

Michel Leveau

My first encounter with Michel Leveau took place in the early 1980s. When it came time to leave, my husband, René, asked if we might be able to see his objects in Paris. “Impossible at the moment,” Michel replied. René believed this to be a polite refusal, but in fact a wonderful adventure awaited us, a journey that would last for three decades, take us through the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa, and become a profound friendship. I will always remember the discussions the four of us had, whether seated around a Paris table or at our place (where Michel savored my desserts), as a great privilege that I am deeply thankful for.

In spring of 1986, I was invited to two exhibitions. The first, presented by the Fondation Dapper, was titled *Ouvertures sur l’Art Africain* and was held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. The second, *Panorama des Figures de Reliquaire dites “Kota,”* was shown in a private venue, hidden by a bamboo garden. This set the stage for a series of unforgettable exhibitions, each focusing on a single culture, such as the Fang, Dogon, and Luba, or on a particular theme, such as *Supports de Rêve* and *Cuillers-Sculptures*. The events became a beacon in Parisian cultural life, and the opening of a dedicated space that also embraced the African diaspora followed. The exhibitions *Femmes* and *Angola* were among its highlights.

Michel was a mining engineer, who began his career in Senegal. He was a multi-faceted man and, as a patron of the arts, he early on had the idea of cre-

ating a foundation for his enduring passion, African art. He was always developing new projects and worked closely on these with his remarkable wife and companion, Christiane Falgayrettes, who handled much of the organizational side. With the help of a close and faithful staff, they put together more than forty exhibitions in which aesthetics always reigned supreme. Through their magnificent publications, they did a great deal to promulgate the art they loved so much while also helping many Africans become better aware of the richness of their patrimony.

Maupassant said, “life always unfolds in the same way, with death at the end.” On a gloomy night in November, as discretely as he had lived, Michel left us in his dreams to join the spirits of the lands of Africa, completing the circle. A man of action to the end, he departed in the midst of the installation of exhibitions on Gorée Island and while developing an exhibition titled *Initiés*.

The Musée Dapper’s devotees all hope that Christiane will continue to pursue her dear husband’s work. He will still be there in the shadows, as he always was, because together they always looked the same direction.

Anne Vanderstraete



Patrick Sargos

I met Patrick Sargos twelve years ago through Renaud Riley, who had asked me to entrust him with some pieces to show to some collectors. After this, a meeting took place with Patrick and Catherine Sargos in my gallery. We talked so much about the objects that I began to wonder if they had really come to buy or if their interest was primarily to talk and exchange ideas. In fact, their aesthetic sensibilities, accompanied by their deep interest in the original function of the object in its culture of origin, made them quite unusual among collectors. And this is exactly what nurtured our relationship over all these years—an ongoing exchange about objects with them and also with their son, Nicolas.

Relatively few collectors of African art have traveled in Africa and even fewer have lived there. This observation by no means defines the legitimacy of collecting the art from this continent, but it certainly can shape a particular approach and a special understanding. The two stays that Patrick made in Mauritania and then in Senegal, each several years in duration, allowed him to get to know Africa firsthand before he developed an interest in the artistic production of the continent.

Of course, the decision to build a collection didn’t hinge solely upon his having lived abroad. Both Patrick and Catherine had family backgrounds in-

volving the arts, although in very different forms. Their open yet informed minds drove them from the start to seek out unusual, rare, and precious objects, such as pearls and Mauritanian boxes, and eventually toward extremely challenging sculptural forms such as those found in the arts of Cameroon and Nigeria. Their most intense memories are without doubt those of the evenings when such objects arrived at their home and their shared excitement of discovering what each object had to offer.

There was another dimension to the pleasure Patrick got from the objects. He led an ongoing crusade against fakes and was vocal in his criticism of any exhibition or publication that included them. His opinions were always well thought out, precise, and effectively argued, and, as such, his views, positive as well as negative, were always a pleasure to listen to. This was true for a reason. Patrick wasn’t just a collector. He was also a professor of mathematics, and, like all good researchers, he was both curious about the opinions of others and knew how to listen.

The African collection of more than 200 pieces built by the family over the course of nearly thirty-five years clearly attests to Patrick’s taste and passion. It also expresses his unfailing interest in the history of the objects in their socio-cultural context, which defined the singularity of his vision and approach.

To honor Patrick is also to honor integrity, honesty, passion, and loyalty. His tireless presence at every event associated with African art will be missed by everyone who knew him.

Didier Claes