

## Art is All: The Byron Aceman Collection



Byron Aceman was a well-known and beloved contemporary art collector from Vancouver. Aceman was a true collector in every sense of the word—his collection included close to 400 works of art, and reflected the Canadian contemporary art scene and his constant global travel. Aceman’s collection shows his curiosity and lack of limits in the kind of art he collected—it includes photography, mixed media, video, installations, sculptures, lithographs, plastic bears, furniture and cigarette boxes, among many other categories and materials. Byron passed away in Vancouver in January of this year, and it is a great honour for Heffel to present his encyclopedic collection of Canadian and international artwork this fall.

Aceman’s intense involvement with the arts started early. His father and uncle owned a vaudeville theatre in Vancouver called the Avon, and as a child he developed an appreciation for live performance that was lifelong—in later years he became a supporter of the Arts Club Theatre Company. His father also had an art collection, which included Inuit art. Aceman took an art class at the age of ten, and for a few years he experimented with abstract, strongly coloured paintings. His interest developed further when he lived for a year in Los Angeles, where he started going to art galleries.

Aceman worked in the family business Morton Holdings, which was involved in estate management, but his true pursuit was collecting art. He developed a lifelong passion for collecting, particularly the work of emerging artists from the Vancouver area, acquiring works from such diverse sources as Emily Carr University’s grad shows, Jewish community centre shows, Arts Umbrella, and small artist-run centres. He developed relationships with commercial art galleries and was a friend of Heffel’s; he dropped in often during the 1980s and clearly relished talking about the art he saw in the gallery, such as paintings by Peter Aspell, whose work he acquired. The interaction with gallery owners and staff was important to him.

Aceman always wanted to help out artists, young people and the art community. He liked to hear the artists’ stories—he specifically attended art openings to talk to them—and he did not like to

miss out on these opportunities. When he found an artist who was particularly meaningful to him, such as Derek Root, he would collect in depth and over time. Aceman became particularly serious about his collecting in the 1990s, and he rarely left a show without acquiring a work. As mentioned, his taste was eclectic, and he bought works because he liked them and felt some intuitive connection to them. Aceman contributed so much to the Vancouver scene - his collecting and patronage encouraged young artists to continue to make their art, and through this activity he contributed to shaping the city's art scene.

In the 2000s, Aceman was a member of the Contemporary Art Society of Vancouver, a non-profit educational organization involved in organizing public lectures on art as well as studio visits and trips for its members. Jane Irwin, past president of the CASV and a long-time trustee of the Vancouver Art Gallery, recalls, "Byron was a passionate collector who was interested in engaging with artists' work, always asking questions and wanting to learn more about their practice. His inquisitive nature and desire to share his love of art with others was inspiring to other collectors and supportive of so many artists and galleries in the Vancouver art community."

Besides being a collector and a mentor, Aceman was a philanthropist. He supported individual artists such as David Robinson, sponsored Mark Lewis at the 2009 Venice Biennale, and also sponsored BGL, a trio of mixed media artists from Quebec, at the Venice Biennale in 2015. He attended international art fairs at Basel, Venice, Mexico and Miami, and bought works there as well.

Around 2009, Aceman developed a new interest—video art. It seemed that the more deeply Aceman pursued art, the more innovative he became in his collecting. Likely the first video he acquired was by Mark Lewis, bought at a fundraiser for the Venice Biennale. Another early video acquisition was *Stone on Stone*, by Rob Carter, acquired from a trip to Zona Maco, an art fair in Mexico City, with the CASV.

Everything he bought, he kept, so that soon he ran out of wall space in his False Creek three-storey condo, and he had to rotate the pieces on show. In 2015, he decided to use his condo as an exhibition space, and removed most of his furniture to facilitate this. He loved to have people over to see the art—it was his chance to shine, and share his passion for what he had collected. As he got older, Aceman challenged himself, becoming more open-minded and redefining his own taste in art. His curiosity led him down different paths, and art had become an integral part of his personal journey. As Lee Henderson wrote, "Just as the artist is eventually defined by all that she creates, so, too, does an art collector like Aceman define himself through the multivalent plurality of art springing off in all directions." From the work of Pablo Picasso to Vancouver's Young Romantic painters, Aceman's collection features "high energy, big fireworks, radical ideas, innovative forms, and diverse approaches," Henderson notes. It encompasses works that are important to the history of art in Vancouver and internationally, such as artists from the photo-conceptual school, including Jeff Wall.

The sale of the Byron Aceman collection is a unique opportunity to acquire pieces from a remarkable group of works that belonged to this passionate collector, accumulated over a lifetime. For Aceman, his love for art was expressed in the slogan on a T-shirt he liked to wear, "Art Is All."

## Literature

Doretta Lau and Lee Henderson, *BAC: Byron Aceman Collection, Volume 2*, 2019, pages 36 and 55.