

INSIDE ART

Carol Vogel

A New Friend For Mr. Pointy

When François Pinault attended the Venice Biennale in June, he made a rather large purchase. Mr. Pinault, the luxury goods magnate who is a passionate collector of contemporary art (as well as the owner of Christie's), bought the heart of Takashi Murakami's whimsical installation, which went up with great fanfare this week at Rockefeller Center.

He bought a 30-foot-tall Buddha-like sculpture fashioned from painted fiberglass, which the artist named "Tongari-kun," Japanese for "Mr. Pointy." Mr. Pinault also snapped up four smaller fantastical fiberglass figures stationed like guards around Mr. Pointy.

Mr. Pinault could not be reached for comment, but Marianne Boesky, the Chelsea dealer who represents Mr. Murakami, confirmed the purchase. She declined to reveal the price, but contemporary art experts believe it was around \$1.5 million.

The Rockefeller Center installation of "Reversed Double Helix," as the installation is called, is the first of an edition of three and is on view through Oct. 12. The second has also been sold to a collector, Ms. Boesky said, although she would not identify the buyer. The third is intended for the Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, N.Y., scheduled to open in June. The hospital was the original inspiration for the installation, Ms. Boesky said. Officials there asked her if Mr. Murakami would create a centerpiece for the collection of child-friendly art it is forming.

One part of the installation in Rockefeller Center that Mr. Pinault has not bought is a pair of balloons 30 feet in diameter decorated with the artist's signature eyeballs. They float 60 feet above the cafe in the Rockefeller Center ice rink.

"He hasn't seen them yet," Ms. Boesky said, referring to Mr. Pinault. "Hopefully when he does he'll give me a call."

Mr. Pinault does have a specific site in mind for Mr. Pointy and his guards. He is about to break ground on the François Pinault Foundation for Contemporary Art, designed by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando, on the Île Seguin, an island in the Seine in western Paris, scheduled to open in about three years.

The Murakami isn't the only artwork Mr. Pinault has recently



Richard Perry/The New York Times

Takashi Murakami's "Mr. Pointy" on display in Rockefeller Center.

bought for the foundation. He also purchased "Balloon Dog," a monumental sculpture by Jeff Koons, and Maurizio Cattelan's "Charlie," a robotic likeness of the artist as a child, riding a tricycle steered by an invisible operator. It was seen zooming around the pavilions this summer at the Venice Biennale.

High-Profile Wall Space

The fabled 22-foot-tall curtain that Picasso painted in 1919 for Diaghilev's ballet "Le Tricorne" is still hanging between the two rooms of the Four Seasons restaurant, which Philip Johnson designed for the landmark Seagram Building on Park Avenue. But the restaurant's owners are aware that it could be taken down any day now. (Christie's has been trying to sell it for months.) Other familiar images by artists

like Miró and Larry Rivers that once hung in the restaurant are already gone. Vivendi Universal, the troubled French entertainment conglomerate that bought Seagram in 2000, has been selling off the art collection.

In the lobby where the Miró tapestries once hung there is now stock photography bought on the Internet. But it is only temporary. Alex von Bidder and Julian Niccolini, the restaurant's owners, are reaching out to the art world for help. They recently sent out a letter to about 15 dealers asking for proposals to fill the space exclusively for a year.

In a private dining room off the Pool Room where a self-portrait by Rivers once hung is now a painting by Alex Katz on loan from PaceWildenstein. In two private dining rooms behind the Grill Room, where there had been works by Lichtenstein and Stella, are now two paintings by Hel-

en Frankenthaler lent by Edgar Bronfman Jr., the scion of Seagram's founding family. But there is still plenty of empty wall space waiting to be filled.

"We have a great tradition of art, and we would like to continue it," Mr. von Bidder said. "This restaurant is like a public trust." He added, "This is an opportunity to exhibit great art in a great spot."

The Whitney Conserves

Marcel Breuer always envisioned a conservation studio when he designed the Whitney Museum of American Art. But only now, 37 years after the museum opened, is his vision being realized. Gifts of \$6 million — including \$2.5 million from Robert W. Wilson, a trustee, along with a \$1.85-million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and several individual donations — have made it possible for the Whitney to begin a serious conservation initiative. It includes a new center for art conservation in a fourth-floor room facing Madison Avenue that Breuer had intended to be used for the purpose. (Over the years the space had been administrative offices.)

Samuel Anderson, the partner in Alspector Anderson Architects who is in charge of the project, has designed the narrow space to be as compact as a ship's galley. (His firm also designed the new conservation studio at the Pierpont Morgan Library and is working on a conservation center for the newly expanded Museum of Modern Art.)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, the Whitney's director of conservation, who also heads the technical study of modern art department at the Harvard University Art Museums, said that her mission to set up a proper conservation studio and department has been particularly exciting. "I'm not hampered by a traditional approach in formulating a department that copes with modern media," she said. "Now, with this in-house presence, we can expand the consciousness of conservation into the daily culture of the museum."

Part of the department's efforts will include researching and working with living artists, as she has been doing at Harvard. She also intends to re-evaluate the Whitney's collection.

"Our research will be spawned by interviews I do with artists," Ms. Mancusi-Ungaro added. "Over time our approach is to study artists' techniques and record their attitude to the aging of their own art."