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ART
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SALES
PREVIEW

PHOTOGRAPHY
COLLECTOR
ALICE SACHS ZIMET

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74



Alice Sachs Zimet in the foyer of her apartment on New York's Upper East Side, between Chien-Chi Chang's *The Chain* #14, 1988, and *Twins* (from a Russian Juvenile Prison), 2003, by Ingar Krauss.

ESSAY



A passion for
portraiture led
New Yorker
Alice Sachs
Zimet to form
a formidable
photography
collection

BY JULIE BAUMGARDNER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN



In the living room, the top row behind the piano, left to right, includes *Coney Island*, 1939–41, and *Café Metropole*, New York, 1946, by *Lisette Model*, and *Lotte Jacobi's Claire Bauroff*, *The Turn*, 1928. William Klein's *Gun 1*, New York, 1955, hangs over a side table, with three portraits by Zanele Muholi, *Lumke Stemela*, 2011, *Mpumi Moeti*, 2012, and *Vuyelwa Makubetse*, 2011, over the sofa.

ALICE SACHS ZIMET has always been something of an innovator—it was she who, as the director of Chase Manhattan's cultural affairs marketing group in the 1980s and '90s, practically invented a now ubiquitous corporate role. So it is little surprise that as a collector, she is attracted to the medium of photography. Although her beloved trove—some 200 works strong—is mostly black-and-white, color roars through in the subjects: Robert Capa's revered 1948 image of Pablo Picasso shielding a promenading Françoise Gilot with a parasol; late 19th-century Edward Steichen portraits of himself, Auguste Rodin, and vivacious Belle Epoque stage performer Yvette Guilbert; Berenice Abbott's 1927 *Jean Cocteau et le masque d'Antigone*; and a 1969 picture of David Hockney and Henry Geldzahler by Cecil Beaton are but a very few examples of the images that deck her walls. Zimet's Art Deco apartment, perfectly triangulated on Madison Avenue between the Metropolitan and the Guggenheim

museums, maintains the black-and-white scheme, with the exception of a small guest room off the kitchen.

That room is green—technically Palladian Blue, the wall color of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.—and in it hang Zimet's first acquisitions. Contemporary Conceptualist Andrew Bush's *Columbines* and *Studio Kitchen*, both 1982, were purchased a year or so after they were made when Zimet took a field trip to Southampton's Parrish Art Museum with Sam Wagstaff, the lover of Robert Mapplethorpe (whose pieces grace Zimet's living room). The painterly, softly lit interior shots with lush flora and fauna are reminiscent of a Renoir dream and somewhat antithetical to the collector's taste for portraiture. Her mother, however, "was a great gardener," notes Zimet, and personal connections to each work have guided all her acquisitions since. But she "couldn't buy one, I had to buy two," she recounts. "I didn't realize that collectors can't stop."

The revelation came despite an art-informed upbringing. Her parents, Nadine and Dr. Ralph Zimet, were avid supporters of the arts and collectors of French modern masters. Growing up, Nadine was influenced by her uncle Paul Sachs, patron and associate director of the Fogg Museum at Harvard and successor to the Goldman Sachs



financial empire. Nadine became the custodian of family-owned works by Bonnard, Vuillard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Picasso, and Delacroix, which populated the Zimets' Scarsdale, New York, home. "When we were born, my parents bought art to celebrate each birth," says Zimet of herself and her two sisters. Thirteen Bonnards from the 1899 series "Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris," purchased for Zimet's arrival, hang in her apartment today.

A dedicated Francophile who travels to Paris at least once a year, Zimet sometimes runs her own place as a salon in the fashion of Mesdames Geoffrin or Récamier, with curators, museum directors, and gallerists buzzing in and out. She hosts dinners for the many boards on which she sits and is actively involved with the collections committees of the International Center of Photography and the Harvard Art Museums. "I know she's a descendant of Paul Sachs, but it wasn't until about a year ago that I found that out," says Thomas Lentz, director of the Harvard Art Museums, who has consulted with Zimet as the museum's current expansion plans unfold. "It's safe to say that photography will play a much larger role in this new museum, and she's an advanced thinker when it comes to the field."

Students from the International Center of Photography, the Camera Club of New York, and the graduate program in visual arts administration at New York University, who know her as a faculty member, are invited to observe how a serious collection is managed. Lessons begin with the works hanging outside Zimet's front door, including Albrecht Tübke's 2010 portrait of the patron herself, and continue throughout the residence, where works are hung salon style. The collection's professional archive is conveniently outlined in a room-by-room checklist, and Zimet prefers to allow guests to peruse pieces alone, encouraging them to return with questions.

Among the mostly vintage works are a fair number of contemporary exceptions, notably Vik Muniz's *Jackie (in ketchup)*, 1999, currently on loan to ICP, and three large-scale black-and-white portraits of South African lesbians by Zanele Muholi, who considers her work to be a project of visual activism. Muholi won the 2013 Carnegie International Fine Prize and will soon have a show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. But it's neither accolades nor method to which the collector responds when acquiring work. "I saw the one on the left," Zimet says, pointing toward *Lumke Stemela*, 2011, showing a shorn-haired woman with a steady gaze, "and thought, my god, what a portrait." Humanistic

On the shelf, from left, two mid 1950s prints by Seydou Keita sit beside Lisette Model's *Woman with Veil*, 1940–46. On the table, Raphael Dallaporta's *F1* and *BLU-3/B USA*, *Cluster Bomb*, both 2004, flank Alice's *Handprint*, 2013, by Gary Schneider. Early 20th century compositions by Brassai, Andre Kertesz, and Jacques Henri Lartigue line the wall on the right.



Ghost chairs by designer **Philippe Starck** in the dining room, above, complement **Andres Serrano's** *Untitled VII* (*Ejaculate in Trajectory*), 1989. Opposite: Works by **Robert Mapplethorpe** grace a reading nook in the living room: from left, *Single Stem Orchid*, 1984, *Ken Moody* (*Red Nude*), 1985, and *Three Flowers*, 1984.

portrayals of people living their lives—such as Lisette Model’s *Coney Island*, 1939–41, a shot of an overweight woman bent over and laughing on the beach—are what characterize the collection. “Alice’s tenacity to have that print she couldn’t quite afford but really loved made me want to find a way to get it into her collection,” says New York dealer Howard Greenberg.

AS ONE OF THE FEW IN HER FAMILY who didn’t attend Harvard, Zimet sees herself as a pioneer. “I’m a redhead,” she declares. During a postgraduate internship at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she was drawn to the education department rather than to curatorial endeavors, and her proclivities for humanism flourished. Her interest led to stints at NYU’s Grey Art Gallery and the ICP, but after a grant from the NEA ran out, she realized her business acumen and social consciousness made her perfect for a job in philanthropy.

“I go in for an interview dressed as an art person—long skirt, glasses, a lot of hair,” she recalls of her 1979 introduction to Chase Manhattan Bank. “Never in a million years will they hire me, I thought. I wasn’t wearing a suit or an Hermès scarf.” She was offered a job on the spot. She sees “opportunities most people would probably miss,” says Aubrey Hawes, her former boss, who remains one of her

closest friends. “She loves having ideas and affecting other people with those ideas, which are somewhat infectious.”

At Chase, Zimet thrived. She began in the philanthropy office, where she secured more than a million dollars for arts funding. In 1984 or ’85, the head of corporate communications, the aforementioned Hawes, “was looking for a volunteer to cross-pollinate,” Zimet says. The mission was to mine resources from other departments to maximize philanthropic dollars by creating sponsorship programs. Soon Zimet was traveling the globe—Asia, South America, Europe—setting up lucrative donor opportunities “to do good and to do business for the bank.” There were Halloween performances in Paris with Martha Graham, events with Twyla Tharp and Paul Taylor. Anyone who received a free ticket to the Guggenheim as a result of faithfully using his or her Chase credit card back in the late 1980s has Zimet to thank. Her growing department was a rainmaker, earning “a billion or so for the private bank and a billion scattered around the other businesses.” The projects she managed “became a model for what sponsorship is today,” says the collector of her nearly 20-year tenure in the field of crossover marketing and philanthropy. With her bonuses (a pittance compared with the earnings of those making headlines today), she began her own art collection.



Humanistic portrayals of people living their lives—such as Lisette Model’s *Coney Island*, 1939–41, a shot of an overweight woman bent over and laughing on the beach—characterize Zimet’s collection.

ZIMET LEFT THE BANK IN 1999 and established Arts + Business Partners, the arts-consulting business she still runs today. Being her own boss allowed her to return to her roots as an educator. “She’s immersed in the field and has established strong connections,” says Suzanne Nichols, associate director of education at ICP. “Alice builds a community around her and provides a lot of information to steer her students in the right direction.”

Zimet stresses that collecting requires due diligence. “If you want to be a collector, you have to create a circle of friends, a circle of trust,” she explains. She has many stories about acquiring pieces by big artists for small sums. Pointing to her six works from Hiroshi Sugimoto’s “Time Exposed” series, Zimet says, “I got them for \$800. When I met him, he told me, ‘You probably paid less than what I made them for.’” She patronizes organizations such as the AIDS Community Research Initiative of America, Friends Without Borders, and the Aperture and Magnum foundations. “I bought a Cindy Sherman at the Artists Space benefit for \$500. These

events are a fabulous place for collectors to go and for emerging artists to give their pieces to get their names known.” Another tip is to attend auction after-sales. At Sotheby’s in 2012, Zimet snagged Chien-Chi Chang’s *The Chain #14*, 1988, which was bought in on an estimate of \$5,000 to \$7,000. “I made a post-sale bid for \$2,200, which was accepted with no negotiation,” she says. An updated appraisal rendered a \$9,000 valuation after one year.

Much of Zimet’s collection has followed a similar path: bought on instinct, appreciated in value, and always acquired out of passion. As a woman who will continue to collect for many years to come, Zimet has already promised her collection to a museum she won’t disclose. She is also passing her collecting philosophy on to her students. “I get overwhelmed easily,” Zimet admits. “One reason I gravitated toward photography is because of the small community of galleries and artists.” Much like where her eye leads her, humanity is what most enraptures Zimet: “It’s in my soul.” 田