

# OBSERVATOIRE DE L'ART CONTEMPORAIN

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## Collector profile: André Magnin

*Contemporary Art | Through his world travels, André Magnin slowly discovers that to learn from others we need to “unlearn what we naively first put into our heads.” André Magnin is skeptical of Western certainty and arrogance. His childhood in Madagascar accustoms him to the confrontation between worlds. Spending his adolescence in eastern France, he engages intensely with the waves of music emanating from across the Channel and the Atlantic, while at the same time initiating himself to Dadaist, surrealist, and electric poetry, to the living arts, to the Situationist International bulletin, Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, Ralph Rumney and the theory of the derive... whose formidable presence will mark his life.*



André Magnin, © Alighiero Boetti, Paris, 2015

He lives on the rue Battant, then the rue Proudhon in Besançon, where, with his circle of friends, he spends more time organizing musical, artistic and social events than attending university. In 1979, with the artist collective PAP'CIRCUS, he organizes the first performance festival, “a local catastrophe,” that convinces him to never become an artist. In 1983, he moves to Paris where he meets a series of individuals who will mark his life : Anne Tronche and the art critic Georges Boudaille, who he assists in organizing the Nouvelle Biennale de Paris in 1985, the artists Christian Boltanski, Jean-Michel Alberola, Niele Toroni, Bertrand Lavier, who introduce him to the director of the Berne Kunsthalle, Jean-Hubert Martin, in 1986. Martin is in the midst of organizing the 1989 global exhibition “Magicians of the Earth” that brings together at the Grande Halle of la Villette and the Centre Pompidou over a hundred artists from different cultures and five continents. This breathtakingly ambitious project leads him, between 1986 and 1989, to seek out artists in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Far North, British Columbia, and in a number of Sub-Saharan African countries. In the wake of this project, the collector Jean Pigozzi hires him to assemble the first collection dedicated to contemporary Sub-Saharan African art.

Twenty years of “intense” travel to the deepest recesses of Africa follow, looking for the most original artists, inventors of new worlds and languages, and the most dazzling and powerful works. Since then, he exhibits their works and places them in the most prestigious museums, foundations and private collections. Nowadays, he contributes widely to the development of this market and participates in the writing of a history of modern and contemporary African art, and a more global art history text.

### **Contemporary art?**

For André Magnin, contemporary art exists in the primordial space of a “growing family,” continuously in the intimate realm of artists he calls his “pure friends” who are motivated by the desire to make art without being preoccupied with schools and ambient styles. His encounter with Alighiero Bœtti in 1986, at his exhibition for the Nouveau Musée de Villeurbanne, is the beginning of an unending friendship that will last until his death. He organizes two of the twenty steps of On Kawara’s Pure Consciousness in Ivory Coast and Madagascar. It is the same for all the artists with which he is in contact, such as his strange meeting with Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, who he met in Abidjan before introducing him to a global public. “Each of my encounters could make for a book.” André Magnin speaks the language of artists, a language that breaks all codes and develops an intense proximity through a fraternal network.

### **His collection?**

His collection isn’t a collection in the traditional sense of the world. He sees it as more of a notebook, with visual chapters and countless adventures. Most of the works that surround him express that. There is a particular story behind each “treasure” : Jean-Michel Alberola, Alighiero Bœtti, Walter Swennen, William Eggleston, Huang Yong Ping, Marcel Miracle, François Curlet, Carsten Höller, Didier Marcel, Franck Scurti, Hugues Reip and Dewar & Gicquel... A small Ryan McLaughlin painting representing a whale with candles on top is “one of the few paintings I’ve acquired, I couldn’t get it out of my head.”

### **Money?**

“I built everything without money.” He created a gallery to bring recognition to African art in the international market. But selling isn’t in his temperament. “Selling a work I love rips my heart in two. I am very closely connected with a few collectors, but it is mostly my small team that takes care of sales, loans, and who manage the unmanageable.” The money that enters heads right back to Africa, to the artists, where it affords them the means to develop their work in peace and quiet, to feed living ecosystems, economic initiatives and educational projects for children...

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