

F. W. Oberg

Danish industrialist, art collector and gallerist

Frederik Wilhelm Oberg was born 1913 in Denmark, six years in school, started out as a window dresser, then built a high-precision bronze foundry, Panther Bronze, serving mainly shipbuilders and also owned a mechanical tool shop.

More importantly, he had a lifelong passion for contemporary art.

He joined an art club in his twenties and later began collecting Danish painters and then COBRA artists, *Asger Jorn* in particular whom he and his wife, Gudrun, knew well.

Jorn was from the town of Silkeborg and so was she. In the years around 1950, they supported the Jorn family economically by now and then buying a painting or ceramics. At the time, Jorn was struggling, poor and considered mentally ill by his surroundings.

When Oberg turned 50 he sold the foundry to devote himself fully to art. In 1964 he was a co-founder of the *Jutland Art Academy* in Aarhus.

During the 1960s he also sold the Danish/COBRA collection he had built and began collecting prints instead, European and American artists such as Hamilton, Paolozzi, Rauschenberg, Johns, Lichtenstein, Motherwell, Stella, Hockney, and Francis.

He also sold the tools in his shop in Aarhus and converted it to a gallery in Aarhus in 1966. He opened a second one in Copenhagen a few years later, both called *Ars Studeo*.

The collection and *Ars Studeo* became a pioneering endeavour in the Danish art life of the time.



He not only arranged exhibitions in his gallery but also at e.g. the *Bella Center*, the *Louisiana Museum* and the *National Gallery* and arranged exhibitions for young Danish artists abroad. He loved art and didn't need to make a profit from these activities.

Although most collectors were into painting and sculpture, prints fascinated him for two reasons; one, printing in larger-than-one edition had the potential of reaching a wider audience and he wanted good art to spread.

Secondly, printing techniques, frames, paper qualities, conservation etc. spoke to the technician, the industrialist in him. He designed the frames himself, abandoned the passe partout and went for "floating" of the prints in the frames; and he studied paper qualities and worked with conservators.

F.W. and Gudrun Oberg visit ULAE in November 1980, Tatyana Grosman between them

F. W. Oberg with Bill Goldston of ULAE, November 1980

How did Oberg decide to buy works by these artists who, at the time, were very avant-garde and very little known in a country such as Denmark?

He had no education in art-related matters and didn't think in terms of what one "should" buy or what might later increase in value.

An innovator himself, he looked for artistic expressions that were innovative, experimental and often provocative. He simply bought what he spontaneously liked and thought he could afford.

His main information tool was art magazines - *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, *Art Forum* and many others as well as auction house catalogues. Studying them, often in the late night, helped him develop his English too.

He also kept himself updated by going to fairs such as *Documenta* and *The Biennale*. And visited and interacted with leading European galleries and printers of the time - Beyeler, Sonnabend, Denise René, Marlborough, Petersburg Press, Alecto, etc.

A large part of the contemporary print collection was bought in the late 1960s and during the 1970s at *Gemini G.E.L.* in Los Angeles and at Tatyana Grosman's *ULAE* in New York. He had identified them as the best art printing anywhere. By correspondence he got to know the managers and master printers and got news early about new editions.

The collection eventually counted at least 600 pieces and many other artists than those mentioned above as well as remnants from the many exhibitions, works donated to the Obergs, etc.



During a month-long visit to the U.S. in November 1980 - in his third year with cancer and his last trip abroad - he visited Gemini G.E.L., Tatyana Grosman's print-shop, Robert Rauschenberg as well as lots of leading galleries and museums. A very important trip for him.

His last exhibition was held at the National Gallery in Copenhagen, photos by *Aaron Siskind*.

F. W. Oberg died in spring 1981 and his two sons, Carl Arne and Jan Oberg, divided the collection in two after their mother's death in 1996.

Jan Oberg
Lund, Sweden
September 28, 2016