

# WILD ABOUT ART

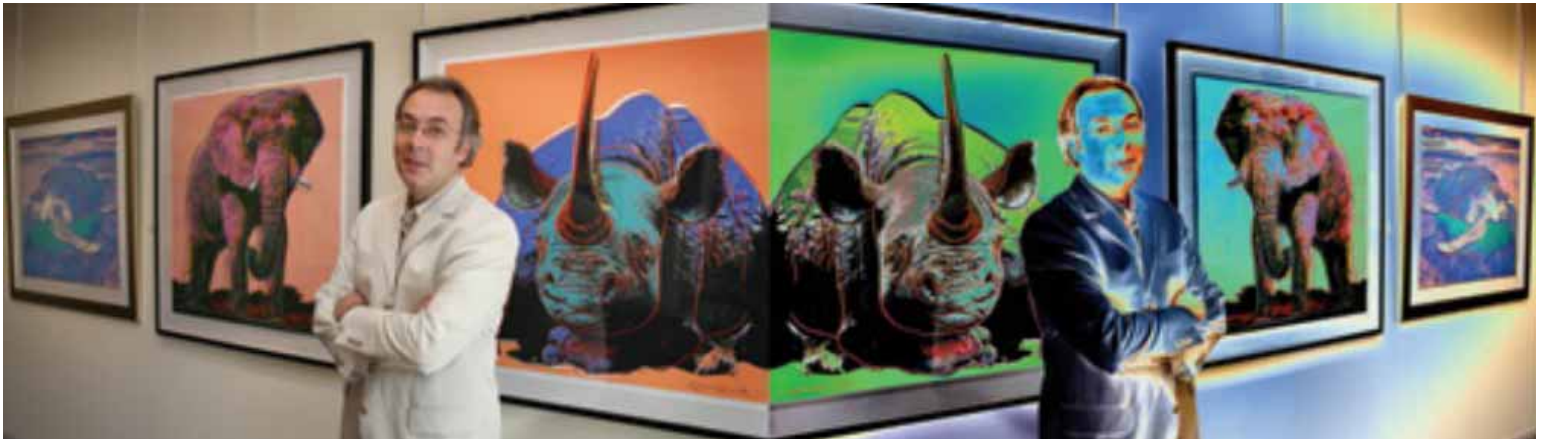


photo by Katie Deits

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**A**rt connoisseur and consultant Ted Vassilev's minimalist clothing and calm presence give him a Zen-like appearance, which contrasts with the vivid Warhol silk screens of wild animals on the walls of his Palm Beach gallery. But don't let the serene façade fool you. While his intellectual knowledge of art is extensive, his being surges with a passion for art and for helping others to join him in feeling the same way about their own art collections.

As president and co-owner of DTR Modern Galleries, with locations in Boston, New York and Palm Beach, he stewards a staff of art consultants who assist clients in acquiring investment-quality collections that they will also treasure.

DTR offers an impressive selection of 20th century art, focusing on the masters of the Surrealist, Pop Art and Post-War movements. It specializes in multiples, such as silk screens by Andy Warhol, etchings from the Ambroise Vollard Suite, and very rare Picasso drawings from his Blue Period.

"We carry the most recognizable images by the most famous artists of these periods. Our philosophy is to match the most preferred medium that the artist cares about, with the most reasonable prices," Vassilev said. "For example, Warhol is most famous for his silk screens, not his sculpture, and as far as I am aware, we have the largest holding of Warhols in south Florida – more than one hundred pieces."

"Unlike many galleries, we own the art we display," he continued. This is possible because Vassilev has been collecting for years and has established the collection over a period of time. Originally from Bulgaria,



Salvador Dali, "Planetary and Scatologic Vision", 1974, *Laconquete du Cosmos II (The Conquest of the Cosmos II)*, Original engraving and lithographic color with some collage on BFK Rives paper.

Vassilev emigrated to the United States seventeen years ago – "after the collapse of the Berlin Wall."

He did doctoral studies in political science at Boston College and was a fellow at Harvard University's Russian Research Centre in Boston from 1992 to 1995. Vassilev is a Christie's New York

alumnus and an art advisor certified by the Royal Society of Arts in London. Currently, he is Chairman of the Board of the Christie's Education Alumni Association of New York.

From 1998 to 2005, Vassilev was also Director of Development and Exhibitions at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA) – one of the largest non-profit organizations in New York, supporting contemporary visual artists. At EFA, he was active in launching the Printmaking Workshop, honoring the artistic legacy of master printer Bob Blackburn. Founded by Blackburn in 1948 and recently re-established, it stands today as the oldest artist-run print shop in the United States.

With business partner Diko Mihov, he also maintains an exclusive by-appointment-only gallery in Manhattan. His gallery in New York City is committed to cutting-edge, late 20th century and current art. The Boston and Palm Beach galleries are positioned to concentrate on 20th century masters.

"New York City is the largest market for art, and all young artists go there," Vassilev said. "It is the best market for emerging and experimental artists."

And, always on the lookout for a new art genius or trend on the horizon, he fixes his keen eye also on up-and-coming artists. "I usually visit a lot of studios in Boston, Paris, New York, London and Berlin, looking for new talent. Of course, once a gallery is established, the artists come to you."

"In New York, the medium is not the underlying factor. In new art, people are looking for what the message is and how the artists articulate it," Vassilev explained. "First, I look at the medium and



Marc Chagall, "Woman Juggler", 1956, Color Lithographie

decide if it is the best medium that can enhance the message and give the viewer the best experience when viewing the art."

Vassilev is looking for "something that hasn't been said before or something that enriches the language of the visual arts. Also a consideration is the presentation of the art. How do you preserve the art? I want to make sure that the art is preservable when I present it to collectors or museums and corporate collections."

Vassilev is very selective. "I care about the condition of the artwork. It must be pristine," he emphasized. "Warhols are very speculative. The condition of the work can have a large reflection on the price. Pristine vs. poor to fair can make 100% difference in the price."

From his vast experience in the art world, Vassilev designed his galleries with a focused-collection philosophy. "The way we operate our collections at DTR is different from other galleries, which may offer paintings and sculpture from the 18th century, mixed with 19th or 20th century pieces. I will pass [on purchasing] a 19th century still life, I will pass on a Kandinsky or a Mondrian because they don't fit with what we do. They are certainly fine artists, but our specialty lies in the Surrealists, Post War American Art and Pop Art."

"In our galleries, you will not see a 19th century still life combined with early 20th century geometric abstraction, next to a Warhol. We are consistent in our vision, because it is a collection," Vassilev said. "There should be a driving force behind a collection. For example, collecting Pop artists, whose most recognizable work is in the early '60s, as opposed to generally collecting Post-War art: the first collection would have a higher monetary value because it has a clear focus. A collector may actually spend more money on the second collection, but in the end it would be worth less than the first, highly specific collection."

From this platform, DTR bases their vision as art consultants. "We help educate our clients and focus on establishing a cohesive collection for them. Our

consultants go to their homes, view their collections and make suggestions. Our clients come to our galleries to discuss what may be good for their collections. Once we have established the criteria for their specific collection goals, if we don't have the art already in our galleries, we usually can find it for them within two to four weeks. We also softly advise our clients on pieces that they may want to sell and replace with other, more suitable pieces. A collection is a dynamic structure — it keeps changing."

Sustaining a collection is also about forging relationships. "We want to make sure that our collectors get the right price. Collectors drop by and chat with our consultants. They establish personal relationships. Our consultants match the right work with the right person and at the right price, as well," Vassilev pointed out. "We are not about selling a piece or two, we are about helping our clients to establish a collection, or if they have a collection, to enhance it."

At the end of the day, it is the vision of the collection, not a mechanical gathering of pieces," he continued. "The idea of the collection is based on a theme or an art movement or medium; for example, a collection of sculpture from ancient to contemporary."

When asked about what he art he has on the walls of his own home, Vassilev responded, "In my home, I love Miró and Warhol — they are my two favorites. I also like the erotic Picassos that he did late in his life. Last fall, our Boston gallery staged an exhibition of erotic Picassos from the 347 Suite to the 156 Suite to Lysistrata, including a lecture and book signing with Picasso's granddaughter, Diana Widmaier Picasso. She discussed her book in which she presented a chronologically arranged collection of ninety of Picasso's erotically charged works,



Andy Warhol, "Chaney", ads suite, 1985, screen print on Lenox Museum board.

including intimate revelations about her grandfather's amorous adventures."

The extremely successful exhibition, Vassilev explained, "dispelled the erroneous notion that the late Picassos were not as good as his early pieces. Unfortunately, it is often the case that aesthetic and artistic judgment gets twisted by the art market. And," he added, "this is why we educate and teach people about aesthetic values and monetary aspects."

As the fervent art lover behind the calm façade, Vassilev shares his knowledge and passion for art that help his clients build collections to stir their souls. ♦



Robert Longo, "Cindy", Lithograph



Robert Longo, "Max", Lithograph