

Prof. Dr. Dr. Herbert Batliner (26 December 1928 – 8 June 2019)

Herbert Batliner, one of our era's truly great art collectors and patrons of the arts, passed away on 8 June 2019 at age 90. The Liechtenstein native's valuable art collection, which numbers among the world's most important collections of modernist painting in existence today, was entrusted by him to Vienna's ALBERTINA Museum in 2007 as a permanent loan. Former Director General Klaus Albrecht Schröder has described this loan as "a highlight in the history of the ALBERTINA Museum that enabled it to establish its first large display collection that would be permanently open to the public. Without Herbert Batliner, the ALBERTINA Museum would not be what it is now."

The Batliner Collection has since served as the basis of numerous successful exhibitions centered on artists such as Picasso, Magritte, Max Ernst, Matisse, and Monet. The legendary art historian and museum director Werner Hofmann referred to Batliner's collection as "the realization of his dream of creating an instructional journey through modernist painting from impressionism to Picasso."

Herbert Batliner also played a crucial role in the Propter Homines Foundation's decision to fund the construction of the ALBERTINA Museum's Propter Homines Hall, where all of the museum's major exhibitions—from Dürer to Raphael to van Gogh—have since been shown.

Herbert Batliner began collecting art during the 1960s. Quite early on, he discovered not only Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and other important masters of German expressionism, then still widely viewed as "degenerate," but also their role models Matisse and the Fauves as well as Russian avant-gardists ranging from Malevich to Chagall. Moreover, it was while Alberto Giacometti was still alive that Herbert Batliner acquired sculptures and paintings by the artist—who, as the collector himself once put it, "became the driving force behind this rapidly growing collection for me personally." Batliner's later years saw his interests shift increasingly toward contemporary art, and it is thanks to this more recent curiosity on the part of the collector that the Albertina Museum now holds extensive groups of works by Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, Arnulf Rainer, and Alex Katz.

Herbert Batliner's professional life was devoted in equal measures to the development and leadership of his international law firm in Vaduz and to his deep involvement in the political and judicial life of Liechtenstein, where he served for many years as the president of its Administrative Court and thereafter spent many years as the president of its State Court (which functions as the principality's constitutional court).

Batliner, born to a father from Liechtenstein and a mother from Austria, made a special contribution to the deepening of relations between the Principality of Liechtenstein and the neighboring Austrian Republic. He nurtured these relations through his sponsorship of numerous Austrian universities as well as various events. In recognition of his deep ties to the Republic of Austria, Herbert Batliner received the Grand Decoration in Gold with Star for service to the Austrian Republic of Austria in 1999. Later on, in 2007, he was awarded the Grand Decoration in Gold for service to the City of Vienna by Vienna's Mayor Michael Häupl.

Austria's former Federal President Heinz Fischer said the following of Herbert Batliner: "It was decades ago that I became acquainted with and developed great esteem for Dr. Batliner and his wife. And as federal president, it was a pleasure for me to meet him repeatedly and express to him my gratitude for his magnificent support of the ALBERTINA Museum and thus of our Republic of Austria. He was a marvelous patron."

The artworks that Herbert Batliner, with his unmatched eye for artistic quality, succeeded in bringing together laid the cornerstone for the ALBERTINA Museum's holdings of both modern art and contemporary art—collections that now fascinate and inspire over a million visitors from all over the world each and every year.

Since Herbert Batliner's passing, his surviving spouse Rita Batliner has joined their four children Angelika Moosleithner, Thomas Batliner, Caroline Egger, and Alexander Batliner in overseeing the future of the collection.