

Arman's Legacy

An Interview with Corice Canton Arman, The Arman Trust

EDITORS' NOTE As an educator and collector, Corice Arman (www.arman.com) has brought to others the joy and fulfillment she herself has experienced over a lifetime guided by a passion for art. Since 1992, she has been a trustee of New York City's Museum for African Art. In this, she has had an invaluable ally: the world-renowned artist Arman, her husband of 35 years who passed away in October 2005. She initially pursued a career in art, but chose to focus on supporting her husband's career. They collaborated on Arman's many museum and gallery exhibitions and monumental sculpture projects. As collectors, they amassed a peerless, world-class collection of African art, which they have loaned to several international exhibitions. Corice has been dedicated to cultivating art appreciation among children, which she did for many years on the advisory board for the Learning Through Art Program under the auspices of the Guggenheim Museum. She has also served on the board of directors for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company and on the Advisory Board of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and is active on the Committee for Women for the Apollo Theater in Harlem. In 2003, she acted as an adviser to the Florence-based Studio Art Centers International, recruiting renowned artists from around the world to form the International Artists' Council. For her efforts in promoting the arts, she was recognized by the Studio Museum in Harlem with the Patron of the Arts Award in 1992. Along with Arman, she received the Honorary Fellowship Award from the Tel Aviv Museum in 1998. Corice and Arman have been honored twice by the Museum for African Art, where she is a trustee. In 2004, Corice was honored by the National Association of Women Artists for her arts patronage and, in 2006, received the Wall of Life Award, the highest humanitarian award given by the Women's International Zionist Organization.

What is the Arman story, and how has it evolved?

Arman and I met in France in 1968 through a mutual friend. He was an emerging artist at the time, but was already living in New York. He had come in 1960 for an exhibition and fell in love with New York, and decided to move there. When we met in France, I was working in fashion and knew very little about art.

Arman traded one of his works for his very first piece of African art through a dealer in France, and fell in love with the culture. Over



Corice Canton Arman

the years, we continued amassing African art. Arman believed in culture itself, and he was a man of all cultures – he enjoyed studying and learning about different cultures, and the arts in general. He turned collecting into an art form, as well as doing his own work, which was very important for him.

Young artists always knocked on the door and asked to be received, and he never turned anyone away; he was generous by nature. Our life together was exciting, and it was always a learning experience. It was quite wonderful to be in the presence of someone that extraordinary. He was a caring and compassionate human being who was articulate and loved to teach – and he shared his knowledge with everyone. I consider myself to be home-schooled by Arman.

After Arman passed away, did you know you would continue his legacy? How has it evolved since then?

It was always something I wanted to continue. I would like to continue buying the art, and I try to in my own small way, but I do not have the knowledge that Arman had, because he would do a tremendous amount of research whenever he purchased a piece.

Have you tried to focus on specific areas where you can have the most impact? How do you decide what to support?

I support the Museum for African Art, where I'm a board member. I also support anything having to do with children that will give them a better quality of life. We owe that much to our children – we owe them that start. At one point, through the Guggenheim, Arman and I had set up a studio within his own studio with posters of other artists on the walls and tables with paint and pallets for the visiting school children to show them the diversity in art and to allow them to explore their own natural artistic ability and get more involved.

Looking ahead, what is your main focus?

We are making grants and hoping to create a foundation where a young artist can come in and focus on working in Arman's studio, which I will maintain, for maybe around six months. I haven't quite figured it out yet, but it's one of my dreams and plans to do that.

In addition, in 2007, I went to Israel to see friends of mine who funded the new wing for the sciences and research on the campus of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, founded in 1969. It was also the anniversary of Ben-Gurion's death, and there was a very moving ceremony in the presence of Shimon Peres. I was so inspired by the speeches that when we moved inside for lunch and noticed the bare walls, I decided, then and there, to donate about 30 works. There will be a ceremony to unveil them next May. Also, Arman and I have always been friends with and have supported the Tel Aviv Museum.

In September 2010, a retrospective of Arman's work will be exhibited at the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris. It is my goal to have venues for the exhibition in New York and in other museums and institutions around the world. Right now, there is a great show called "Look Again" at the Marlborough Galleries, which is a group show including some of Arman's works. His work is in many museums all over the world in permanent collections, including at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and others.

I am in the process of shaping the framework for the creation of a scholarship in Arman's name for two universities in New York proper.

Did he ever create pieces that were so close to his heart that he didn't want to part with them?

There were pieces he created that were so close to my heart that I wanted to keep, but we also had to make a living. However, over the years, we've been buying his early works back with a vengeance, thankfully not for the price he sold them for, because our long-term plan was to have a core of works that we can loan to itinerant museum exhibitions. Arman was very philosophical. He left me his legacy, which I feel very close to, and he was also very realistic. He stated that, in 30 years from now, if my work is not appreciated, so be it. That's how it is. You do what you need to do. ●