



Number 26
Spring 2003

Published by
ARCO/Ifema
Quarterly
Publication

TERRITORIES
VIEWPOINTS
INSIGHTS
NOTEBOOK
MUST READ
OF INTEREST
PANORAMA ARCO'03
ELECTIVE AFFINITIES
REVIEW
INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART EXPERTS FORUM ARCO'03
FACES IN THE GROWD
ARCO FOUNDATION NEWS
AMIGOS DE ARCO ASSOCIATION NEWS
DIRECTORY



INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART FAIR



Eliane Gans

Advisor & Expert in Modern and Contemporary Art, LA

An Interview with Billie Milam Weisman

Director, Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation

*"I don't think there's anything that communicates better than art.
It's quicker than language and clearer than philosophy."*

FREDERICK R. WEISMAN



ELIANE GANS
Advisor and Expert in Modern and
Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Billie Milam Weisman is the Director and President of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, and President of the Frederick R. Weisman Philanthropic Foundation. She was born in Minnesota and raised in Los Angeles. She has always had art around her – her mother was a school artist, her sister an art major, and her uncle a commercial artist. As a child, she was already interested in art. When she was driven to school, she would always take some clay with her and make little sculptures in the back seat of the car. Her passion for art was already ignited at a very early age. In school, she would paint on all of the pieces of paper, faster than the rest, and when there was no more paper left, she would paint her dress. Billie had another interest during her early years – she loved science. She wanted to become a doctor, but her mother told her that it was not a woman's career. She studied metallurgy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and served an Art Conservation internship at Harvard University's Fogg Museum. Billie holds a Bachelor's Degree in Art History and a Masters Degree from the

University of California, Los Angeles in Italian Renaissance Art. Prior to her post as Director of the Frederick R. Weisman Foundation, she was Senior Art Conservator and Head of Objects Conservation at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, as well as a sculpture conservator at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu. Billie sits on the boards of several philanthropic foundations and art museums, and has

lectured internationally in conjunction with their travelling exhibitions. For over nine years during **Mr Weisman's** lifetime, Billie Milam Weisman worked closely with him to foster and expand the Foundation's activities, as well as acquiring works of art. In 1982, Mr Weisman established the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation and the Frederick R. Weisman Philanthropic Foundation,



BILLIE MILAM WEISMAN
Director of the Frederick R. Weisman
Art Foundation

believing it was his corporate responsibility to give something back to the public who had helped to enable his success. His activities in art and business were "an attempt to bring the world closer together". In the mid 1980s, he launched the first in a series of acclaimed touring exhibitions. The installations brought together the work of established and emerging artists.

The original goal was to circulate exhibitions drawn from the Foundation's substantial collection of contemporary art, primarily to areas in the United States where access to original examples of international postwar art was limited. Later, the programme was expanded to Europe and Asia.

In the late 1980s, the Foundation initiated a series of workshops that explored significant issues in the contemporary art world, in which scholars and experts in various fields explored topics such as the relationship of art and architecture, the growing role of art fairs, and conservation of contemporary art.

In 1990, Mr. Weisman provided funding to the University of Minnesota for a museum designed by the internationally renowned architect Frank Gehry, which was completed in 1993. This



was in many ways the precursor to **Gehry's** design for the Guggenheim Bilbao. In addition, funds were provided for the Frederick R. Weisman Museum at Pepperdine University (Malibu, California), and for the establishment of the Frederick R. Weisman Wing for Contemporary Louisiana Art at the New Orleans Museum.

Since Mr Weisman's passing in 1994 his intentions for the Foundation have been carried out under the direction of his widow, Billie, who, drawing on her experience as a museum professional, continues his commitment to sharing his art collection with a broad audience. To this end, the Weisman residence serves as a showcase for this important and highly personal collection of 20th-century art. The annex, designed by Frank Israel was completed in 1991, and houses the large-scale works. The Weismans' vision was to

share their art with the public, and visitors are welcome, by appointment, on docent-guided tours. There are more than 500 works of art displayed in the Los Angeles residence, mostly dating from the 1950s on, with over 90% of the pieces acquired since the 1980s. Although primarily contemporary and very strong in California art, there are works dating back to the late 19th century, such as a painting by **Cezanne**. There is a sense about the collection – it's fun! Uplifting! Positive! Mr Weisman was particularly drawn to illusionism in any form – i.e., art that "played tricks", or that was not immediately apparent. He collected according to his intuitive preferences. The works in the residence are installed visually, and emerging artists hang next to Modern Masters. Every inch of space is used – there are even paintings on the ceilings.

The collection includes over 1000 works, representing 500 artists. Modern Masters include **Arp, Bacon, Braque, Brancusi, de Chirico, Gabo, Giacometti, Kandinsky, Leger, Picasso, Magritte, and Miró**. Works of contemporary masters include **Albers, Calder, Cornell, de Kooning, Gonzalez, Johns, Kelly, Kiefer, Lichtenstein, Moore, Newman, Oldenberg, Pollock, Smith, Stella, and Warhol**.

The particular focus on contemporary California art includes such artists as **Albuquerque, Arnouldi, Francis, Goode, Graham, Price, Ruscha, Valentine, and Voulkos**.

E.G.: Do you currently acquire new works of art for the collection?

B.M.W.: Yes, generally emerging artists. There was a lull after Fred died, but recently we have put a yearly budget in place to acquire new works.

Viewpoints

E.G.: What is the criteria for acquisitions?

B.M.W.: Powerful, memorable, and artistically strong – does it hold up to an important work by an established artist?

E.G.: What was your most recent acquisition?

B.M.W.: Anish Kapoor – a beautiful blood-red disc.

E.G.: Who selects the work? Is there a committee?

B.M.W.: I select on my own – but for larger acquisitions there is a committee.

E.G.: Does the Foundation have a yearly budget?

B.M.W.: Only for the past three years.

E.G.: Do you collect photography?

B.M.W.: Some, but not a great deal.

E.G.: What are your thoughts about the current aesthetic of conceptual, video/digital or photo-based art? Do you have any works representing these disciplines?

B.M.W.: My love and passion is really painting and sculpture, more traditional forms. I believe that it is important to open up this area, but our space is not geared to this type of work. Since our mandate is to leave the Los Angeles residence as it was when Fred was alive, it does not lend itself well to installations. The home is a traditional Mediterranean, with embellishments created in the 1920s. We do have

the work of **Denise Marika, Nam June Paik** and, probably the earliest or this type of work – a **Wesselman** incorporating a TV from the 60s.

E.G.: Do you have regular visits to the collection – groups or individuals?

B.M.W.: The foundation is open to the public by appointment. We have museum groups from all over the world; college students, retired persons, many people come for special occasions – birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

E.G.: With regard to the other institutions that the Foundation has funded, do you organise exhibitions for them?

B.M.W.: No, they are run independently; however, we do organise exhibitions from time to time originating from the permanent collection of the Foundation. For instance, at the New Orleans Contemporary Art Center, we have a show on now until March 23rd. Also there is a Pop Art exhibition that has just closed at the Luckman Fine Arts Gallery, Los Angeles. Currently, at the Frederick R. Weisman Museum at Pepperdine University, Malibu, there is a

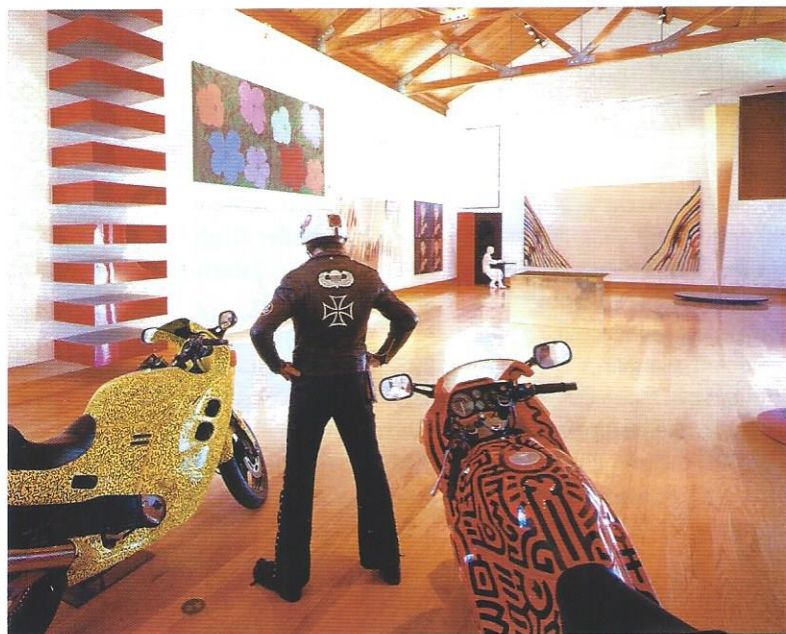
retrospective of **Wayne Thiebaud**.

E.G.: Where will your next exhibitions be mounted?

B.M.W.: We are lending to the San Diego Museum of Art; there is a show coming up at the University Gallery, Bakersfield, California; an exhibition at the Virginia Beach Art Center, Virginia; the Frederick R. Weisman Museum at Pepperdine; and in 2004 we have a full programme: New Orleans Museum of Art, the Frederick R. Weisman Museum at the University of Minnesota, and at Pepperdine University and other venues in the United States and in Europe.

E.G.: Do you have any future plans for exhibitions in Spain?

B.M.W.: We are working on a European tour; however, after my recent trip here to Madrid, I am most interested in mounting exhibitions in Spain. I was very surprised to discover how much support there is from the government and from the population here for contemporary art, sensitivity and honouring new movements. I noticed that there are many new museums that have been built and are continuing to be built here. We had the wonderful opportunity to visit the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Valladolid – in a renovated monastery – which was a



Courtesy: Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation

Viewpoints

Courtesy: Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation

highlight. The work was meticulously installed and the works of art were of extremely high quality. I have a great hope that we will have an exhibition in Spain very soon. Perhaps, there would be an opportunity to have an exchange with the foundations here.

E.G.: What were your impressions of ARCO?

B.M.W.: In a word: wonderful! It was very enlightening. It was a real discovery, to view so much work from Latin America, and Spain, many emerging artists that I was not acquainted with. There was a different

selection of artists than we see at most other art fairs, although some familiar. Also I was very impressed with the invitation to collectors from all over the world, to exchange ideas and to meet each other and discuss our various interests and impressions.

E.G.: What is your vision for the future?

B.M.W.: To continue the passion and legacy that my late husband created; to share the art around the world and make it accessible to people who are not always privileged to see great works of art; to complete a comprehensive catalogue of



the entire collection, a *catalogue raisonné*; to reinstate our intellectual conferences and document them to disseminate them for study internationally.

E.G.: As Director and President of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, would you share a personal thought with us about your role.

B.M.W.: It is impossible to fill the shoes of a dynamic,

brilliant, generous individual like Fred. It is a great challenge to live up to that; to carry on his dream and to take the Foundation to further heights. When I was given this opportunity, I had to change my own direction in life – and did so with great excitement as well as intense commitment. I do this with honour and love for the future legacy of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation.



Courtesy: Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation