

CARY LEIBOWITZ, an artist and a print specialist at Christie's, likes to wear his collectibles to work. Visit the auction house and you're likely to see him sporting one of his 400-odd Rooster ties—the slim, patterned, square-bottomed neckwear worn by the 1960s precursors of yuppies. These days, he finds many of them on eBay, typically paying \$3 to \$10 for each. Leibowitz also searches there for another love: early 20th-century photographs of people posing in front of Mount Vernon. "I just always had this Americana fetish," he explains. Usually, the photographs are panoramic, black and white, and commemorate occasions like a class trip, a family reunion or a union meeting. "A good one I have is from the early '20s or late teens," he says. "It's of postal workers."

Ebay was also the source for most of the Grandma Moses fabrics that now upholster the furniture in the living room of Leibowitz's country house in Ghent, New York. Although his collecting in this area has recently slowed down ("I have all the different patterns already," he says), he is still planning to use the overrun fabric "to make some blazers and other clothing."



At home in upstate New York, Cary Leibowitz of Christie's collects Mount Vernon group photographs and favors Rooster ties.



WHAT'S YOUR PLEASURE?

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?

By Carol Kino Photographs by Michael Schmelling

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.



Above: Richard Prince in his studio with *The Final Curtain*, 2005. Below: A selection of hippie and Woodstock publications from the artist's personal collection.



Many are perfectly open about their obsessions: BRETT LITTMAN, deputy director of PS.1 in New York, and his fiancée happily admit to having hundreds of pieces of vintage dishware by mid-20th-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 mystical 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 had 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 traveling friends.

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 19th-century Orientalist photographs in Berlin, French and American film posters in Copenhagen, and her favorites—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.



Los Angeles artist Christopher Pate regards his 109 skull-embellished T-shirts as contemporary vanitas pieces.

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-embellished T-shirts (they’ve even inspired him to incorporate the silk-screen process into his own art). He regards the shirts as modern-day vanitas works, with imagery drawn from biker, rock-and-roll and tattoo culture. »



A selection of lures used for fly-fishing sit atop Fred Tomaselli’s desk, along with one of his works in progress.



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.

THIS PAGE, BOTTOM: ELLEN LABENSKI, COURTESY PACE WILDENSTEIN, NEW YORK

James Siena calls the typewriters in his collection a group of "common machines," saying, "They have little value, but I love them just the same." Right, the artist in his studio.



If you want to understand the design impetus behind the 2004 Whitney Biennial catalogue, which came packaged with a boxed set of artist-made stickers, acetates and zines, look no further than Whitney curator **CHRISSIE ILES**, who has collected record albums since the early 1970s, while growing up in Kuwait, Beirut and London. "It was my introduction to conceptual art," she says, "because I came from a very middle-class English family. I didn't go to museums as a child." When she was young, Iles was fascinated by her parents' copy of Prokofiev's *The Love of Three Oranges*, whose album cover bore a surrealist drawing that struck her as disturbingly "radical," and of Peter, Paul & Mary's *In the Wind*, with sleeve notes by Bob Dylan. "I learned to read partly through looking at the back of that record cover," she says. Today her prize possessions include a British edition of the Beatles' *White Album*, complete with photographs and poster, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Wedding Album*, which came packaged with four multiple-like objects, including a black-and-white photograph of a slice of wedding cake.



The Whitney's Chrissie Iles with the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* album. Her favorite records include the band's *Exile on Main St.*, at right, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Wedding Album*, in foreground.

LEA FREID, a partner in Chelsea's Lombard-Freid Projects, began collecting Fascist and Communist books in the mid-1980s with her architect husband, Stephan, while traveling around Eastern Europe and Russia for work. (At the time, Freid says, many of the areas they visited were newly open to Westerners, and huge amounts of fascist memorabilia were being sold on the streets.) Drawn by the aesthetics and design of the material, the couple first acquired such gems as a Stalinist cookbook, a volume on Soviet aviation designed by Aleksandr Rodchenko and several expansionist travel tomes published by Mussolini's regime. Gradually, however, Freid realized that she was also retracing the footsteps of her late Polish-born father, who at 15 joined the Russian and English armies to escape the Nazis. Although Poland, especially, was awash in Nazi objects, she bought only a few. One, a soft-cover children's book, is filled with birthday lists and ditties for important officials, like Himmler. Being Jewish, Freid says, "I thought it was very, very important to have, as proof and memory." But she still can't bring herself to tell her mother about it—or about the rest of the collection.





Lea Freid, opposite, in her Manhattan apartment, where she keeps a collection of Fascist and Communist publications. Above, propaganda books from Italy, Germany, France, the U.S. and the former U.S.S.R.

In the Chicago and Miami Beach homes of JEFF and DARYL STOKOLS, contemporary artworks by Rachel Whiteread, Olafur Eliasson and the like fight for space with poodle-themed kitsch. Their doggy collection ranges from poodle-shaped figurines, Pez dispensers, car fresheners, shoehorns and shower curtains to baseballs and Mary Janes decorated with poodle motifs. Daryl, a longtime trustee of Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, marvels at the stylistic variations: "You get a very Art Deco look in the 1920s, and you get a more comical put-down of poodles in the 1950s." Jeff adds, "There is a point where the art and the poodle collections cross." Check out the couple's Jeff Koons balloon dog, their Martin Parr photograph of a poodle perched in an ice-cream cone and their William Wegman Polaroid of a Weimaraner disguised as a poodle—among countless others. The inspiration was the couple's late black standard poodle, Anisette, whose bark still resonates on their Chicago answering machine.

A small sampling of poodle collectibles, circa 1950s to '60s, from the Miami home of Jeff and Daryl Stokols.



Paolo Canevari, below, with some of his pinup photographs, including Irving Klaw's 1950 shot of Tempest Storm, on wall. Right, '50s and '60s pinups by Elmer Batters.



Some collectors' desires are rooted in their youth. The Italian sculptor **PAOLO CANEVARI** began scouring Rome flea markets for midcentury pinup postcards of voluptuous young women when he was 14. "It's the most appealing period for the kind of female image that I like," he says. Five years and 500 postcards later, he graduated to vintage fetish photographs, concentrating on models like bondage queen Betty Page and photographers like Irving Klaw, Carlo Mollino and the leg-and-foot specialist Elmer Batters. Today his collection is divided among the three homes—a villa in Stromboli, and apartments in Rome and New York—that he shares with his wife, body-baring performance artist Marina Abramowicz.

An inveterate treasure hunter, Canevari also owns dozens of postwar leather motorcycle jackets, which he wears while driving his two Norton Commando bikes, two working Vespas (he owns three) and two Alfa Romeos. "I have this passion about things related to cars and motorcycles," he says. As a child, "it was an imaginary world that boosted my fantasies. The collections I have are all related to each other."

Miami dealer **FREDRIC SNITZER** became entranced with 1950s Japanese robots about 12 years ago, after he visited a toy fair and realized that "I could actually find the same kinds of things I had when I was a kid." He bought his first—a silvery moon explorer outfitted with a slot-machine-style spinning drum—for \$325 from a toy

auctioneer in New Jersey. "It seemed like a tremendous amount of money to spend for this thing," he says. But when it arrived, "the reality of it was so beautiful, I was hooked and crazy." Now, with about 220 more robots on his shelves, he's seeking only a few choice items, like a Radicon Robot, the rarest of Japanese toy maker Masayuda's coveted "Gang of Five."

ROBIN VOUSDEN, a director of Gagosian Gallery in London, also focuses his interests around the early 1950s—"the period around which I was being formed," he says. His collection of mid-20th-century first editions is largely split between two extremes: futuristic science fiction from the 1940s and '50s, which he says explores "the moral and spiritual issues of a species that had achieved godlike powers over life and death but lacked godlike powers of responsibility," and books with a more nostalgic air, illustrated by British postwar neo-Romantic artists like John Craxton, Keith Vaughan and John Minton. Vousden has spent anything from £10 (\$19, for a copy of a 1950s travel book about South America, with a cover illustration by Minton) to £2,500 (\$4,800, for a near fine first edition of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*). To find such items, he

periodically trawls London's bookshops and book fairs, armed with a loose wish list to give his wanderings structure. "It's the fun of the chase," he says.

LANCE KINZ, co-director of Kinz, Tillou + Feigen in Chelsea, developed a yen for vintage pocketknives at age 12, after inheriting a bone-handled butterfly folding knife from his great-grandfather. But the collecting bug didn't bite until adulthood when, while wandering through a junk store, he happened upon a red pocketknife whose blade bore an etching of a nude woman.

Today Kinz's collection numbers about 175. It is divided into countless series and is organized by categories and sub-categories like handle material (tortoiseshell, stag horn, fancy composite); function (fishing, plant grafting, veterinarian bloodletting); and theme (outer space, advertising, gun- or bullet-shaped, shoe-shaped, animal or human leg-shaped). For a while, Kinz even rewarded himself with a \$20 knife whenever he made a gallery sale. "That was just a short-lived excuse to rationalize my habit," he says. But his favorite remains his first buy. Although "it's a knife of no significance," he says, "I liked it because it's small, red, fits in your pocket and has a babe on the blade." ☐



Toy robots provide a taste of childhood for Miami dealer **Fredric Snitzer**. These date from the mid-1950s to '60s.

New York dealer **Lance Kinz** collects his penknives by category, including purpose, shape, material, manufacturer and theme.

