Portfolio of Images

The Quiet Collector and the Sensuous Immortals

by Pratapaditya Pal

January 28, 2021

(click on the small image for full screen image with captions.)

If the viewers of the show and the readers of this catalog derive pleasure from their contact with the sculptures, it will be due to the instinctive appeal of works of art executed by believers in any humanistic creed. The spiritual inspiration of the nameless sculptors represented here imbues their work with an imposing presence and a contemplative as well as physical vitality. But it is probably those figures in which a deity's compassion is most lovingly expressed that will generate the greatest enjoyment. And is that not as it should be, since in the final analysis love and compassion are what religion is all about.

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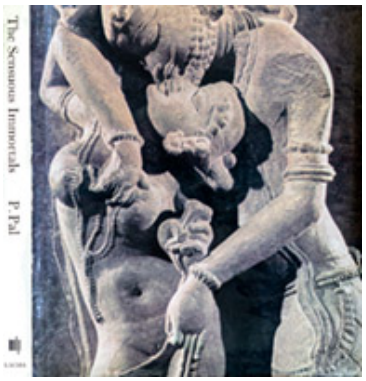

Fig. 1

That is how the anonymous collector concluded his brief Preface in the catalogue of the exhibition of a selection of sculptures from the Indian subcontinent, the Himalayan countries of Nepal and Tibet and from the nations of Southeast Asia culled from his collection. The *Sensuous Immortals: A Selection of Sculptures from the Pan-Asian Collection* was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1977 (fig. 1). For almost a quarter of a century thereafter only a limited number of people in the field knew who the collector was. Only as the collection was slowly dispersed after his premature death in 1981 did the general public gradually learn his name. To this day he remains a shadowy figure.

The collection was formed over a short time, roughly two decades between 1960 and 1980. At his sudden death the following year, it consisted of well over a thousand objects spanning almost two millennia, not merely sculptures—stones, clay and metal—but also paintings galore on ancient palm leaf, paper and cloth. This is the brief story of that remarkable aesthetic adventure of a short life that began in France in 1924 and ended in the New World in 1981. His name was Christian Humann (fig. 2).

Fig. 2

In the late 30s, after their childhood in France, Christian and his younger sibling Edgar were brought to New York for further education. Nevertheless, Christian remained quintessentially French all his life. Rare was a meal that I shared with him on my visits to New York in a restaurant that was not French; sweetbread was his favorite dish. He had residences both in New York and Paris and alternated between the two cities: most of the fall and winter in the former and the spring and summer in the latter. His New York apartment on Sutton Place never looked lived in with no resident help. The kitchen always seemed unused, and the dining table was cluttered with portable bronzes. When he did not eat in a restaurant, he shared meals with Edgar's family with whom he was close. In Paris, however, he lived in the 16th arrondissement in the style befitting an aristocrat. His apartment was attractively appointed in a French style with no Asian touch. A charming French couple looked after him; he was a valet and a chauffeur and she the housekeeper and cook. It was amazing to watch him in the two cities: a bohemian and a businessman in New York but a pucca gentleman and to the manor born in Paris.

Tall and handsome, he was comfortable in any company be it in the world of finance in New York, European aristocracy, art dealers or the academia. He may have learned to drive an automobile, but as far as I remember, never owned one in America. Taxis were his favorite mode of conveyance in New York but he loved to use his legs whenever he could. Polite and cool, in all our years together I never saw him lose his temper in any situation. He was certainly an emotional man, but rarely did he display any of it in public. Nor did we have disagreements often about an object or an objective. He was stubborn, however, about disclosing his identity as a collector when discussing the exhibition. I was never sure whether this was a personal quirk or due to his European upbringing or his fear of displeasing his mother who, I had heard, was a strong Europhile when it came to collecting art.

I first met Christian through our mutual friend Mary Lanius in 1967. She was then curator of Asian Art at the Denver Art Museum, which is where he stored most of his collection. Another mutual friend also associated with the Denver Art Museum was art historian Emma C. Bunker, the daughter-in-law of the irrepressible Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker (1894-1984), of Vietnam War fame. I met both Mary and Emma in the summer of 1964 when I attended the 80th birthday celebratory seminar at Seattle in honor of Ludwig Bachofer (1884–?), the well-known German historian of Asian art at the University of Chicago. Christian was then a partner at the financial establishment, Tucker Anthony & R.L. Day, based in Boston. He would come up for short visits to the city from New York, and I think on one such visit in the fall of 1967 we met at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [MFA], which I had joined in May of that year. It was an auspicious meeting, for our relationship survived my move from Boston all the way to Los Angeles at the beginning of 1970.

Before meeting Christian, I had had very little experience with private collectors apart from Nasli (1902–1971) and Alice (1910– 1990s) Heeramaneck [1]. Soon after joining the Boston

Museum, I met at least four other collectors—John Ford of Baltimore, whose collection is now in the Walters Art Museum of that city; Ed Binney 3rd (1925–1986) of Cambridge, MA; John D. Rockefeller 3rd (1906–1978) of New York (whose advisor was Dr. Sherman Lee (1918–2008), the well-known museum director and Asian art scholar); and Paul F. Walter (1935–2017) of New York. Except for Mr. Rockefeller, who brought me to this country in 1964 with a travel grant, John Ford, Ed Binney and Paul Walter became intimate friends like Christian, but my contributions to the formation of their collections was far less extensive than my involvement with the Pan-Asian Collection. Of all the collections I have been associated with during my long curatorial career, including those of the Alsdorfs of Chicago and Norton Simon of Los Angeles, my relationship with Christian and his collection was like that of an "honorary" curator [2].

2

The art dealer Robert Ellsworth (1929-2014) always claimed verbally that he was the first to interest Christian in Indian art, which was partially true, but in his recently published memoirs, he has nothing much to say about their relationship [3]. They were friends some years before I met Christian but by 1967 the friendship was over. Neither really ever disclosed the cause of the rupture in their relationship. Christian was much too discreet in such matters while, as everyone knows, discretion was not one of Robert's virtues, but in this instance, both were pucca gentlemen. Even when I would goad Christian to visit Robert after spotting something exciting in his gallery, arguing the worthiness of the object, I never had any luck [4].

Fig. 3

As far as I could piece together, the dispute had something to do with the famous Belmont sale in the 1960s. J.R. Belmont (dates unknown) was a Swiss doctor who had formed a formidable collection of Chola bronzes while in India in the 1950s, and was compelled to sell the collection to rescue his nephew from financial difficulties. Belmont turned to his friend, Sammy Eilenberg (1913–1998), the great mathematician and intrepid collector, who in turn contacted Robert Ellsworth. Robert approached Christian for financing the deal, and thereafter the story gets murky. Some of the Belmont material was sold in an auction at Sotheby's New York and some directly by Ellsworth. The *pièce de resistance* of the collection–the precocious child Krishna dancing on the hood of serpent Kāliya, about which I have written elsewhere–was sold to Rockefeller. I have a feeling that the dispute between Robert and Christian was over the sale of this object [5]. Nevertheless, Christian acquired a number of outstanding objects from the Belmont collection, the finest of which was the Chola Somāskanda, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met), among the most exquisite realizations of the Shaīva family group in Chola art (fig. 3).

Another admirable Chola bronze from the Pan-Asian collection–though not from Belmont–is the simian deity Hanumān, now also in the Met (fig. 4). As I wrote in *The Sensuous Immortals,* this extraordinarily expressive figure remains the most human and elegant depiction of the popular Hindu god known. Stylistically, it is remarkably akin to the imposing Rāma (fig. 5) also once in the Humann collection, whose devout attendant is Hanumān. Both are modeled in the round with similar grace, energy and majestic aplomb. When the Humann collection was acquired by Ellsworth after his sudden death he offered select sculptures to the major museums and the Rāma was promptly acquired for the Philadelphia

Museum by none other than Stella Kramrisch, the most admired curator of Indian art in the world at the time.

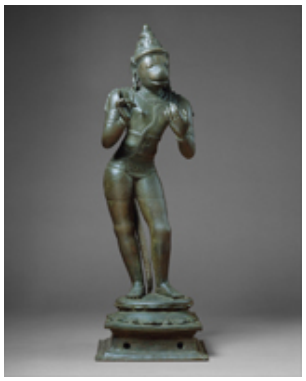

Fig. 4

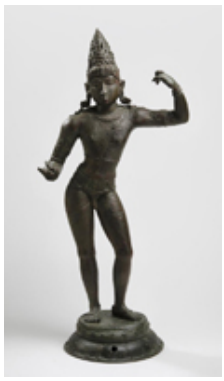

Fig. 5

The other discerning collector of Chola art with whom I had the privilege to be associated in an advisory role was the corporate giant Norton Simon (1907-1993) in Los Angeles. I mention him here because whenever he considered an acquisition, he always asked if it was a work worthy to be in the Humann collection. The other collector Simon would cite was John D. Rockefeller 3rd, and as I ponder the three collections today, I wonder what an extraordinary *omnum-gatherum* of Chola bronzes they would form today. I would like to end this discussion of the Pan-Asian Chola art by mentioning two other sculptures which have interesting stories behind them and also reflect Christian's *modus operandi* and our mode of cooperation.

Fig. 6

One day I got a call from Christian from Zurich, where he had gone for business. He said that he was calling from the home of Dr. Kurt Brochin (dates unknown), who had an object for sale, that he had never seen anything like it and the price was high. He went on to describe a bronze sculpture of a mother and child of disarming simplicity quite unlike any Chola object he had seen. I said to him that without seeing a photograph, I really could not offer him sound advice, but apparently, Brochin, who was unknown to me, was insisting that he needed the money immediately and could not wait even a week for a decision. The asking price was $35,000 USD, which, in the 1970s, was a hefty price for a 13in (33cm) strange bronze. Finally, after almost half an hour on the telephone, I simply said that if it wasn't a tribal bronze (what Douglas Barret of the British Museum characterized as "junglee"), and he was confident it was genuine, then perhaps he should risk it. He did and the bronze proved to be Yaśodā suckling the baby Krishna, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (fig. 6). It is an even more atypical figure than the Hanumān. While stylistically akin to the Chola mode, it remains one of the most individualistic sculptural interpretations of the subject by an unknown master in the history of Indian art.

That impulsive purchase of the Yaśodā and Krishna demonstrates the young collector's self-confidence and chutzpa! A man of finance, as far as I know with no training in Indian art history, and, without ever visiting India, his eye and instinct were unerring. As will be discussed later, his interest in Indian art was aroused through his visit to Cambodia in the early 60s.

The second object is also a sculpture, but in stone and remarkably well preserved for its age. It represents an important Shaiva myth that was popular in Tamil Nadu in the south where it is referred to as the god's *jñānadakshināmurti* or the image of "wisdom and grace"


Fig. 7

(fig. 7). Its complex iconography cannot be discussed here, but suffice it to say that Shiva is both ascetic and regal, and sits in *sukhāsana* or posture of pleasure, on the cosmic Mt. Meru beneath a meticulously rendered banyan tree. His left leg is placed horizontally on his right thigh with his bull mount adoringly licking his foot while a *gana,* or dwarf attendant, at the bottom serves as a foot stool. In essence, serenely elegant and exquisitely detailed, the composition is the Shaiva counterpart to the historical Buddha seated under the Bodhi tree, both simultaneously meditating and teaching, as an embodiment of grace and wisdom [6].

This compact and detailed composition faultlessly executed had once graced a niche on the southern wall of an 11th century Chola temple. If I remember correctly, it appeared in the New York gallery of Doris Wiener in the early 1970s who brought it to my attention by post. Smitten by it, I was eager to acquire it for the LACMA collection. However, as I could not immediately rush to New York to see it, I requested Christian to take a look. Whenever Christian was in New York, it was his habit to visit the dealers every Saturday. He did so that week, was equally enthralled and put a hold on it for LACMA as he was then a member of the museum's board of trustees, with the option to buy it if I could not raise the funds. The asking price was only $30,000. As is often the fate of a curator, I was unable to raise the funds at the time and had to relinquish the piece to him. However, it should be mentioned he was a generous donor of objects to the museum on a yearly basis and also donated a substantial amount of money for the acquisition of objects for the department.

In any event, along with the rest of his collection, the Dakshināmūrti also passed on to Ellsworth. He too apparently was so fond of it that he decided not to part with it and transferred it to his country house. Upon his death, he left it as a gift to an associate who sold it to a private foundation a couple of years ago. I don't know the exact sale price, but I hear through the grapevine that it was in the millions rather than thousands. A robust investment, indeed!

3


Fig. 8

The scope of the Pan-Asian collection was vast both geographically and temporally: It spanned from Afghanistan in the north to both east and south across the Indian subcontinent to Sri Lanka, across the Himalayas, including the territories of Kashmir, Nepal, Tibet, and all of Southeast Asia. Temporally it crossed two millennia from the 2nd century BCE to the 19th century. His fascination with this vast region of Asia began, however, with the art of Cambodia and Angkor Wat. As far as I know, the only country in Asia he visited was Cambodia back in the early 60s. In fact, when he last visited Los Angeles in 1977 for the opening of *The Sensuous Immortals* exhibition, he brought a box containing all his cardboard–mounted slides that he took during his solitary trip to Cambodia. I reproduce one of them here (fig. 8). As far as I know, he never visited another Asian country the rest of his life. This was true of Norton Simon as well, who was seduced by Indian art during a brief visit to north India on his honeymoon after his marriage to the movie star Jennifer Jones in 1970; thereafter he too

became interested in South and Southeast Asian art, as I have recounted elsewhere [7]. Both Christian and Simon were autodidacts when they began collecting Asian art, but both had honed their eye with European art. Nevertheless, both had their first taste of Asian art in museums: Simon in Los Angeles at LACMA, and Christian in his native Paris at the famous Guimet Museum, though the seed for collecting the exotic art sprouted in each during their solitary visits to Asia.

Because of France's colonial past, especially in what was known as Indo-China, the Guimet Museum in Paris is particularly strong in the art of Cambodia, and so it is not surprising that he would first visit that country and be inspired to collect its art. I illustrate here a superbly expressive sandstone head of Vishnu of the much-admired early Phnom Da style (fig. 9). A later but more complete figure of a female who could well represent a royal portrait deified as a goddess is yet another fine example of his love for Khmer sculptures (fig. 10). I do not know where the strongly modeled head has gone, but do remember that Ellsworth held on to the graceful lady until his death as it was one of his favorite pieces of Khmer art. However, he did not cling to another sumptuous example of Khmer metalwork in the form of a twin piece, but with a crowned head (fig. 11). While the polished sandstone with its cool beauty and elegant simplicity pleases the connoisseur, the other with abundant gilding is more seductively glamorous in its aesthetic appeal. Both figures likely represent mortal, regal ladies posthumously apotheosized as the Hindu goddess Umā, a distinguishing feature of the Khmer culture as opposed to India. By the same token, the earlier male head has the simple cylindrical crown (*kirita mukuta*) of Vishnu but otherwise the handsome face has individualized features and a strong personality, thereby indicating a commemorative portrait of a divinized monarch (fig. 9).


Fig. 9


Fig. 10


Fig. 11

What is interesting is that Christian was always a discreet buyer who never spent big money except on only one occasion, to be discussed later, and he never attended an auction. In fact, if I did visit an auction house in New York for a pre-sale exhibition, I don't remember a single occasion when we would even discuss something that he was curious about. However, almost every Sunday after his Saturday tour of the New York galleries, he would call me in Los Angeles to chat about his discoveries. Sometimes I was familiar with the pieces as the dealers had sent me photographs, but at others I had to wait for them. On rare occasions, he would simply go ahead and acquire something on the spot if it was small, not too expensive, and he had fallen instantly in love with it. He was not impulsive by nature, but made very quick decisions which made him popular with dealers and, unlike others I know, he was never impolite or a procrastinator.

Apart from Ellsworth, he was an equal opportunity buyer, patronizing all the New York settled dealers, but also engaged with itinerant ones among the young "hippies" of the day. The Vietnam War had forced many young Americans in the late 60s and 70s to migrate to Nepal. There they discovered the commercial value of the art of the Kathmandu Valley which was also the refuge of Tibetans running away from Chinese occupation and

persecution. Many of the refugees fled with objects that belonged to wealthy families or to destroyed temples and monasteries. This was particularly true during the Cultural Revolution. It was due to the political turmoil in Tibet that several major collections of Himalayan art were formed in the West, especially in Europe and America. In any event, Christian did all his buying in New York or in Europe and never acquired a single object in any of the countries where the art originated. As I have said before, other than Cambodia, he never visited any of the Asian nations whose art he collected. As he once financed the established Ellsworth for the Belmont collection, he was equally comfortable with young "hippy" dealers he trusted, and in that sense, he was popular with them, as was "Uncle Jim" or James Alsdorf (1914-1990) of Chicago.

4

Only once in his life did Christian make an exception and acquire an entire collection, which included several large groups of objects of which he had little knowledge or interest. This mega purchase, which mixed business and pleasure, really took me by surprise, as it was so uncharacteristic of this discerning and discreet collector. I have written elsewhere about Christian's impulsive acquisition, and so here I will recall the exciting story briefly [8].

The year I think was 1974, and I got a call from Alice Heeramaneck in New York to tell me that she had some art objects that she wanted to sell as a group. Since joining LACMA in 1970 I had become used to these calls and had acquired from her for LACMA, besides the original Heeramaneck collection of Indian and Himalayan art, accumulations of ancient art of the Ordos and Luristan cultures, and Islamic art from Western Asia, and could not believe that she had yet another substantial collection of South Asian art to sell. So, when a few weeks after the call I went to New York and visited the four-story townhouse at 23 East 83rd Street, I was astonished by both the quality and quantity of the assembled array of objects. Not only did it consist of scores of stone and metal sculptures but at least a hundred examples of Buddhist palm leaf and paper illustrated leaves from India and Nepal, a couple of hundred paintings on paper in the Mughal and Rajput traditions from India and 50 or more Buddhist paintings on cloth from Tibet and Nepal, some from the famous Tucci collection. It was a readymade assemblage of extraordinary variety and quality fit for a major museum that wished to acquire an instant and complete collection of South Asian art in one fell swoop as LACMA did in 1969. Alice expected to sell it at once for two million dollars which was not excessive at the time. The first Heeramaneck collection of 235 objects was bought by LACMA for two and a half million.

That evening I had a dinner engagement with Christian and casually told him about the collection without any expectation, as I knew that this would not interest him. To my surprise, he asked if he could go and see the collection. A meeting was quickly arranged and, accompanied by his friend and business associate Claus Virch (1927–2012), we went to visit Mrs. Heeramaneck. By the end of the day a deal was made, and the collection was bought, lock, stock and barrel. I knew that he had no interest in the paintings, but I guess as an investment banker himself, and Claus being the director of an Art Fund that the two friends had formed a year earlier, it was considered a prospective business deal. Later I helped to divide the collection between Christian personally and the Art Fund. It was after that transaction that we decided to do an exhibition at LACMA of sculptures from the Heeramaneck collection and others that Christian had patiently acquired on his own from the 1960s. Fortunately, in the 1970s, there were no "provenance issues" that would become such a headache for museum professionals and collectors by the last decade of the century.

That exhibition, titled *The Sensuous Immortals*, opened in 1977 at LACMA and traveled to four other major museums across the United States. I believe it remains one of the most influential exhibitions for the art of South, Southeast Asia and of the Himalayas ever organized. It also remains, if I am not mistaken, the only major *traveling* exhibition in America in which the religious sculptures from South and Southeast Asia were shown together.

The range of the exhibition cannot be reproduced with enough illustrations in a limited article such as this just as an ocean cannot be measured in buckets. Nevertheless, I illustrate a few objects to emphasize the collector's discerning taste. I have already discussed several objects of Chola and Southeast Asian sculptures earlier in the essay, and so here I will present a few of Christian and my favorite objects from North India and the Himalayas. As Christian graciously wrote in the collector's statement in the catalogue: "In the selection of the objects to be included in this exhibition, it was a measure of the profound influence of Dr. Pal's taste and discrimination upon the collector that no meaningful disagreement arose."

5


Fig. 12

As the reader may have guessed, the title of the exhibition, "The Sensuous Immortals", was my invention, while Christian selected the term "Pan-Asian" for the collection. No piece in the collection better describes the aptness of the title—by definition, the gods, being immortal, must remain perennially youthful—than the stone relief from an unknown temple in Madhya Pradesh on the cover of the catalogue (fig. 12). Carved from a rust-colored sandstone a thousand years ago, the subject needs little explanation. Such frankly erotic sculptures of youthful lovers were used in temple walls as symbols of auspiciousness and the fullness of life in unabashed honesty. After all, what can be more graphic and metaphoric than portraying the joy of spiritual bliss (*ānanda*) than the rapture felt in a perfect sexual union, as the ancient Sanskrit texts assert. It may be recalled that the first poet in the world, Vālmiki,, the putative author of the popular epic, *Rāmāyana,* is said to have been inspired to invent lyrical poetry (*śloka*) by watching the sadness (*śoka*) of separation when a stag and a doe were interrupted in coupling by the arrow from a hunter's bow.

This tender expression of a loving couple absorbed in each other was not a Heeramaneck piece but was acquired from Doris Wiener. I recall Doris telling me of Sherman Lee's interest in it, but neither Lee nor I was prudent enough to put a hold on it, so it was a prize that Christian snapped up on his next weekend round of the galleries. Lee never forgot it and pounced the very week that news of Christian's death was known by submitting a list to the executor of the estate of the objects, including the loving couple, that his museum wanted from *The Sensuous Immortals*. Another object on the wish list was not from India but from Nepal; a golden copper lady representing the goddess Umā, the wife of Shiva, from what is known as Umā Maheśvara tableau (fig. 13). This superlative figure, among the most regal ever modeled by an unknown Newar master of the Kathmandu Valley, once belonged to the Heeramanecks (who lent it to my 1975 *Nepal, Where the Gods are Young* exhibition), remains, as I said then, one of the most nuanced and sensuous realizations of the female form and grace in South Asian art. Years later, in a secondhand shop, I found an LP record whose album cover displays her photograph (fig. 14).

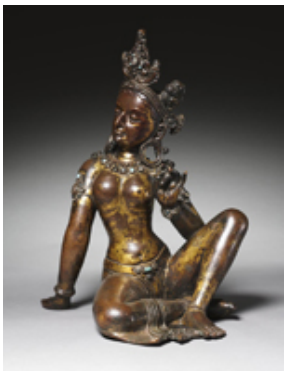

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

No less attractive, and one of my favorites, is an earlier sandstone Indian sculpture, now in the Houston Museum of Art (fig. 15). It represents a tableau with the Goddess of learning, Sarasvatī, playing the musical instrument *vinā* surrounded by a chamber orchestra of four celestial musicians and two dancing females. As far as I remember, this was the first Hindu goddess whose inspiring Sanskrit mantra I learnt by rote, even as I was beginning to read Bengali, my mother tongue, and knew no Sanskrit. Also belonging to the Heeramanecks were two of the most impressive metal bodhisatvas from Nepal, size wise, as well as for divergent but lubricious plasticity, elegant postures and proportions, and gentle expressions in their dissimilar ways (fig. 16 & 17). Both can now be seen at the Met displayed together in their Himalayan gallery.

Fig. 16

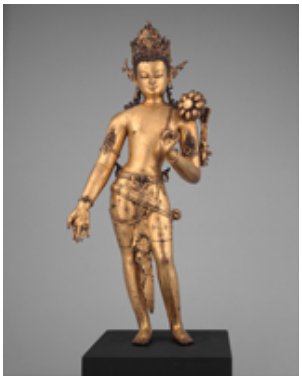

Fig. 17

It will not be possible for me to discuss too many objects from the Pan-Asian sculpture collection, but I would like to add here a portfolio of images with captions to demonstrate more fully for readers not familiar with the catalogue Christian's discerning eye and impeccable taste (please see the Portfolio page). These objects graphically reflect his aesthetic sensibility and his philosophy of collecting as he stated with simple eloquence in the quotation used as the epigraph at the top of this article. They are also some of my personal favorites.

In general, I would state that not only does the selection shows Humann's preference for certain schools over others, as for instance the Himalayan cultures of the Kashmir and Kathmandu Valleys, but also a spirit of adventure in his own aesthetic aplomb. As a matter of fact, I would say that in the area of bronzes from Kashmir and the neighboring regions of Pakistan, such as Swat and Gilgit, and Himachal Pradesh in India, he was a pioneer. Already in the early 1970s he had assembled such a large and diverse collection of the metal images of this region (of which very little was known at the time) that I was able to publish the first study of the subject based primarily on the Humann and the LACMA collections (Pal 1975).

The exact reason for Christian's fascination with South and Southeast Asian art remains unknown. As I heard from a mutual friend, one reason he was so publicity shy was that he did not want to reveal his passion for the exotic arts to his mother. I must say that I was not keen on probing him, as it never occurred to me that he would die so prematurely. There would be time enough. Because of our close association and the organization of the exhibition, I heard idle speculation about the collection ultimately coming to LACMA. Others thought that because he was a resident of New York, inevitably his loyalty would be to the Met. However, other than the fact that, he knew well fellow European aristocrats Aschwin de Lippe (1914–1988), a curator in the Asian department, and Philippe de Montebello, the museum's renowned director he had little to do with the Met.

He was more closely associated with the Denver Art Museum because of his friendship with Mary Lanuis and Emma C. Bunker, and indeed, until the acquisitions of the Heeramaneck collection, Denver was the only museum which he used as the repository of his collection. After the Heeramaneck deal, most of that material was sent to LACMA for storage and to develop the exhibition. I was adamant, however, that LACMA did not need the material as the 1969 Heeramaneck purchase by the museum was substantial and comprehensive enough for any museum. Besides, I did not see the possibility of acquiring enough space to either properly display or store the vast collection in the 80s without a considerable spatial expansion. At the time, the Indian community was not as prosperous financially as they are now, nor as interested in their heritage in the visual arts; so there was no chance of their funding a building or even a wing for LACMA's burgeoning South and Southeast Asian and Himalayan collection. In fact, in the new buildings that are being constructed now as I write this article there will not be room enough to either display or store the extensive and now world-famous collections that LACMA has assembled since its acquisition of the Heeramaneck collection in 1969, and I see no generous patron of Indian art in Southern California in the tumultuous COVID year.

In any event, to return to Christian and his plans, I remember early in the 70s on a long drive to Bakersfield to inspect some oil producing fields that the Humann family owned, he opened up for some reason and did tell me how the family originally belonged to the Alsace region and that he might one day return to France and build a museum of Asian Art as the area was not culturally rich. Whether it was a pipe dream or not I will never know, but never again was the idea repeated.

Soon after the opening of *The Sensuous Immortals* in L.A. Christian began developing a back pain which considerably diminished his physical activity and collecting. I don't think he was able to attend the openings of the exhibition at the other venues. He did undergo several spinal surgeries but the situation deteriorated.

My last conversation with him by telephone was sometime in 1980 towards the end of the year before he went on a trip to Bermuda for family business and recuperation. The news of his sudden death came as a shock, and only then did I realize that he was barely 56 years old. It was incredible that he had amassed such a formidable collection in only about 25 years.

The sole surviving piece of his personal statement about his philosophy of collecting remains his anonymous collector's preface in the catalogue, an extract from which I have used as an epigraph for this *in memoriam*. I can only hope he found his own enjoyment in collecting the wonderful works of nameless artists who used their own talents with love and compassion for the various religions they were fortunate enough to serve.

Upon his death, his estate asked me if I would be willing to take on the task of selling the collection either intact or piecemeal. The latter was out of the question for me, but I did approach some major museums as the asking price was modest. The Freer in Washington D.C.—the National Museum of Asian Art in the country–with a stellar collection of East Asian and Islamic arts but weak in South and Southeast Asia was the most appropriate, I thought, but they were unable at the time to raise the funds.

So, in the final irony of Christian's brief life, the Pan-Asian collection was snapped up by his old friend, Robert Ellsworth. The rest is well known.

Perhaps, it is just as well, for the vast assemblage is now dispersed across the world, augmenting and enriching many public and private collections. Still referred to as the Pan-Asian collection generally, in recent auction catalogues, the name of the collector is being acknowledged at least in parenthesis.

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Dr. Pratapaditya Pal

Dr. Pratapaditya Pal is a world-renowned Asian art scholar. He was born in Bangladesh and grew up in Kolkata. He was educated at the universities of Calcutta and Cambridge (U.K.). In 1967, Dr. Pal moved to the U.S. and took a curatorial position as the 'Keeper of the Indian Collection' at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He has lived in the United States ever since. In 1970, he joined the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and worked there as the Senior Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art until retirement in 1995. He has also been Visiting Curator of Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian Art at the Art Institute of Chicago (1995–2003) and Fellow for Research at the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena (1995–2005). Dr. Pal was General Editor of Marg from 1993 to 2012. He has written over 70 books on Asian art, whose titles include, *Art of the Himalayas: Treasures from Nepal and Tibet* (1992), *The Peaceful Liberators: Jain Art from India* (1994) and *The Arts of Kashmir* (2008). A regular contributor to Asianart.com among other journals at the age of 85+, Dr. Pal has just published a biography of Coomaraswamy titled: *Quest for Coomaraswamy: A Life in the Arts* (2020).

Footnotes

1) I first met the Heeramanecks in the summer of 1964 on my first visit to New York. See Pal 2019.

2) For James (1914–1990) and Marilyn (1925–2019) Alsdorf see, Pal 1997 and Christie's 2020. *Sacred and Imperial: The James and Marilyan Alsdorf Collection*, 24 September, 2020, New York. It would be fair to state that Christian also received advice from both Mary Lanius and Emma Bunker who turned 90 this year and is an expert on Cambodian art.

3) Meech and Oliver 2017. See also Pal, 2014, "The Last of the Mohicans: Remembering Robert Ellsworth (1929–2014)". https://www.asianart.com/articles/ellsworth/index.html

4) Pal 2020: I would like to add here that after completing this article on Christian Humann, I came across a review in the magazine in this citation (pp. 162-163) by Roses Kerr of a book titled "Inside the Head of a Collector" by Shirley M. Mueller MD in which the author ostensibly proposes a new theory in her own words that "the drive to collect is rooted in our neurobiology." I regret to say that I am yet to read the book, but hope this article on an obsessive collector will shed some light on the apparently new theory.

5) See also Pal, 2014, "The Last of the Mohicans: Remembering Robert Ellsworth (1929–2014)". https://www.asianart.com/articles/ellsworth/index.html and https://www.asianart.com/articles/ellsworth/4.html. Incidentally, for those who are concerned about the issue of provenance of objects, the early history of this sculpture is interesting. It came into Mumbai (then Bombay) market in the 1950s but there were no takers among the Indian museums or collectors, as the price was considered too high. It was offered to Mr. Rockefeller during his visit to the city but he demurred, because he was on an official mission appropriately. However, when the object was offered to him years later in New York by Ellsworth, he rightly acquired it. The story was told to me in Mumbai by a collector who had declined to buy it.

6) The Dakshināmūrti is now in the Halsted Foundation Collection in the USA. Regarding the iconological meaning and significance of this remarkable sculpture see Pal 1982 and Bakker 2004. Hans Backker does not seem to be aware of my 1982 article on the subject.

7) See Pratapaditya Pal *Asian Art: Selections from the Norton Simon Museum*. Pasadena: Norton Simon Museum in association with *Orientations*. 1988.

8) See Pal 2019.

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Los Angeles, Thanksgiving Day, 2020

Portfolio of Images

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