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The Modern Art Museums of Irene and Peter Ludwig

The German couple Irene and Peter Ludwig's collection today comprises thousands of objects, ranging over the widest chronological and geographic spectra. It includes European (ancient Greek, medieval and modern), African, Chinese, and Indian art, and even art from pre-Columbus America. But the collection undoubtedly owes its global renown to its unique holdings in twentieth-century art, which date back to the 1960s, when the main direction for the Ludwigs' acquisition activity was decided upon. Their interest was concentrated on modern and contemporary art. Peter Ludwig, whose thesis of 1950 was devoted to *The Image of Man in the Works of Pablo Picasso as the Expression of a Generation's World View*, argued that the art of any period was above all an expression of the age: "When I began my studies in 1945, Picasso was not yet the admired Olympian of the first half of the century, but widely discussed. My thesis tried to show the intellectual legitimacy in his art; to see him as not an individual creating an art which is not understood by society but to show him as an artist who, bound by his time and his generation, gave expression to this thinking and feeling of this time and this generation. Every art, that of the so-called primitive people as well as that of high cultures, expresses the time and generation, which created it, is an expression of a people, from which it has grown."¹ Works by contemporaries of Irene and Peter Ludwig gradually became the main focus of their acquisitions. They began to acquire works by still unknown artists, which they then placed in their museums, with considerable daring, alongside works by the old masters, thus radicalizing the traditional museum space. In the 1960s, the Ludwigs became particularly interested in American Pop Art, which positively screamed modernity, was not yet recognized by critics, and had caused much controversy. "Art in those years burst over us like a storm,"² admitted Peter Ludwig. He personally associated with Pop Artists and bought up their work, and as a result was one of the first to reveal Pop Art to Europe. In 1968, he organized an extraordinarily successful exhibition of Pop Art in Cologne,³ and in 1976 the Ludwig Museum was founded in the same city with a donation of over 300 works by Pop Artists, as well as work by even younger artists. This event heralded the arrival of Pop Art not only in Cologne, but in all of Europe, and noticeably radicalized the European art scene, introducing the public to the work of artists including Andy Warhol, Tom Wesselmann, Robert Indiana, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns and others. Apart from the Ludwigs' rich collection of Pop Art, their collection of works by Pablo Picasso from 1904 to 1972 and Russian avant-garde artists from 1910 to 1930, and contemporary works from Eastern Europe and the former GDR and the USSR also enjoy international prestige.

The international system of the Ludwig Museums is an enormous project which took shape in the mid-1950s and continues to be a success. Today, works donated or loaned on a long-term basis by Peter and Irene Ludwig are displayed in more than twenty of the world's public museums. Twelve museums, including that in St. Petersburg, bear the title of Ludwig Museum, that is a museum which either has received a generous support from the Ludwigs in the form of donations and long-term loans, or was itself founded by the couple. Seven museums are devoted to modern art, and are located in Cologne, Aachen, Koblenz, Vienna, Budapest, Beijing and St. Petersburg (Ludwig Museum in the Russian Museum).

The Ludwig Museum in Cologne, the Ludwig Forum in Aachen, and the small Ludwig Museum in Koblenz are independent institutions founded by the Ludwigs. The remaining museums are so-called "museums within museums" which make up for deficiencies in the collections of the parent museum. The Ludwigs have donated works of art to museums whose collections are lacking in the respective area. Thus they have filled some of the gaps which inevitably exist, for whatever reason, in the collection of any museum.⁴ Understandably, most of these are museums of modern art: contemporary art is the hardest to evaluate, and is therefore under-represented in museums.

Irene and Peter Ludwig's modern art museums are interesting not only for the value and uniqueness of their collections, but also for their concept of representation, which today is highly topical.

The Ludwig Museum in Cologne, which opened in 1986, carried out a project entitled *Museum of Our Wishes*, the aim of which was on the one hand to find new methods of staging exhibitions, and on the other, to broaden and change the traditional functions of a museum. The curators rejected the thematic and chronological models, in which a group of works are shown and individual exhibits are often overlooked. Such a model gradually



Unknown Artist
 Ball Player. Circa 701–900
 Black painting on clay. 64 x 26
 Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne

Unknown Artist
 The Stroganov Head of Athena
 Circa 130–140
 Marble. 47 x 19
 Museum of Antiquities, Basel
 and Ludwig Collection, Basel



Unknown Artist
Gold earrings from the Roman Empire period
Gold. Diameter: 3.2 (each); weight: 9.5 g
Museum of Antiquities, Basel
and Ludwig Collection, Basel

Unknown Artist
Loutrophoros. Circa 430 B. C.
Ceramic. Height: 32.5
Museum of Antiquities, Basel
and Ludwig Collection, Basel



Unknown Artist
Black-figured vase with eyes
515–501 B. C.
Red-brown clay, varnish. Height: 10;
diameter: 30 (with handle), 23.2 (without handle)
Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen



leads to a concentration on an individual work or the works of those artists who exerted a decisive influence on the development of twentieth-century art. Furthermore, fundamental changes in the whole concept of the museum were planned, such as extending the traditionally perceived boundaries of its activity to such forms of art as music, dance, and poetry. One of the most recent works of museum theory states that “We see our task on the basis of a critical reflection of the constantly changing cultural institution, which over the past decades has been assigned a multitude of new functions and which has to adjust its meaning to the changed requirements of its visitors without giving up its own ideals.”⁵ The main task of a museum consists in striving to reconcile as successfully as possible the demands of the age with the museum’s chosen fields, the development of its collections and its method of representation.

The trend of pushing back the boundaries of the functions of a museum can be seen even more clearly in the Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen, opened in 1991. This is not so much a museum as a cultural centre, where a variety of events are held. The modern art museum’s aspirations to go beyond the boundaries of the traditional static display, expand the scope of its activity, and create the conditions for a wider understanding of modern artistic culture by including the viewer in the process of museum communication were first achieved in the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, also known as the Centre Beaubourg, which had been founded twenty years earlier in 1977. The Ludwig Forum in Aachen consciously tries to shatter the traditional con-



Unknown Artist
 Six stained-glass windows with scenes
 from the *vita* of St. Bernard of Clairvaux
 Circa 1510–1530
 Element of cloister decor in Altenberg Cathedral
 Schwarzlot painting, red cased glass
 and colored glass. 65 x 86 (each part)
 Schnütgen Museum, Cologne

Unknown Artist
 Rubble Stone. Circa 1740
 Copper, gilding, silver, heartwood,
 ore, quartz and metal dust
 12.5 x 18.2 x 17
 Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen



Master of the Glorification of Mary
 The Adoration of the Magi
 Circa 1480–1490
 Oil on wood. 131.5 x 90.5 x 1.5
 Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen



Joos van Cleve
 Madonna of the Cherries. Virgin and Child
 Circa 1525
 Oil on wood. 74 x 53
 Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen

cept of a museum, and reject any kind of chronological, thematic, or other system or order, thus causing a collision of different cultural discourses in the museum. This leads to the creation of an interactive, modern museum space, which ceases to be a neutral frame for works of art, instead taking on the quality of an active participant in cultural exchange.

In the 1970s, the Ludwigs began to extend their sponsorship activities to museums in neighbouring countries. The Ludwig Foundation Museum of Modern Art (MUMOK) in Vienna is today considered one of the most important museums of modern art in Europe, and boasts a significant proportion of the Ludwigs' collection, including masterpieces of post-1945 American and European art. Since 2001, when it was given the name MUMOK, the museum has been housed in a purpose-built location in the city's Museum Quarter. The new building has played host to a comprehensive exhibition of modern and contemporary art since September 2001.⁶

In 1988, the Ludwig Museum in the Budapest Museum of Modern Art opened, in which contemporary Hungarian art is presented within the context of world art. This was extremely important especially for the countries of the former socialist bloc, which were isolated from worldwide cultural developments for a long time.

1995 saw the opening of the Ludwig Museum in the Russian Museum, to this day the only museum of international modern art in Russia with a permanent exhibition. This so-called "museum within a museum" is an institution, which has a relatively autonomous status within the "main" museum. Exhibitions of contemporary foreign artists are held there quite often.

In the late 1920s a Department of Contemporary Art was set up at the Russian Museum by Nikolai Punin, though it soon closed,⁷ while the nationalized parts of Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov's collections with an excellent collection of art from the turn of the 20th century were brought together in 1922 to form the



Unknown Artist
Harrach Diptych. Circa 601–810
Traces of painting, beads,
painted wooden frame and ivory
29 x 9 (each part)
Schnütgen Museum, Cologne

Unknown Artist
Tiled room. 1601–1800
Ceramic
Couven Museum, Aachen

Georg Baselitz
Round Head. 1986
Oil on wood. 155 x 55 x 47
Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen



Johann Joachim Kändler
Royal Meissen Porcelain Manufactory
Monkey Choir. 1753–1766
Installation. Height: 12–17 (each figure)
Ludwig Collection, Bamberg

Joseph Hannong
Strasbourg Manufactory
Decorative Composition: Plate with Oranges
Faience. Diameter: 23
Ludwig Collection, Bamberg



new State Museum of Contemporary Western Art. Unfortunately, this museum was closed by the government in 1948 as part of a war against “formalism” and “cosmopolitanism”.⁸ The work of the Ludwig Museum in the Russian Museum therefore represents the resumption of a tradition of exhibiting contemporary foreign art in Russia, and the filling of a significant lacuna in artistic knowledge.

An invaluable role is played by the Ludwig couple’s gift of works of international art to China (Beijing) and Cuba (Havana). Peter Ludwig’s conviction that every country has good artists and art and his belief in the unifying role of culture is reflected in each of the museums they created. And the fact that the Ludwig couple’s creations continue to live and develop is the best monument to Peter and Irene Ludwig.



Notes

¹ Interview between Peter Ludwig and Wolfgang Becker in *Neue Galerie der Stadt Aachen, Der Bestand, 1972: Kunst um 1970*. Catalogue. Germany, 1972, p. 21. “In 1945 when I began my studies, Picasso was not yet the admired Olympian of the first half of the century, but widely discussed. My thesis tried to show the intellectual legitimacy in his art; to see him not as an individual creating an art which is not understood by society but to show him as an artist who, bound by his time and his generation, gave

expression to this thinking and feeling of that time and that generation. Every art, that of the so called primitive people as well as that of high cultures, expresses the time and generation which created it, is an expression of a people, from which it has grown.” Hereinafter: translated by the author.

² Cited from: V. Fiedler. *Derzhat' v napryazhenii. Peter Ludvig, met-senat* in *Guten Tag*, 1989. No. 7, p. 28.

³ See: K. Ruhrberg. *Twentieth Century Art. Painting and Sculpture in the Ludwig Museum*. Cologne, 1986, p. 46.

⁴ See: Marc Scheps. *Peter and Irene Ludwig: Collectors, Donors, Museum Founders in Ludwig Museum in the Russian Museum*. Catalogue. St. Petersburg, 1998, pp. 16–18.

⁵ U. Wilmes. *Museum of Our Wishes* in Kaspar König (ed.), *Museum of Our Wishes. Ludwig Museum Cologne*. Catalogue. Belgium, 2001, p. 24. “...we see our task on the basis of a critical reflection of the constantly changing cultural institution, which over the past decades has been assigned a multitude of new functions and which has to adjust its meaning to the changed requirements of its visitors without giving up its own ideals.”

⁶ See: F. Achleitner. *From Danube Limestone to Basaltic Lava. The Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (MUMOK) a Time Machine?* in M. Ammer and C. Mittermayr (eds.), *Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien. The Collection*. Catalogue. Vienna, pp. 27–33.

⁷ See: Irina Karasik. *Obrazovanie i deyatel'nost' otdeleniya noveishikh techeny* in Irina Karasik and Evgenia Petrova (eds.), *Gosudarstvenny Russky muzei. Iz istorii muzeya*. St. Petersburg, 1995, pp. 58–80.

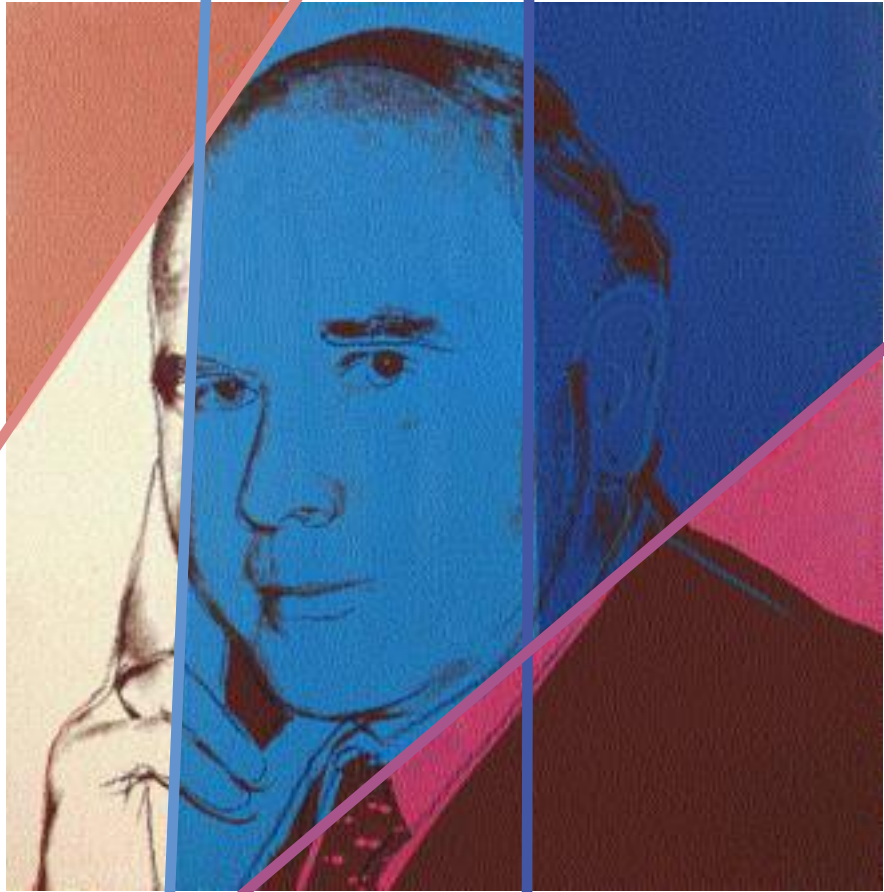
⁸ See: B. Ternovets. *Pis'ma. Dnevnik. Stat'i*. Compilation, introduction, texts accompanying the sections and commentary by L. S. Ale-shina and N. V. Yavorskaya. Moscow, 1977.



Unknown Artist
 Royal Meissen Porcelain Manufactory
 Tea and coffee service with scenes from Antoine Watteau
 on a gold background. Circa 1750
 Porcelain. Height: 11.5 (teapot); 24 (coffeepot)
 Ludwig Collection, Bamberg

Unknown Artist
 Camel with a Pack Saddle
 Circa 701–750
 Fired clay, three-color glaze (sancai)
 Height: 83.3
 Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne

RUSSIAN MUSEUM, ST PETERSBURG
LUDWIG MUSEUM IN THE RUSSIAN MUSEUM



visions

OF THE LUDWIG COLLECTION



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Photography

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We would like to express our sincere gratitude to:

Walter Queins (Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation)

Hendrik Stängle (Gunter Sachs Foundation)

Viktoria Ilyushkina

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Printed in Italy

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