

George Ortiz

“Marvelous!” George Ortiz, *enfant terrible* and collector extraordinaire, would exclaim as he held a new treasure, his radiant expression infused with delight. A private scholar with unbounded passion, he built a superb collection and magnificent library mostly on the art of the ancient world and Middle East, but also elsewhere if a special object attracted his attention.

His father was posted to Paris as a diplomat, so George was born in a house on Avenue Foch. His mother was the daughter of Simón Iturri Patiño, known as the “tin king” of Bolivia. He first visited Bolivia when he was ten and had fond memories of horse rides in the Andes. An English nanny taught him excellent English, augmented by a few years at Downside, a Jesuit school in the UK. When war broke out, he went to America to complete his education at a Protestant school and then studied philosophy at Harvard, where he claimed never to have set foot in the Museum of Fine Arts nor the Fogg. He briefly became a Marxist.

He returned to Paris in 1948 and the following year went to Greece. This was a revelation, his epiphany. The Athens he would have seen was a town of red-tiled roofs, bougainvillea, and cypress trees, and the national museum contained superb examples of ancient art. George had found his vocation—to explore and study classical art. He was to say, “I instinctively hoped that by acquiring ancient Greek objects I would acquire the spirit behind them.”

He set out to acquire the best by consulting scholars and the relevant books. That he succeeded was revealed in the exhibition of his collection in St. Petersburg and Moscow (1993), London (1994), and Berlin (1996). The title, *In Pursuit of the Absolute*, declared his life’s quest. His eye was legendary and he was assiduous in his pursuit of perfection. He supervised every aspect of the installation from case construction, lighting and, especially, object positioning. Exacting and at times exasperating, his perseverance drew appreciative visitor comments: “Each individual object is exquisite in itself, but it is the

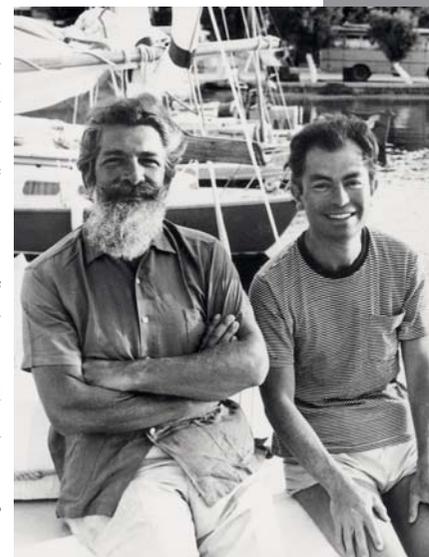
precision placing of each piece in its relation to its ‘performing’ which creates such charged magic.”

Little would deter him in his quest. He would buy items that he knew had been exported illegally, but to him they were “rescued” from the farmer who might well have sold gold antiquities for bullion. He resolutely believed in freedom of movement for art. When the Unidroit Convention was debated in Bern, George became incensed, lying in wait in the corridors to confront officials. Self-control was not a strong point and his howls were well known.

Tragedy struck when his daughter, Graziella, was kidnapped and he had to sell most of his tribal art to raise the ransom in 1978. He kept back the immense bronze head from Nigeria he had named Bulgy Eyes, acquired from the British dealer John Hewett, who had introduced him to African art. Bruce Chatwin was a close friend to whom he confessed, “My whole collection was made with no preconceived intellectual approach. It was purely visceral, emotional, and intuitive. My gift is to be able to appreciate, to perceive the ethos great artists put into their creations. That is why I can see a work of art and I will know nothing about it until it hits me in the guts and later on I learn it is the essence of that culture. It is a gift I have, in the same way as a Bach or a Cézanne, but it is also a handicap. I learned by looking, by feeling.”

George left us in October of 2013, but his collection and the beautiful house he lovingly restored outside Geneva will not be forgotten. He is survived by his wife, Catherine, three sons, and a daughter.

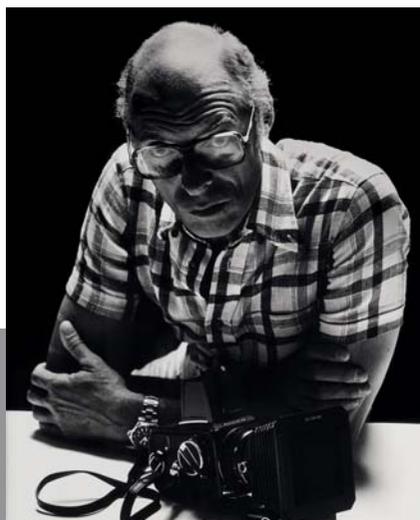
Hermione Waterfield



Roger Asselberghs

Mr. Asselberghs (1925–2013) was a jazz musician and a photographer, both for advertising and of art objects. He left us this last October.

There are determining moments in a career. One such moment came for me in 1977 when I met Roger Asselberghs—an elegant, disciplined, talented, and affable man, who was always melodiously whistling classic jazz tunes. It was an encounter with his clarinet, which he played wonderfully well, and with the fine musicians who accompanied him every Thursday evening at a studio on Rue de la Longue Haie in Brussels. And it was an encounter with objects—which were unknown to me at the time—from fascinating civilizations, and which major dealers of the time, such as Gisele Croës, Émile Deletaille, and Philippe Guimiot, as well as private collectors, brought to him. Lastly, it was an encounter with his marvelous photographs and writing.



I remember my questions and how he listened to them, his responses, and his example. His determination to find a solution to every problem surrounding the photographing of an art object remains with me in my daily work. The mastery that his brilliant and international career revealed coupled with the ability to transmit and to share—all of these things made him a veritable “school.”

Through the people that worked with him and learned from him, so-called tribal art is still profiting from him, and that is as it should be. But to the world of tribal art aficionados and connoisseurs, Roger Asselberghs’ departure represents the very sad loss of a supremely sensitive vision.

I know that my own path would have been more arduous without this encounter and without his example. I will always have emotion in my heart and in my mind the greatest respect for this man who taught me rigor in technique and showed me the musicality of his images. I can now only thank him for these things.

Hughes Dubois