

COLLECTOR'S EYE: AARON AND BARBARA LEVINE



AT HOME, Barbara and Aaron Levine pose with 'Hat Rack' and other Marcel Duchamp pieces.

AN ATTORNEY'S OFFBEAT TROVE

ALTHOUGH they are longtime residents of Washington, D.C., a town ruled by political tribes, the art collectors Barbara and Aaron Levine cherish mavericks. If their large collection has a patron saint, it's the 20th century's revolutionary prankster Marcel Duchamp, of the urinal and hat rack sculptures. They own 25 Duchamps, and Mr. Levine, 80, includes a photo of the artist among his family snapshots. Ms. Levine, 77, delights in owning art that others might ridicule, including a 1960s-era work by Robert Barry that nearly doesn't exist. The piece is the eighth-inch of space—the air itself—below a small metal disc suspended from the ceiling.

Mr. Levine, a personal-injury lawyer, and his wife, who works with him, are lending a Today series painting by On Kawara for a retrospective on the late Japanese conceptual artist at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Every picture in the series depicts the date on which it was made, written in the language of the country in which it was created. The Levines discussed that work and the rest of their collection. Here, an edited version.

—Jessica Dawson
El Melfi Kaplan for The Wall Street Journal © Succession Marcel Duchamp/DAGA, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2015

MS. LEVINE: A lot of people think conceptual art is a bunch of baloney. When we first got that On Kawara, Aaron thought it was nuts. "You want it, you can have it." Now he loves it. I was always much more minimal. The first time I saw the early 20th-century abstractions of Kazimir Malevich, I was in tears. I have an emotional relationship to the work. Aaron started with German Expressionists and social realism, which is totally the opposite end.

MR. LEVINE: She got me off that as soon as we had kids. Now we gravitate to brainy art, stuff that requires you to contemplate over time to get it. Conceptual art doesn't give you the jump that visual art gives you, but it comes on better later. It all comes out of Duchamp. There's nothing of the hand of the artist, there's nothing of the materials of the artist. But he takes a hat rack out of the hardware store, and he puts it in the museum. And with that one act, he draws the curtain down on the Renaissance.

MS. LEVINE: I have two Duchamp look-alikes. One is Regina Silveira, who is a South American artist. It's a urinal. Where Duchamp took his hands off the work, she's got her handprints all over it. Downstairs I have an early Joana Vasconcelos. It's a double urinal embroidered with Portuguese fabrics.

MR. LEVINE: At first I didn't get Christopher Williams. [Mr. Williams often hires proxies to create images, challenging the norms of commercial photography.] He's on the edge. He's weird. It's about photography. But it's about how we live with images and how they lie.

MS. LEVINE: We must have about a hundred books by artists. That's a very special joy. We have every Duchamp—the White Box, the Green Box. Every single one. All the On Kawara books, every Ed Ruscha book. It's obsessive.

► See more images from the Levines' collection at WSJ.com/review.

DON'T MISS: JAN. 24-30



Klint John Schiele
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, through April 27
Custave Klimt's monumental "Adam and Eve" is in Boston as part of the museum's "Visiting Masterpiece" series. Works on paper by Egon Schiele are also on display. Left, Schiele's "Wife With her Little Nephew," from 1915.

Marclay in London

White Cube, Wednesday through April 12
Christian Marclay (famed for his installation "The Clock") will offer paintings, videos and live performances. Right, "Actions: Swoop Splash Fwsh," from 2013.



Jos and Harald
CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, through April 18
Brussels-based artists duo Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys make their U.S. solo debut with the show "Tram 3." At left, "Mrs. Imgard Speck" (2015).

T-B: Edwin E. Jack Fund/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; White Cube/George Darrell (photo); Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys/Galerie Micheline Szwajcer/Susana Bates (photo)