

LE MONDE DE L'ART



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INTERNATIONAL GALLERY

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A taste for the unusual

SALEROOM

A passion for Indian art led to one of three collections coming under the hammer, writes **Laura Suffield**

IT IS always encouraging to come across collectors who have had the courage of their convictions to buy in unusual and underappreciated areas.

Sotheby's New York have put together a sale of one such collection, formerly belonging to an American couple, Chester and Davida Herwitz. It includes 210 works of art by contemporary Indian artists to be sold in New York on 12 June to benefit the couple's charitable trust, which has been set up to found a museum of modern and contemporary Indian art.

Chester Herwitz, a designer and manufacturer of handbags, began visiting India in the early 1960s. He started collecting contemporary Indian art in 1966 when he saw a painting by MF Husain in the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi.

Hervitz began to collect Husain's work, of which he says: "I saw India: the crowded lively streets, the brilliant colours of the women's saris, the ancient rhythms of the Indian village."

The paintings are varied in mood and style: some obviously influenced by India's traditional artistic heritage, others using western-influenced styles to create satirical comments on

Indian life and society. This sale represents a small part of the 3,000-strong collection, which is still growing.

In India Chester Herwitz is considered something of a celebrity for his commitment to this subject. "He has done for Indian art what no Indian industrialist has been able to do," Husain said recently.

Estimates are modest - reflecting the small amounts that the works originally cost - but the prices are likely to go far higher. Another passionate collector, American-born Eric Estorick, who died in 1993, assembled one of the world's most outstanding collections of modern Italian art.

Estorick lived in Paris immediately after the war, spending much of his income, which he earned from writing and editing, on drawings by Picasso, Matisse, Gris, Léger and Braque. In 1947 he and his



Western influence: *Bindu* by Indian artist Syed Haider Raza

wife met Mario Sironi, the leading Italian artist, and bought his works. This stimulated their appetite for Italian art and Estorick met and bought works from most of the leading names at that time, including Morandi, Campigli and Severini.

An exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1956, "Modern Italian art from the Estorick Collection", introduced these artists to a wider public.

There are plans for a

foundation and art gallery in Estorick's name to open next year in north London. To help this project a group of works will be sold at Sotheby's Milan on 29 May.

An enlightened department store is behind a sale at Sotheby's Amsterdam on 30 May. The KBB (Koninklijke Bijenkorf Beheer) is one of the Netherlands' best-known shops, with a tradition of artistic patronage.

In the early 1940s they started a collection of art by living artists, an extremely wise investment. At the forefront of taste in modern art, they held exhibitions in their shops of works by a movement of artists known as "CoBra", at a time when their work was considered extremely avant-garde. KBB have decided to sell their art collection to invest in work by younger artists.

It includes an outstanding painting by the CoBra artist Karel Appel, entitled *Cry For Freedom*, signed, and dated 1948. It could fetch up to Nfl 500,000 (\$318,000).

The sale includes paintings and sculpture by a number of important modern artists, including Lipchitz; his 1914 bronze called *Woman with Braids* is put at Nfl 150,000-Nfl 200,000.

The only doubt one could have about this sale is why it is happening. The KBB collection is outstanding and the shop is not in need of cash. While it is worthy to patronise younger artists, they might have been better advised to hold on to the earlier work as well. It is now irreplaceable, and, as a group, constitutes a historically interesting collection.

Let's hope the KBB does not come to regret its decision.