



BY JOHN MCDONNELL—THE WASHINGTON POST

# Convictions Of the Collector

Arthur Sackler, Bringing His  
Oriental Treasure to Washington

By Lon Tuck  
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One of the motivating forces of art collectors, said Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, a psychiatrist who should know, is frustration. "When some people are frustrated, they go out and buy a new hat, or a tie. When I have, I have gone out and bathed myself in something truly beautiful. So my collections are in a sense the measure of my frustrations."

So mused the physician-philosopher-connoisseur one recent afternoon as he hypothesized about art collecting, civilization and creativity while sipping a frozen daiquiri in a glitzy Washington lounge.

Sackler, who just turned 73, is an engaging fellow. But if it is frustration that drives him to collect, he must be riddled with it.

Over the years he has acquired tens of thousands of objects in an extraordinarily diverse and intensively thorough set of collections. There is the fabled Asian collection (long coveted by several major museums), but there are also enormous holdings in Piranesi drawings, Italian majolica, European terra cottas, pre-Columbian objects and textiles.

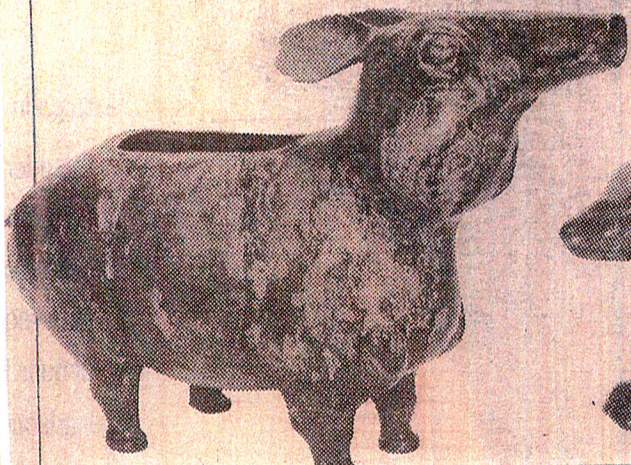
Nobody knows for sure, but his holdings must come close to a record for a present-day private collector. Sackler is, said Thomas Lawton, head of the Freer Gallery, "a modern Medici."

Great art collections seem to reflect the idiosyncrasies of their collectors. With the Mellons, perhaps *noblesse oblige*. With Nelson Rockefeller, perhaps the demands of a restless ego. With Sackler, the character seems to be philosophical. His collections provide him a sort of intellectual trampoline upon which to exercise ideas about the arts.

Next May the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, of oriental art, will open on the quadrangle behind the Smithsonian Castle, giving the Sackler collection the same visibility as those of Charles Lang Freer and Joseph Hirshhorn, whose similarly personal galleries lie on either side.

Just who is this man who has also made major artistic bequests to Harvard, Princeton, Colum-

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Above, Arthur M. Sackler at the new gallery being constructed behind the Smithsonian Castle for his collection of Oriental art; far left, a Chinese bronze ritual vessel from Western Zhou, 10th century B.C.; left, a jade hound of the Tang dynasty, 7th-8th century; right, a Chinese bronze ritual vessel from the Late Shang dynasty, 12th-11th century B.C.





# Arthur Sackler

SACKLER, From F1

bia, and in two instances, New York's Metropolitan Museum, and whose relations with the Met constitute one of the livelier conflicts of the museum world?

Sackler doesn't always make it easy to find out. He almost never grants interviews, and some have found him unduly secretive in his art and business dealings. Sackler admits he carefully guards the privacy of the palatial Fifth Avenue apartment he shares with his considerably younger wife Jill, an arts patron herself with a special interest in music.

But he is no intransigent recluse. After politely declining an interview request several months ago, he changed his mind recently and, frozen daiquiri in hand, discoursed so long the reporter's tapes ran out. "This is not going to be an interview," he announced with glee. "It is going to be a book."

There are many sides to Arthur Sackler; his art is simply the most visible. The three-page, single-spaced résumé he sent before the interview was meticulously grouped into three categories: "In Science," starting with his service as research director of the Creedmor Institute for Psychobiological Studies from 1949 to 1954; "In the Arts," starting with his work on Columbia's Advisory Council of the Department of Art History and Archeology from 1961 to 1974; and "In the Humanities," beginning with his 1967 sponsorship of a symposium on "Early Chinese Art and Its Possible Influence in the Pacific Basin (published in two volumes)."

Among the more visible fruits of his patronage are the Sackler Institute of Graduate Biomedical Science

at New York University (his alma mater); the Arthur M. Sackler Center for Health Communications at Tufts; the Sackler Wing at the Metropolitan Museum (built to house the great Temple of Dendur; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard, which opened last year to extravagant critical praise for its striking design by British architect James Stirling.

At the top of the first page Sackler categorizes himself as "physician, researcher, publisher." There is no mention on the résumé of his vast fortune, estimated in the "Forbes 400" list as "\$175 million plus" and made mostly in medical publications and advertising. Next to Armand Hammer, Sackler may well be the wealthiest doctor in the world.

But with all his interests, what motivates Sackler as a collector? Is it really, as he suggested, just impulse?

"As much as love," he replied with a beatific grin, twiddling the straw on that little frozen daiquiri. Some collections, he said, are "statements" and others merely "interior decoration." "The acquisition of a great esthetic statement," he continued, "is a work of art itself, an act of passion. And in so far as passion is not controllable, it constitutes in significant measure an act of impulse. I have mentioned the role of discipline in collecting. You heard me say that I consider science a discipline with passion, and art a passion for discipline. I don't believe that there can be any creativity without passion. Because I think all great art has enormous emotional content: a message of the Creator, conveyed within the language of his medium."

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