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## ART+ AUCTION

### What's Your Pleasure?

By Carol Kino, excerpted from a longer article

*Probe discreetly and you'll discover that nearly every powerhouse collector, dealer or artist has a quirky trove of objects that they've amassed in private. Embarrassing? Inspiring? Or a thrilling combination of both?*



Fred Tomaselli in his studio

Art world luminaries are as well-defined by their eye and expertise as actors are by their roles. But if you want to dig a little deeper and learn what really makes someone tick, ask them about their collecting passions when they're off duty. Collectors and curators known for their rarefied tastes in contemporary art become weak at the knees for pocketknives, Rooster ties or poodle paraphernalia. Some are inspired by childhood nostalgia, while others amass their more unusual objects to scratch an aesthetic itch.

Many are perfectly open about their obsessions: **Brett Littman**, deputy director of P.S.1 in New York, and his fiancée happily admit to having hundreds of pieces of vintage dishware by mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century designers. But some—especially those whose fixations run to racier stuff—are more secretive. London powerhouse dealer **Anthony D'Offay** is rumored to have a huge stash of Indian lingam and yoni sculptures but has never given an interview about it. And while visitors to the sprawling, East River-view apartment of a certain Whitney trustee frequently return

squealing about the large selection of erotic objects and photographs on display, the lady herself is disinclined to discuss the subject.

On occasion, these quirky collections have almost mythical origins. So it was for **Linda Pace**, the founder of Artpace, the artists' residency program and exhibition space in San Antonio, Texas. Her sleekly modernist loft, filled with works by Teresita Fernandez, Jorge Pardo and the like, is also teeming with cheap plastic Buddhas. Pace began seeking them out in 1997 after dreaming that a red Buddha has been implanted in her tongue. Working with her Jungian dream group, she realized that the message of her nighttime vision had something to do with "speaking up," she says. To honor its power, "I started collecting red Buddhas, and then went on to collect all kinds." She found her first, priced at 50 cents, in a local botanica; today she has nearly a thousand, many of which were sent to her by travelling friends.

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**Iwona Blazwick**, who as the director of London's Whitechapel Gallery is breathing new life into the venerable institution, unearths postcard treasures at flea markets and local shops around the world. She has found 19<sup>th</sup>-century Orientalist photographs in Berlin, French and American film posters in Copenhagen, and her favourites—black and white photographs of a Chihuahua in a handbag and a terrier driving a sports car—in a shop in Tuscany. She has innumerable groupings—such as cityscapes, seaside scenes of coastal resorts and piers, date palms and 3-D designs—and stores them in 10 wooden boxes at home, with more piled in bags and boxes at her office.

"I have collections of every kind of postcard, and I have them all filed," Blazwick says proudly, declaring that her waterfall postcards—all of which are framed—are "second to none." Sometimes she even uses them to entertain, pulling them out at parties and dinners to play a game of her own devising. Blazwick, however, turns uncharacteristically mum when asked how many she owns. "It's too embarrassing," she says with rueful amusement.

Artists' collections often hold clues to their work. Take **Richard Prince's** extensive assortment of Woodstock memorabilia, which includes his own ticket to the event and the single photograph he took there. Prince's passion is not terribly surprising when one considers his oeuvre, which frequently subverts American suburban and, advertising stereotypes.

Los Angeles painter and curator **Christopher Pate** cherishes his 109 skull-emblazoned T-shirts (they've even inspired him to incorporate the silk-screen into his own art.) He regards the shirts as modern-day vanitas works, with imagery drawn from biker, rock-and-roll and tattoo culture.

**James Siena** sees a connection between the intricate acrylic-on-aluminum abstractions he's known for and the manual typewriters he's been buying since his first Manhattan solo show in 1997. His collection of about a hundred ranges from two circa 1890 Blickensderfers to four Olivettis from the 1950s and '60s, including two Lettera 22s, one Lettera 32 and one throbbing red Valentine portable designed by Ettore Sottsass. "My paintings contain imagery that may or may not deal with contemporary issues of cyberculture, logic, the digital milieu, but they are resolutely analog," says Siena. "So are typewriters."

And though it's hard to believe that **Fred Tomaselli** could collect anything more curious than the pills, hemp leaves and collaged paper flora and fauna he seals beneath layers of resin in his work, he has another love: flies—the artificial lures used for fly-fishing, an activity he's enjoyed since his childhood in Southern California. To make a fly, he says, "you have to get into the fish's brain and understand how its perceptions distort what we see as reality." So far, however, he has avoided tying the lures himself because, he says, "It's an obsessive-compulsive behavior and I already have a lot of that in my life." Adding a new one, he fears, might absorb so much time he'd stop making art.