. Their two daughters, Aerin and Jane, work for Estée Lauder and are said by sources to have art collections based on gifts from their father. Aerin, vice president for global advertising at Estée Lauder, and Jane, vice president of marketing for Estée Lauder's Stila Cosmetics, are members of the Modern's Junior

Associates, an auxiliary membership group, and sit on the museum's special programming and events committee.

Sources describe Ronald as a passionate, eccentric collector with a voracious appetite. Leonard is said to be more analytical and focused. "Both have an extraordinarily good eye and are very insistent on high quality," says Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "They are also very knowledgeable. They buy in difficult fields. They don't collect out of a sense of fashion. They collect out of a sense of devotion. They are broad, inquisitive collectors." (De Montebello says there have been thoughts about the Lauder brothers becoming trustees at the Met, but "because of their leadership positions at the other museums it would not have been seemly.") On occasion the brothers have purchased works together. They paid \$24.7 million to buy Pablo Picasso's *Woman Seated in an Armchair (Eva)*, a 1913 Cubist portrait, at the Victor and Sally Ganz sale at Christie's in 1997. "Some are in his home and some are in mine," says Leonard. "And then we swap." (The Picasso, he says, is "en route.") The brothers speak about art every day, but they also keep their cards close to their chests. Ronald says he

On occasion, the brothers have bought works together—like a \$24.7 million Picasso. "Some are in his home and some are in mine," says Leonard. "And then we swap"

wasn't aware of the extent or the specifics of Leonard's acquisitions on behalf of the Whitney until the museum went public with the gift. "We have an agreement. We don't discuss what we're doing," says Ronald, "because if we discuss something, we have to discuss everything."

There are surprises everywhere in Ronald Lauder's office. The first one he points to is on a bookshelf behind his desk: Felix Nussbaum's 1940 *Self-Portrait in a Concentration Camp*, for which he paid \$1.76 million at Sotheby's in 2000. Egon Schiele's 1912 *Conversion*, a tough composition of contorted figures, hangs above a couch by Wiener Werkstätte designer Josef Hoffmann. A portrait of Sigmund Freud by Gerhard Richter precedes a door leading to a separate office, an intimate space crammed with books, two 18th-century sculptures by Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, and a still life by Lovis Corinth. "Art reflects a civilization's culture," says Ronald, "a civilization's feeling about life, about what is important and what isn't important."

A tall, boyish-looking man with heavy-lidded eyes and unruly dark hair, Ronald Lauder walks with his shoulders back, his arms swaying faintly at his sides. In a light-filled circular atrium outside his office he lingers in front of works by Bruce Nauman and Joseph Beuys, whose felt suit hangs slack against a wall. Then he moves on to admire an all-white textured canvas by Piero Manzoni, a recent purchase. "I've always been, I guess, anti-establishment in what I buy," says Ronald. "I tend to buy in a certain field, and when it becomes popular I move on."

The hallways are lined with drawings and collages by the likes of Barnett Newman, Hannah Höch, and Ellsworth Kelly. "The idea is to make one think and be challenged," notes his curator, Elizabeth Szancer Kujawski. Anselm Kiefer's thickly painted *Heliogabal* of 1983 consumes a wall in the lobby, which also contains Beuys's 1969 assemblage *Sledge* and Sigmar Polke's 1964 *Tennis Player*. In the near right-hand corner of the room, the first object to greet a visitor is Martin Kippen-

berger's 1990 *Martin Stand in the Corner*, a life-size figure clothed in a pinstripe shirt, suspenders, and gray trousers, with his back turned to the world. "The most lasting art is that art that is the strongest, art that has an edge," Ronald says. "You see it with your eye and you feel it in your stomach."

Leonard Lauder, appearing to tick with the precision of a metronome at high speed, is running seven minutes late—so, he explains apologetically, the interview will be cut short by seven minutes. The chairman of Estée Lauder is wearing a white shirt and red tie, with no jacket; leaning forward assertively in his seat at a conference table, he gives the impression of a man with his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. "Leonard is a force of nature," says Whitney director Maxwell Anderson. "He has a very high energy level, which makes it hard to keep up with him sometimes."

A patriarchal figure with trim white hair and wide-set, almond-shaped eyes, Leonard speaks in measured sentences. He jokes about having amnesia when queried about his private collection. ("I never like to talk about the things I collect," he explains later. "They're my personal collection, and I'm very private about it.") He comments on the answers he gives and winks or raises his eyebrows for emphasis. When asked how he makes decisions, he replies, "I have a little sign that says any-

thing can be done as long as no one takes the credit." Then adds with a wink, "How's that for evading a question?"

Twenty-three minutes later, Leonard is standing at the door to his office, trying to bring the meeting to an end and reeling off the names of the creators of the works on his walls. Near the center of the room stands Oldenburg's 1976–79 model *Clothespin*, which Leonard and Evelyn have promised to the Whitney.

It is 5 P.M. and there are a half-dozen people waiting to speak to him outside his office. "Leonard calls himself a middle-class billionaire," says David Ross. "He works all the time." The following morning the company hosts a conference call with securities analysts, announcing its fourth-quarter and year-end results. For the fiscal year ending June 30 the company reports net income of \$191.9 million, down from \$305.2 million the previous fiscal year. Sales are up 1.6 percent to \$4.74 billion, from \$4.67 billion.

The Lauder brothers, particularly Leonard, have been instrumental in overseeing the expansion of the business their mother, Estée, and her late husband, Joseph, founded in 1946. The ambition and dream behind the company were hers. "First comes the shy wish. Then you must have the heart to have the dream. Then you work. And work," Estée wrote in her 1985 autobiography *Estée: A Success Story*. "Serenity is pleasant, but it lacks the ecstasy of achievement."

Born Josephine Esther Mentzer, in Queens, New York, Estée Lauder was raised by a French-Hungarian mother and a Czechoslovakian father who was the owner of a hardware store. Estée's maternal grandmother was a French Catholic; her maternal grandfather was a Hungarian Jew.

In 1930 she married Joseph Lauder, the son of an Austrian immigrant. He was a silk salesman, and she was a housewife who peddled a skin cream she had learned to make from an uncle, a skin specialist. Estée and Joseph were divorced in 1939, when Leonard was six years old, and then remarried three years later at City Hall. Ronald was born in 1944. "Leonard and Ronald are not idle inheritors," notes Kirk Varnedoe, former chief curator of



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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Ronald with his parents, Joseph and Estée Lauder, ca. 1962. Ronald and his wife, Jo Carole, at MoMA last year. Ronald's daughters, Aerin (left) and Jane. Leonard and his son William, chief operating officer of the Estée Lauder Companies. Leonard and his wife, Evelyn.

painting and sculpture at the Modern and now on the faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. "They were present at the creation of the family's wealth."

Leonard worked at the office after school every day, from the time of the company's first sale to Saks Fifth Avenue in 1946, delivering packages on his bicycle and typing invoices. "He worked every summer, every free moment," wrote Estée. "One might say that, as soon as he was old enough to know what a lipstick was, he was making them."

Educated at the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania and the Columbia Graduate School of Business, Leonard joined the family business full-time in 1958, sharing a small office with his mother, after serving three years as a supply officer in the navy. The company had just broken \$800,000 in sales. Leonard would serve as president from 1972 to 1995 and as chief executive from 1982 to 1999, before becoming chairman.

Ronald went to work in the company's Belgian factory in 1964, after he graduated from Wharton. In her book *Estée* credits Ronald, who attended the International School of Business at the University of Brussels and studied French literature at the Sorbonne in Paris, with influencing the company's perception. "It was his eye that helped to create the taste-making look of our company."

Ronald left the operation of the firm to Leonard in 1983, when he was appointed deputy assistant secretary of defense for NATO and European Policy. Now chairman of Clinique International, a subsidiary of Estée Lauder, Ronald has explored a dizzying array of political, philanthropic, and entrepreneurial endeavors over the years. "I am a risk taker," says Ronald unabashedly. Asked how he is able to juggle all of his interests, he says, "It's a question of priorities. You identify certain priorities and then you watch them very carefully. I am blessed with a very good memory, which al-

lows me to follow many things at the same time."

Ronald was appointed ambassador to Austria in 1986, shortly before Kurt Waldheim was elected president despite allegations that he had participated in Nazi war crimes. (Ronald refused to attend his inauguration.) When he returned to New York 18 months later, Ronald founded the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which promotes Jewish renewal by founding and operating Jewish schools, camps, and community centers in central and eastern Europe. The foundation also supports the preservation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps and the restoration of synagogues such as the Temple Synagogue in Krakow, Poland. Ronald's Jewish Renaissance Foundation, meanwhile, is working to restore Prozna Street, one of the few remnants of the pre-World War II Warsaw ghetto.

"Ronald is really a person who is not able to stay still," says a colleague. "He'll wake up at three or four in the morning to talk to someone in Israel. He wants to know where everything he wants is, and he wants to do everything he wants to do. He has a lot of fingers in a lot of pots."

A national leader in the Jewish community, Ronald is the former chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, president of the Jewish National Fund, and treasurer of the World Jewish Congress. He has also taken a lead position, as chairman of the World Jewish Congress's Commission for Art Recovery, in the restitution of artworks stolen from Jewish families during World War II. "He's a very good Jew," says Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, who adds, "My only complaint with Ronald is he's a right-winger. He's more Republican than is even necessary."

Ronald's positions at the World Jewish Congress and the Modern came into conflict in 1997, when Manhattan district attorney Robert Morgenthau seized from the museum two

Schiele paintings, on loan from an Austrian collection, that had been claimed by heirs of Holocaust survivors. The Modern challenged the seizure in court. Lauder made it clear that the museum's director and legal counsel were empowered to handle the matter, and that he supported the museum's position that the works be returned to Austria. "I think he put on his museum hat first," says Bronfman. "But he has a good conscience. He did what he thought was right."

Ronald spent \$14 million in an unsuccessful bid to become mayor of New York City in 1989, losing the Republican primary to opponent Rudolph Giuliani. But Ronald was effective in passing a citywide referendum that set term limits for New York City Council members in 1993 and ousted two-thirds of the council from office in 2001. It was an achievement that caused the Modern some difficulty when it needed to obtain

struggling to fulfill a myriad of obligations and interests.

In the museum world the director is the chief executive officer and the president is the day-to-day decision maker. The chair sets the tone for the institution and is expected to make large contributions and approach others to do the same. "The buck stops with the chair," says Agnes Gund, former president of the Modern and now chair of its International Council. "The chair is ultimately responsible for the fiscal shape of the museum and is responsible for who is running the show."

The Lauder brothers' rise to dual chairmanships began with the impact they felt as children, growing up under the aura of New York museums, and visiting, in particular, the Modern several times a week after school. While at Wharton in the early 1950s, Leonard ran a film society and rented films and film stills from the Modern. But he was soon drawn to the Whitney, which, at the

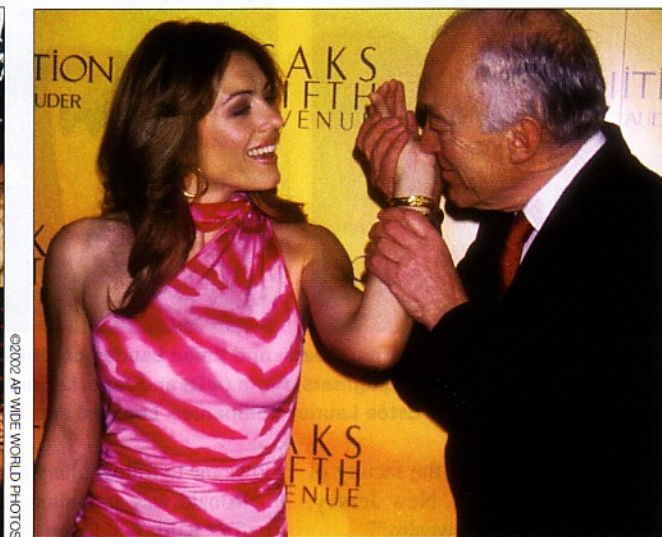
time, stood literally in the shadow of the Modern on West 54th Street. "I felt I could make a difference at a smaller museum," says Leonard. "And I think I have."

In 1964 he joined the Friends of the Whitney Museum and in 1977 he became a trustee. He still retains some ties to the Modern, describing himself as the museum's "single greatest angel in terms of its poster collection." (He has donated to the Modern posters, lithographs, and postcards in addition to providing funding for poster acquisitions.) In the 1970s, he joined the Modern's Arch-

itecture and Design committee, a position he retains today. "I've been to one committee meeting, and I felt very awkward," says Leonard, adding, "Design is one of my passions." Maxwell Anderson explains, "We haven't until recently collected architecture, and we don't collect design. It's not a conflict of interest."

Leonard proved to be a pivotal figure as control of the board passed from relatives of founder Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney to outside trustees. He was committed to expanding the museum's influence and the quality of its permanent collection. In 1980 he led the museum's purchase of Jasper Johns's *Three Flags* for \$1 million, the highest price paid for a work by a living artist at the time. "I feel that many of the things that are happening today I had somewhat of a hand in helping to create," says Leonard. He adds, "When you are talking about a museum, particularly an American museum, and when American artists continue to create new works every day, the best you can hope for is that you can help keep in motion the path to greatness."

He rose to leadership during the 1990s—a contentious decade for the museum, following the firing of longtime director Tom Armstrong and an unsuccessful attempt to expand the museum with a design by Michael Graves—serving as president from 1990 until 1994, when he was appointed chairman. Leonard has given hundreds of works to the Whitney, including Gerald Murphy's 1927 *Cocktail*, Agnes Martin's 1979 *The Islands*, five Ad Reinhardt paintings, and troves of drawings by Brice Marden as well as by Oldenburg and his wife and part-



LEFT Ronald, flanked by Leonard's wife, Evelyn, and his mother, Estée, concedes the Republican nomination for mayor of New York City in 1989.

RIGHT Leonard and Elizabeth Hurley launch the perfume Intuition in May 2001.

approval from the council to move ahead with its recent expansion. "He was the person council members liked least," says a fellow trustee. "It was a sore spot." (The Modern paid \$323,094—the top lobbying bill in 2000, according to the city clerk's office—to the law firm Rosenman & Colin in its quest for approval.)

Ronald's start-up companies, RSL Communications and Central European Media Enterprises, both of which Leonard invested in, have foundered in recent years. RSL Communications, a telecommunications company, filed for bankruptcy in 2001, defaulting on a \$100 million loan Ronald had given the company a year earlier. Central European Media, which owns television stations and network holdings throughout central and eastern Europe, is currently trying to recoup \$500 million in damages from the Czech Republic, claiming in a lawsuit that the government failed to protect the company's investment in a television station there. Its stock was delisted from Nasdaq two years ago when trading of its shares fell below \$1. (At press time, its stock was trading over the counter for \$17.50 a share.)

Leonard and Ronald were elected chairmen of the Whitney and the Modern just before the family business became a publicly traded company in November 1995. Similar to the Estée Lauder company, the Modern and the Whitney were expanding from being family financed and operated museums to being publicly supported institutions

ner, Coosje van Bruggen. Often the acquisitions were the result of Leonard's personally approaching artists and collectors.

When art collector John Powers died in 1999, Leonard traveled to Carbondale, Colorado, to speak with his widow, Kimiko. "Leonard, of course, wanted to be the first there to discuss her options," says Marla Prather, curator of postwar art at the Whitney, who accompanied him on the trip. "He made it clear to her that he wanted to work with her, whatever she decided to do." He subsequently acquired 59 Oldenburg drawings from the collection for the Whitney, for which he paid \$4.6 million through his foundation.

In December 1999 Leonard flew with Prather and Arne Glimcher, chairman of New York's PaceWildenstein Gallery, to Robert Rauschenberg's studio in Captiva, Florida. Rauschenberg had just completed *Synopsis Shuffle*, a 52-panel work meant to be reassembled by different people each time it is installed. The artist suggested that Leonard make a work using no less than three and no more than seven panels. Leonard was won over, paying \$8.7 million through his foundation to acquire the work as a promised gift for the Whitney and giving \$210,000 to support the exhibition of the work at the museum.

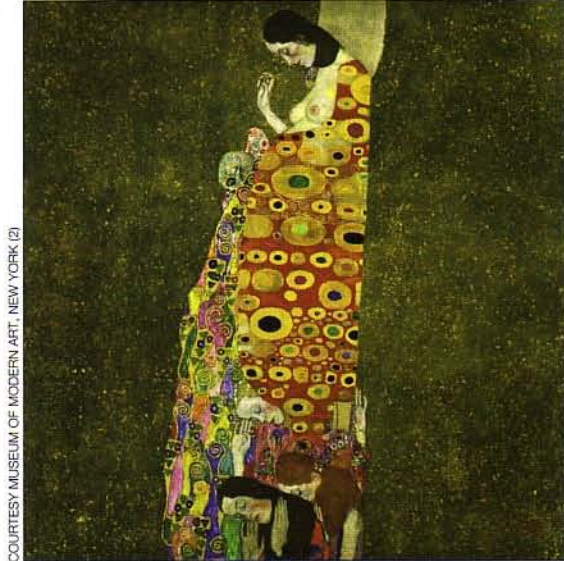
Anderson describes Leonard as a strategic leader who "has an understanding of the Whitney's need to embrace risk and not affirm the obvious" and as routinely in touch. "He'll jot down notes on light blue Estée Lauder paper and invariably send me a clipping attached to a blue note two or three times a week, asking, 'Did you see this?' 'What did you think of this?' He's always actively mining information for how we can improve the institution."

Ronald became involved with the Modern in 1966, when he joined its drawings committee. "It was a very special time," he says. "Many of the original people who were involved with the Modern were still there. There was this still-exciting concept of showing art to the public as well as educating."

Fellow Modern trustee Barbara Jakobson, who was introduced to Ronald in the 1960s by the late arts patron Lily Auchincloss, recalls, "When I first met Ronald, he started talking to me about Schiele drawings, and he was a *kid*. Ronald to me is one of those rare people: a born esthete. He knew from a very young age what he wanted and how to see."

Ronald was the Modern's youngest trustee when he joined the board in 1976 at age 32. He went on to become co-chair of the Finance Committee and head of the Drawings Committee, as well as of the Paintings and Sculpture Committee. The board turned to Ronald in 1995, just as the museum had decided to undertake an ambitious expansion that would eventually require more than \$800 million in capital. "I want to ensure that the legacy that is part of the Museum of Modern Art continues into the future," says Ronald. "As chairman, you do everything you can to move that process along."

The Modern was a Rockefeller-run institution until 1993, when David Rockefeller, son of founder Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, handed the chairmanship to Agnes Gund, who, prefer-



COURTESY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK (2)

Gifts that Ronald Lauder helped bring to the Museum of Modern Art include Gustav Klimt's *Hope II*, 1907, and Matisse's *The Window/The Yellow Curtain*, ca. 1915.

ring the day-to-day role of president, turned the position over to Ronald two years later. David Rockefeller, now chair emeritus, remains active at the museum, according to sources, and regularly attends finance, nominating, capital campaign, and executive-committee meetings.

During his tenure on the board, Ronald has helped the museum acquire nearly 200 works, estimated to be worth a total of more than \$150 million. Among them are Richard Serra's 1992 *Intersection II*, Chuck Close's 1997 *Self-Portrait*, Gerhard Richter's 1971 *Untitled (Portrait of Henry de Montherlant)*, and Gustav Klimt's 1907–08 *Hope II*. He also has stepped back from acquiring a work for himself when the Modern has expressed interest. Ronald had wanted to acquire Henri Matisse's *The Window/The Yellow Curtain* (ca. 1915) for his personal collection since spotting it in the collection of Marcel Marbille in Belgium in the mid-1970s. But when it came on the market more than 20 years later through dealer Stephen Hahn—who was asking \$20 million for it—Ronald agreed to let the museum acquire it and put forth almost half the purchase price.

"He wants the museum to get the best pieces that are too expensive or too large for most people to buy, and he is innovative about finding them," says Gund. "He is not so committed to getting a lot of little things by younger artists who are not proven."

Colleagues describe Ronald as feisty but fair, opinionated but discreet—a quirky leader with a droll sense of humor who loves a debate. "One of the reasons why the staff likes to deal with Ronald is that he knows what he is talking about, whether it's classic modernism or contemporary art," says Richard Oldenburg, director emeritus of the Modern and honorary chairman of Sotheby's North America. "He has his opinions, and they're soundly based." Says Robert Storr, former curator of painting and sculpture at the Modern and now a professor of modern art at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, "He likes to tease and invite debate. He'll express disapproval of an artist he knows I like, knowing that I am not going to change my mind. He'll want me to support my position, and he'll be dismayed if I don't."

Ronald says he will stay on as chairman until 2005, when the newly expanded Modern reopens. (The board voted to extend the term limit of the chairman from five years to ten years when he was elected to serve a second term in 2000.) There is no term limit for the chairman of the Whitney, and Leonard isn't giving any indication of how much longer he might con-

tinue in the position. "I don't know how long it will last," Leonard shrugs. "Until I resign or they fire me."

Ronald was the first in the family to start collecting art when he used \$10,000 in bar mitzvah money to buy a self-portrait watercolor by Egon Schiele. "I still have it," he says, but he is reluctant to talk about it, explaining that everyone always wants to know which one it is. "It's never been displayed. It's a very personal picture for me." He started a collection of German and Austrian art for his parents at the age of 18, when he acquired an early sketch by Wassily Kandinsky on their behalf; it's now on loan to the Neue Galerie. "They had a great deal of faith in me and allowed me to buy things for them," says Ronald.

Today Ronald owns hundreds of objects, ranging from medieval relics, arms and armor, and Old Master drawings to classic modern and contemporary art. He also collects automobiles, and has a half-dozen homes around the world. "He has Seurat drawings that I would die for," says Gund. "I would give many works in my collection for one."

His art collection is so vast that sources say they do not know the extent of it. "I've seen more than the tip of the iceberg," says Storr. "But I was handed one of the inventory books for his collection once, and I was astounded by what was in there that I hadn't seen." Says another colleague, "A day doesn't go by when Ronald doesn't buy something. Dealers, consultants, and advisers come to him with things daily. They know he will respond to quality and will buy."

In recent years Ronald has spent nearly \$100 million on just two pictures for his collection: Kandinsky's 1911 *Composition*

"There are three categories of art: 'Oh,' 'Oh, my,' and 'Oh, my God,'" says Ronald. "I only collect the 'Oh, my God' works"

V, for which he paid close to \$40 million, and Cézanne's 1900 *Still Life, Flowered Curtain, and Fruit*, which he acquired for nearly \$50 million. "There are three categories of art: 'Oh,' 'Oh, my,' and 'Oh, my God,'" says Ronald. "I only collect the 'Oh, my God' works." Both Leonard and Ronald refuse to speak about their private collecting, but sources say Ronald also owns Cézanne's *Man with Crossed Arms* (ca. 1899) and no fewer than seven works by Constantin Brancusi, including, in his Park Avenue home, a limestone fireplace by the artist.

"Ronald's interest in art is central to his understanding of the world," says Glenn Lowry, director of the Modern. "He collects art 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. He does it with an intensity and intellect that is probably unmatched in the world. We talk once or twice a week almost every week of the year, and we always end up talking about a work of art that he thinks the museum should be acquiring or that he is considering for himself."

Leonard began collecting postcards when he was six, then moved on to posters. "I started to pick up postcards when I was a kid. Everywhere I went. That's how I started as a collector," says Leonard. "I suppose you could say that, even back then, I had an eye for things that had history or brilliant design, or that I just couldn't resist. When you have an eye, it can embrace all media."

He didn't gravitate to fine art until the 1960s, when he bought a Kurt Schwitters collage that he has since promised to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. "Schwitters was not a Cubist; he was a collagist. But he provided an entry point into Cubism," Leonard explains. "In collecting, everyone walks through a door before walking into the room of their collecting interest. Everyone has a particular work of art that inspired them. For me, the

Schwitters led to the discovery of so many wonderful objects."

Leonard paid a reported \$25 million to acquire a large group of Cubist works from the estate of art historian and collector Douglas Cooper, who died in 1984. "It doesn't sound like much today," says New York private dealer Paul Herring, who, with his twin brother, John, arranged the sale to Leonard. "He's spent more on a single work since. But at the time it was a complete sensation to buy 25 or 30 works in one fell swoop."

According to sources, Leonard's collection includes Picasso's 1909 *Nude Woman in an Armchair*; Georges Braque's first pasted-paper collage, the 1912 *Fruit Dish and Glass*; Picasso's 1912 *The Scallop Shell: "Notre avenir est dans l'air"* (Our future is in the air); and Fernand Léger's 1917–18 *Composition (Le Typographe)*, for which he paid \$6 million at Christie's in 1998. "It's a comprehensive collection of Cubism that is intensely, deeply focused," says his curator, Emily Braun. "Leonard does nothing on the surface." Adds Varne-doe, "I can't think of a collector who has a more precise focus on Cubism, at least not in the United States."

On the weekends, Leonard and Evelyn often scour flea markets and garage sales for postcards and other memorabilia. Evelyn recalls finding an old food tin she liked, "but the vendor wouldn't budge on the price. I found Leonard and said to him, 'You look worse than I do. Try to give him \$4 or \$5 for it.' So he went up and looked at the tin, made a face, and in a minute my husband was able to buy it at the price I said it was worth."

Leonard and Evelyn have donated most of their posters to museums, as well as many of the postcards, which still number in the tens of thousands. "It's an amazing archive," says Braun. "He'll complete a set, donate it, and go and start collecting the complete set again." Adds Evelyn, "He enjoys documenting, sorting, filing, and looking at his postcards. It is a very relaxing hobby for him."

It was Leonard, also a collector of works by Gustav Klimt, who in 1967 introduced Ronald to Serge Sabarsky, an art dealer and leading authority on German and Austrian Expressionism. Ronald was just 23 when his brother took him to Sabarsky's apartment to show him a drawing. Ronald and Sabarsky took to each other immediately and maintained a close friendship for nearly 30 years. "Debate was common," says Ronald of his relationship with Sabarsky. "Typical central European debate based more on emotion than logic. If there was a painting we both wanted, we debated who would buy it, whose collection was more important, and where it belonged."

In 1994 Sabarsky and Ronald paid \$9 million to buy the six-story building on 86th Street designed by Carrère & Hastings, the architects who built the New York Public Library, with the intention of turning it into a museum for German and Austrian art. When Sabarsky died two years later, Ronald carried on with their mission, lending the Neue Galerie more than \$16 million, endowing it with some \$30 million worth of his Estée Lauder shares, and purchasing works for the museum, including Max Beckmann's 1938 *Self-Portrait with Horn*, for which he paid \$22.5 million at Sotheby's two years ago. The museum, which has access to over 800 works from Sabarsky's foundation and 500 works owned by the Lauders—primarily Ronald, but also Estée and Leonard—has been well received by critics and the public.

On a recent visit to the museum, Ronald lingered before his Josef Hoffmann-designed desk set, now displayed in a vitrine on the second floor. He pointed to a double-faced clock and mused, "I've never liked to see the back of a clock from the other side of a desk." He worked his way over to what was

once the home's library, now lined with Schiele drawings from his collection, and stood face-to-face with Schiele's *Self-Portrait: Head* (1910). "Each one has a certain story behind it. I lived with them for a long time. Some of them I miss." As he reached the winding staircase leading down to the main floor, Ronald paused: "I'm using some ideas from here for the new museum," he said, referring to the Modern's expansion. But he declined to say more. "You'll see," he said with a slight grin.

If all had gone as planned, around the time Ronald opened the Neue Galerie to the public, the Whitney would have announced the \$200 million gift in artworks that Leonard, along with several other trustees, had acquired for the museum. But the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, pushed back the announcement and planned exhibition until this past summer and fall, when it replaced an Eva Hesse show that had been canceled due to budget concerns.

The gift began three years ago in a personal crusade by Leonard to bolster the museum's collection. "I saw a huge international vacuum cleaner sweeping up the remaining works of art of the 1950s and 1960s," says Leonard. "I knew if we simply sat on our hands and did nothing, the window of opportunity to fill in the holes in our collection would close."

Leonard turned primarily to Glimcher, who has a long history with the Whitney and whose gallery represents a number of prominent American artists. "He was very methodical about it," says Glimcher. "He wanted a great Clyfford Still, the best Warhols that could be acquired, the most important Oldenburgs that were still available."

Leonard purchased more than \$115 million worth of art from Glimcher between 1999 and 2001, according to private-foundation filings with the Internal Revenue Service, in addition to paying the gallery a \$500,000 consulting fee. The first group of works was acquired through the Lauder Foundation in 1999 with the help of more than \$20 million worth of Estée Lauder shares that Leonard donated to the family foundation.

The American Contemporary Art Foundation was founded that year with a donation of more than \$34 million worth of art and \$1.4 million in cash from the Lauder Foundation, \$5 million in cash from Estée, and \$38 million worth of Estée Lauder shares donated by Leonard between July 1999 and June 2000. Among the initial works acquired were Roy Lichtenstein's 1963 *World's Fair Girl* for \$6 million, Jackson Pollock's *Number 18, 1951* for \$10 million, and Franz Kline's 1961 *Red Painting* for \$4.6 million. Johns's 1965 *Double White Map* was acquired for \$14 million from New York dealer Richard Feigen.

Leonard went on to donate another \$50 million worth of his Estée Lauder shares between July 2000 and June 2001, enabling the foundation to acquire Johns's 1961 *0-9* for \$26 million and Mark Rothko's 1954 *Blue, Yellow, Green on Red* for \$16.5 million. Seventeen monotypes from Johns's 1982 "Savarin Can" se-

ries were purchased from the Leo Castelli Gallery for \$5 million.

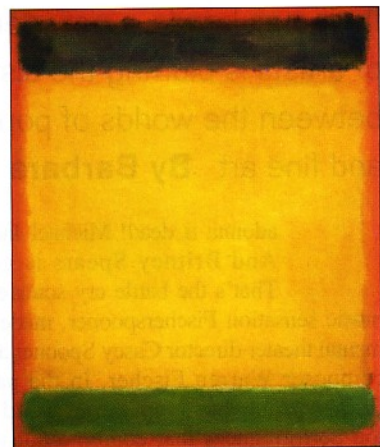
In April 2001 Leonard presented Anderson and Prather with a black binder full of images of the works he intended to donate to the Whitney. At the same time he approached other trustees about specific works he hoped they would donate. "Leonard is an extremely committed individual when he has an idea," says Evelyn. "He is very persuasive. He doesn't come on strong, but he comes on with enthusiasm. And enthusiasm is contagious."

Leonard, along with 14 of the museum's 38 trustees, among them Joel Ehrenkranz and Emily Fisher Landau, contributed to the 87-work donation. But the majority of trustees found out about the gift just last August. "This was done on a one-on-one basis," says Leonard. "I went to the trustees I knew would be interested and who had art. I did not want to start generating acquisition competition with other institutions."

About a month before the exhibition "An American Legacy: A Gift to New York" opened at the Whitney last October (through January 26, 2003), Leonard met with Prather to go over the show's layout. "I think a couple of things need expla-



COURTESY WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART (2)



LEFT "Art in America: From Hopper to Pollock" was on view in the Whitney's Lauder galleries in 2000. **RIGHT** Mark Rothko's *Blue, Yellow, Green on Red*, 1954, was part of a recent gift of 87 postwar works, orchestrated by Leonard, from the Whitney's trustees to the museum.

nation," Leonard observed, suggesting the use of some wall labels to explain the significance of works like Lichtenstein's *World's Fair Girl*, the preparatory canvas for the mural commissioned for the 1964 New York World's Fair. "It occurs to me that each room contains a surprise or a discovery."

Asked if the donation was a step toward expanding the museum, a possibility the trustees recently hired architect Rem Koolhaas to explore, Leonard's response was characteristically cryptic. He shook his head no, saying nothing had been decided. Then he announced, "First art, then bricks and mortar."

Some art-world observers attribute the Lauders' achievements to familial competition. "Sibling rivalry works wonders," says Ross. "New York could use three or four more sibling rivalries like theirs." Others note the brothers' belief in doing good and their sense of civic duty, however differently they might go about it. "Life is not a dress rehearsal. Life is the real thing," says Ronald. "If there are things you really want to try to do, you should try to do them as quickly as possible." As for their legacy, Varnedoe says, "I think we have a long way to go before worrying about what their legacy will be. I think they're still in their building phase and will keep on creating and collecting." Taking a quick breath, he adds, "It's fun to watch." ■

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