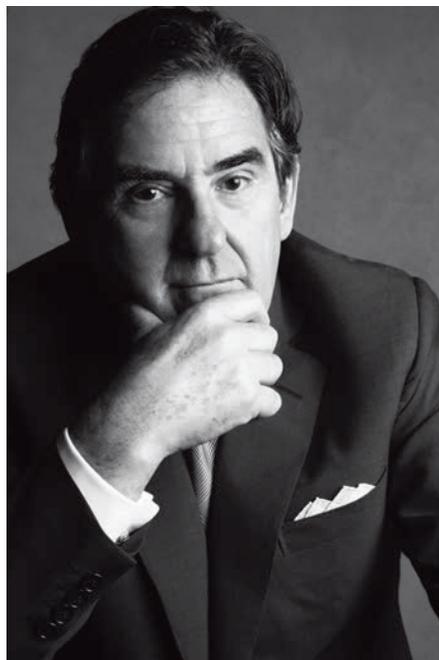


# Great Collectors and Their Ideas

No 8

## Peter Brant



is a multimillionaire  
businessman,  
ART COLLECTOR  
& MAGAZINE  
PUBLISHER.

An enthusiastic early  
supporter of ANDY  
WARHOL, he has  
been collecting art  
since his twenties,  
and in 2009 he opened

HIS OWN ART MUSEUM and art  
foundation outside New York City

Interview by

*Tom Eccles*

*A childhood friend of Donald Trump, Brant started out in the stock market before making his fortune in the US newsprint business. During the early 1970s he invested in Warhol's Interview magazine. Although his newsprint business fared badly following the 2008 crash, Brant continues his enthusiasm for art and art magazines; in May this year he negotiated the merger of three of his titles, including the long-running Art in America, with competitor Art News, taking a controlling interest in the combined company.*

ARTREVIEW *How did you begin collecting art?*

PETER BRANT My interest in art really began with my father when I was about twelve or thirteen years old.

At an early age it was sports that I really did well, but my dad, who was from Europe and spoke 13 languages, was more intellectually inclined. He was interested in art, loved to go to museums and would take me to places like the Frick. He and I were very close, and art was where we joined forces. During his lifetime he collected Rococo paintings but was not very interested in modern art. He was really more interested in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, and I was with him when he was purchasing some of his pictures.

We went to a lot of museums together: he took me to Europe, and brought me to see the Louvre and the Prado. So I learned a lot about art at that time, especially the Old Masters, and especially eighteenth-century English and French painting. Then at fifteen or sixteen years old I became very interested in Impressionist painting, and that was my idea at the time of breaking into the modern. But I never really studied art history.

AR *Where did you grow up?*

PB I grew up in Forest Hills, Queens, and lived in a nice little house and went to a private school in Kew Gardens. Donald Trump went to the same school. He was in my class, as a matter of fact.

Every year, I used to go skiing with my mother and father in St Moritz, Switzerland. There I met the gallerist Bruno Bischofberger. I think he thought that for my age I knew a fair amount about Old Masters, and he kept saying to me: “Look, the best living artists today live in New York, and you really should go to galleries like the Leo Castelli Gallery, go to Pace, go and see John Weber [an art dealer known for his early championing of conceptual art and Arte Povera].” So I did – I guess that I was about seventeen or eighteen when I met Leo, and then I got very interested in Andy Warhol’s work at his gallery, because Andy was also the favourite of Bruno Bischofberger.

AR *What year would this be?*

PB This would probably be 1964–65. I probably bought my first picture in 1967, when I was eighteen or nineteen. I bought two drawings, one by Roy Lichtenstein – a great drawing – and one by Andy Warhol of stacked soup cans.

AR *Do you remember what you paid?*

PB Five hundred dollars. Five hundred dollars was not a little bit of money then. I bought the Marilyn – *Shot Blue Marilyn* [1964] – and I paid \$5,000 for it. You know, to give you an idea,

in 1967 or 68, when I bought the *Shot Marilyn*, a Cadillac would have cost \$3,000. So \$5,000 was more than a Cadillac.

I made some money in the stock market with my dad’s tutelage, and I was very interested in the stock market at the time as well, so that’s where I made my first spendable money, which I invested mostly in art. I was immediately interested in Andy’s work. I think one of the first pictures I bought was from Virginia Dwan – I bought a great [Franz] Kline painting. There’s a famous photograph that Dennis Hopper took of Virginia Dwan sat with the Kline painting in the background. I guess I bought a David Smith, an Ad Reinhardt and a work by Jasper [Johns] and [Robert] Rauschenberg. Those were the artists that I was really interested in at that time, and that was my first introduction. Leo was a big help, he was really a mentor to me, and he took good care of me.

I bought one of the big *Maos*. I offered it to MOMA, they wouldn’t take it. So then I went to the Metropolitan and offered it to them. They said it was too big, and that I had to sweeten the pie. So we gave them a great Flavin that I bought from Nelson Rockefeller. But that still wasn’t enough. So I gave them part of my Art Deco furniture collection

AR *When you first started collecting, did you actually perceive what you were doing as creating a collection, or was it really about buying individual works and having them in your home?*

PB I think it was originally about being a collector, and came out of the experience of collecting film. Certainly film has always influenced me a great deal in my life, and I have always been very interested in film, and I watched a lot of it. I just remember a lot of great films about art when it was in the background. Like I remember a great Fred Astaire film called *Daddy Long Legs* [1955], where Fred Astaire lived in his family’s museum and foundation, and you can see the (obviously) copies of the great Impressionist paintings. They used it in a humorous way, but it was culturally an interesting thing, and, you know, in a way I think that Hollywood

*facing page* Peter Brant.  
Photo: Patrick Demarchelier

and great filmmaking of the 1930s, 40s and 50s has affected our country a great deal, and certainly has affected me.

AR *What about your relationship with Andy Warhol? He’s an artist you engaged with both as a collector and as a collaborator.*

PB Yes, I think I probably had five or six works of Andy’s by the time I met him in 1968, and it was after he was shot [by radical feminist writer Valerie Solanas, on 3 June 1968].

It was the fall, and I met him and Fred Hughes, who was his business manager and organised things for Andy, but who was also a very social person. We started spending a lot of time with Andy, and by spending a lot of time with him I got involved in a lot of ventures with him, and also with Leo. After he was shot, Leo was very concerned that Andy had stopped painting.

During the 1970s I continued to collect Andy’s work – at one point at that time I would maybe go out to dinner with him a couple of times a week. I was really very friendly with him, and that’s how I got to be very friendly with Vincent Friedman and [writer] Bob Colacello – guys who I have known for, you know, forever. I think that I got involved in *Interview* [the American magazine cofounded by Warhol] in 1969. I think Andy had published three or four issues, and I came in with my cousin Joe Allen, and we supplied the paper, got involved in the financial side and actually backed it.

AR *What interested you in Interview? Would it have been a gamble at the time?*

PB Big gamble. Bruno Bischofberger came in for a while and pulled out after six months to a year.

I produced my first film [*L’Amour*, written and directed by Warhol and Paul Morrissey] in 1973. So a lot of things were happening. Leo said to me: “Why don’t you get him to do a series of paintings and we can all patron it: he needs things for the Factory, for the film, for the magazine.”

So I talked to Fred, and Bruno did the *Maos*, you know, the bigger ones, the 68-by-82-inch *Maos*. I think he did 13 of them with Sperone in Europe. We – Leo and I and Knoedler – partnered the commission. We just basically gave him one lump sum of money with the trust he would do something great for us sometime in the next year, because he needed the money for some of his projects, and a year later they were ready. We thought they were incredible from the first day: I can remember going into Knoedler and they were on the floor all the way around the room. Later I bought one of the big *Mao* paintings, a 15-foot one that I gave to the Metropolitan Museum.

AR *Why the Metropolitan?*

PB I promised Andy that I would give it to a New York museum because he didn't really have anything other than Philip Johnson's paintings at MOMA; I offered it to MOMA, they wouldn't take it – they said they already had two or three paintings. They had the Marilyn on a gold field, and they had – I think – the *S&H Green Stamps* [1962] or one of the car crashes. They had two or three works, and they really didn't need it. You know, it was a gift for free, and so then I went to Henry Geldzahler [curator for American art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and subsequently its first curator for twentieth-century art] and offered it to him. He said it was too big, and that I had to sweeten the pie. I had to come up with some more gifts and then they would take it. So we gave them a great Flavin that I bought from Nelson Rockefeller. But that still wasn't enough. So I gave him part of my Art Deco furniture collection, which was really incredible. But that painting, which they own today, is one of the great paintings of the post-1960s.

AR *Have you ever thought of collecting as a form of investing? How have you separated out – or have you separated out? – the conditions of private collecting, patronage, investment?*

PB I didn't use the term investment. You used the term investment. The reason I maybe have been successful at buying art is I have never really considered it an investment. It has worked out to be great as an investment, but I think if you go in there with that kind of approach you miss a lot of things, because a lot of things that you buy, you would never think would be a good investment.

I didn't think when I bought Jeff Koons's *Puppy* [1993] that it would have been considered a good investment. I think that would be considered a crazy thing to do, because how are you going to plant it, where are you going to put it, who would you ever sell it to if you wanted to sell it? It takes on its own folklore and its own life, and then it becomes something that's really great; but most things don't.

AR *Do you think that the strength of your collection has been based upon the strength of your relationship with artists? Because you seem to have quite a close relationship with the artists you work with and ultimately collect, exhibit and support in terms of museums and other kinds of projects.*

PB I think there's pluses and minuses. I don't become friendly with an artist because they're the most famous artist in the world. I become

friendly with an artist because they are very interesting. The artists with whom I was friends during the 1960s were artists like Arman and Bernar Venet and artists like that who really enriched my life because they were good guys and because they were very smart, and they saw things in the New York School that local people in our area didn't see: because they were Europeans and they recognised the talent of artists like Andy Warhol and Carl Andre before many others. There weren't that many collectors at that time in America, there just weren't.

The first real wave of increase in the value of these artists really came from the encouragement of the Germans and the Italians and the French and then the Swiss. Those were really



the collectors that first understood how great the Pop movement was. So I think that you could be very friendly with an artist that is perhaps second tier or third tier. I don't just collect work of friends, and a lot of times, I don't collect the work of people that I am very friendly with. I really keep it separate. The other thing is that if you are very friendly with a great artist, you are going to realise very shortly that they're human beings, and they have idiosyncrasies and faults like everybody else. If you know they're a great artist, you might hold them to a different

Andy Warhol, *Mao*, 1972, acrylic, silkscreen ink, and pencil on linen, 450 × 348 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr and Mrs Peter M Brant, 1977. © 2015 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, and DACS, London. Courtesy Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT

standard as human beings, and that could affect your appreciation of their work. So, I almost think in many cases it can be a disadvantage as a collector to be too close to an artist.

AR *In hindsight, what's the most surprising change or development in the artworld for you in the last 25 years? Or in the last 50 years even?*

PB Everybody is held to a different standard now. Nobody can really fall asleep. Everybody is trying to strive towards excellence: the schools, the galleries, the museums, the collectors. What has caused that? I give a lot of the credit to the dealers who have become much more serious.

In order to be a great dealer, you need to do more than just buy and sell paintings. You need to have really great shows, you need to have some real connoisseurship, you need to curate the shows incredibly well, and I think a lot of the dealers have done that. A dealer like Larry Gagosian has hired great curators. He has attempted to have the really great shows, and I think it has put the museums on notice. A lot of foundations have come forward and had interesting shows, and I think that's put the museums really on a different standard. They can't fall asleep and go through their inventory and just put something together, because people want more.

People want their minds exercised, they want to see radical things and they want to understand what is going on in our society, and they want to see what culture brings forward to give hints about what's going to happen in the future. So I think that's the biggest change. The biggest change has really been that there's just more information available: there are more catalogues being printed, there's more of a history of what went on, to be judged by. That's the biggest change.

AR *Do you consider the art market to be healthy today?*

PB The answer to that question is yes and no. The ultimate proof of how well the art market is doing on a long-term basis really has to do with how great the interest in art is on a long-term basis. They really come with one another. The ups and downs in prices have to do with many things. They have to do with economies, with currencies, with the belief that art is an asset class, something that is valuable, and there are different interpretations of what drives the price of the asset. Ultimately it's the interest in art and the development of art and art history that really change it. I mean obviously the Renaissance was a great period. Art flourished and Renaissance art stayed with us forever

because of the patronage and the churches, the great collectors and the great families. The future will bring other great collectors and great families, and great successful people that maybe in the past wouldn't have looked towards art, but now will look towards art. There's an education process. It's a way that somebody can do something other than what their normal work is and with the same intensity. So I think that the art market on a long-term basis is very healthy, because the art schools are expanding and there are more art programmes in colleges available. I mean, when I went to school there weren't that many schools that taught art history. Today, it's a whole different thing.

That makes a big difference, plus there's the computer, and there's so much more that you can access if you're really interested in art. You can basically pull up any artist's oeuvre and see 20 percent of it online. I'm not saying that replaces actually going to see a museum and see how a particular work or artist relates to everything else that's there.

*AR As a prominent American publisher of art and cultural publications, how have you addressed this shift to digital media and what has that meant for you in terms of your own cultural production?*

*PB* Well, I think that obviously the future is in digital media. You know, we're involved in digital media. We have a digital advertising company – Code and Theory – that we're very proud of; it's a great company that's been growing very quickly. The publishing business in terms of the newspaper business and magazine business has been decimated by a number of things besides social media, because the printed product has declined. In Asia it hasn't, but it has in the United States, and I think that that's only going to continue. I think that printed products will remain, but in a focused way. It's like the TV over from the radio. It's a fact that by looking at imagery on a computer or on a BlackBerry or on an iPhone, it's not going to replace actually going to see a painting. It's a whole different relationship, the scale and the brushstrokes. It's a whole different thing.

*AR You established the Brant Foundation Art Study Center in Greenwich, Connecticut, to host exhibitions. Could you say something about the motivation of establishing a private foundation? Is it a thinking towards the future or is it a response to the present?*

*PB* I think both. I think that it was something that I wanted to do because art has given me such great pleasure my entire life. I wanted to give something back. In terms of the criticism, you know, we've had a lot of positive things said. I know that in the minds of a lot of artists I think they believe that we are important in terms of what we're showing. Maybe what we're showing

in a lot of cases is things that other institutions won't show, or are not current enough to show, or politically can't show. When you're collecting with the idea that you're going to show the work publicly, it's a different way of thinking than just buying a picture to put behind the sofa. So that has encouraged me a great deal to have a foundation, because I've always wanted to collect that way. If you look at my collection over a 40-year period you can certainly see that.

*AR You recently organised a show called Deliverance [2014], with works by Richard Prince, Larry Clark, Cady Noland and Christopher Wool. It was impressive in the same way the Dia Center is impressive: an incredible gathering of masterpieces of their time. But it made me wonder about the difference between private collections and museums and what private collections represent over time (the Dia for example is really a private*

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*collection now in 'public' hands). How do you feel your responsibilities differ from that of museums; should you show a greater diversity of artists, artists at the margins, should you complicate the story?*

*PB* I don't have that responsibility. The only responsibility I have is to do what I think is an interesting show and what my younger colleagues around here who are relatives of mine think is interesting and that I agree is interesting. If you look at the catalogue, which is ultimately what remains 10 years or 15 years from now, hopefully a certain amount of people would say, 'Jeez, I wish I went to that show, I wish I could have seen that show.' I mean, for me, those four artists are four really important artists. I didn't mean to exclude anybody. It meant that those are four artists that I have really spent a lot of time studying and a lot of time collecting, and I wanted to put those four artists together.

This is strictly about what I collected. I'm not trying to teach anybody anything. I'm trying to basically say, this is what we were interested in at this period of time. We were also interested in so many other artists of the 1980s and 90s. It doesn't mean to say that we haven't collected John Currin or Elizabeth Peyton or Karen Kilimnik; we just don't include them in this exhibition, we don't think that it is relevant. Could we put Nan Goldin in? Yes, but we don't collect Nan Goldin.

*AR You have quite a number of children, all of whom or many of whom are engaged either with the foundation or involved in art in different ways, some with very different characters I see. What advice do you give them? What advice would you give anybody, if they were starting out as you did, at seventeen, eighteen, in the artworld today?*

*PB* I think that history repeats itself and I think that their interest is basically coming at a similar age to when my interest in art began. I have one daughter that's an artist and also a nurse in California, went to Yale and had a fellowship at the Art Center in Pasadena under Mike Kelley. My son Dylan is becoming a young dealer, he's very interested in art, he just curated a show on the American cowboy in art at Venus Over Manhattan. Alison runs the foundation and is very, very good at what she does. My sons Christopher and Ryan are collectors. To me it's all good. I don't question where people come from, whether they start as a dealer or a curator, or they work for an auction house. It's the idea that they're around art all the time and that's going to take them somewhere. You should go where your passion tells you to go, and if you enjoy and like being around artists, then that's what you should do, and if you enjoy being around collectors and dealers, then that's what you should do.

*AR Given that this interview is for the Power 100 issue, can I ask you what you think qualifies as power in the artworld today? Who are the most powerful people in the artworld today?*

*PB* To me the people who are the most powerful in the artworld are the people who walk the walk: their passion is huge. They spend as much time as they possibly can going to exhibitions, studying art, going to museum shows, being involved in the way that they most can in order to make that a large part of their life. Ultimately those are the people that are the most powerful. In order to have that, it takes a lot of work. It's not about a natural ability that you have to look at things – that's not the way it goes. It's really when you say art's a science – there's a lot of science to it. You have to educate your sensibility, you have to educate yourself to what is really important.