

Seymour Lazar

Seymour Lazar, who passed away on March 30, 2016, was a loyal and generous friend to many in the field of tribal art and especially to this magazine in its early years. African, Oceanic, and Pre-Columbian art dominated every room of his house in Palm Springs, where museum curators, interested collectors, and selected dealers were made welcome.

In the 1950s and '60s he had a colorful career as a young and hip entertainment lawyer in Los Angeles, working for such clients as comedian Lenny Bruce and jazz musician Miles Davis. He befriended the poets Allen Ginsberg and Maya Angelou as well as the psychedelic drug advocate Timothy Leary. Driving around in a Rolls-Royce and seen at times wearing a Pierre Cardin leather suit with no shirt, he soon tired of life as a lawyer and turned to the stock market, becoming one of its largest independent traders. He once said, "If I bought a stock in the morning, and still owned it at noon, that was a long-term investment." He was not afraid to take risks and he continued to represent in a series of class-action lawsuits, in many of which he was successful.

Seymour collected groups of objects. Many of those from Africa and the Pacific were assembled with the help of his longtime friend Peter Adler in London; Ewe cloths, Asmat shields, Oceanic clubs—some 250 of the latter sat in large baskets on the library floor like bouquets of exotic flowers. His large Pre-Columbian collection was acquired during his years living in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and later expanded and refined with the help of his close friend, the dealer Judy Small-Nash. He was a determined bidder in the auction room. When a group of Melanesian combs from the collection of Nelly van den Abbeele came up for auction in Amsterdam in 1999, Seymour was determined to have them and sat in the room with his hand raised until he prevailed, earning him a round of applause from the other bidders. A selection of more than two hundred of his combs was shown in an exhibition in Oceanside Museum in 2011. His spoon collection also numbered in the hundreds. The objects in his collection were tied to many illustrious names: Lt. General Pitt Rivers, James Hooper, Ben Heller, Stéphan Chauvet, Cornelis Meulendijk, Paul Tishman, and Jay Leff. A group of Admiralty Islands spatulas was acquired at the auction of artifacts collected on the *La Korrigane* expedition. A number of large New Guinea carvings from the



Photo courtesy of Aline Coquilje

George Kennedy Collection stood among the palm trees in his sunny Californian garden.

When one of our auction catalogs arrived, Seymour would call, asking, "What should I buy?" but he rarely followed anyone's advice. He was well aware that he at times had made mistakes, but he never returned an object to a dealer or auction house, simply putting it down to experience and moving on to the next purchase.

Seymour regularly called his many friends, sharing the latest jokes he had heard from Bernie Cornfeld and others. He loved Paris and kept an apartment there for many years, first on rue Mazarine across from Jean-Pierre Laprugne, of whom he was fond, and later overlooking the Jardin du Palais Royal, where he would dine at Le Grand Véfour with Eduardo Uhart, among others, often ordering several dishes from the menu and encouraging his companions to share them with him.

Seymour adored his wife, Alyce, who supported him in all his ventures, his son, Adam, and daughter, Tara, whose successful enterprises made him immensely proud.

By Tim Teuten