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JOYS AND WOES OF AN  
ART LOVER

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## *Joys and woes of an art lover*

### Éric de Rothschild

To begin, I would like to tell you that the reason I'm here is that Leopoldo Rodés, with whom our family had very close ties, asked me to come. It was with complete horror and disbelief that we learnt about the accident which took him away from us. Disbelief, because Leopoldo was life itself and he made everything here better. He had an extraordinary energy and he had all these passions, one of which was, of course, art. What he did for MACBA, and what he did as chairman of this Foundation was extraordinary. There's one detail which I think is the most important, and that's when at the funeral ceremony in Barcelona his grandchildren began talking about him, one of the really moving things that all of them brought up was that they absolutely adored the moments when he took them to museums. It's interesting that when they were talking about him they were always remembered that he had introduced them to art, and that shows his fantastic capacity to transmit his enthusiasm to everybody. When you see it's the young who share that feeling, then you understand that he was somebody who had a power, an energy that was quite unique.

So, it was he who had the power to persuade me to take part in this programme, because I am actually rather embarrassed to be in front of you all, all a lot of experts, people who know probably infinitely more than I do, and it's as a passionate amateur that I'm going to talk to you. I don't like the word *collector*... Now very much, when you're at elegant dinner parties sitting next to somebody who doesn't know you, they turn to you and say 'Do you collect?' And it is, I find, the most horrible thing that you can actually ask somebody, 'Do you collect?'. 'Do you like art?' okay, but 'Do you collect?' There's something rather greedy in the idea of collecting, and I much prefer to be thought of as an innocent amateur who likes looking at painting, who likes touching sculpture, who likes scrutinising prints. Someone who loves contemporary art, primitive art... All these things I enjoy, and I would say that art is one of the joys of life.

In addressing this to all of you, I think when I look round the room, I think that I probably share this passion with a lot of people who are here. And I'm not sure I'd say I collect, but when I can and when I feel that there's an object of art *without* which I cannot live, and that I have the means to buy it, I try to buy it, or if it's in a museum, then I go and see it as often as I can. My brother-in-law Pierre Rosenberg, who was here a few weeks ago, always says 'Éric, your collection is absolutely ridiculous, you only bought the things you actually loved!' And I say 'Yes, that is the case, but it wasn't bought with the idea that this goes with that, that this is a picture which is just at the moment when this artist stopped doing landscape and began doing portraits, or that he all of a sudden understood something about perspective, etc., and this is the first picture or the

last picture he did before that...' No. It isn't that way of collecting, as I say, it's much more about the actual works of art.

I must say that I feel incredibly lucky, I've been very lucky throughout my collecting life. The first thing is probably having been born and brought up in a family which has always been of extraordinary collectors. It's very interesting: in each generation there were some who bought because they needed to fill their houses so they bought Reisener furniture and Rembrandt paintings because it was the right thing to have on the walls, but there were always others in the family, in each generation, who really loved their art.

So I was lucky, therefore, to be brought up in a house by parents who were really great art lovers. One of the thing which is amusing is the number of family portraits we have. Family portraits are rather boring, but in my family it's interesting to see that my mother was painted by Balthus, my sister was painted by Giacometti, my wife was painted by Mike Andrews, and I had a portrait done of me by Warhol! So you see we have quite a spectrum and it shows that the family really liked artists and was probably in good contact with them, and they [the artists] wanted to paint them.

I was also very lucky in that in the mid-sixties I was in London, when Bacon, Freud, Andrews and Auerbach were all at the beginning of their careers and knowing most of them, anyway Freud quite well, Mike Andrews, Bacon a little... It was a time when one was able to get a feeling of being a collector, and it was also a lucky time when they were just starting and it was possible, even on a small budget, which I had at that time, to be able to buy some of their pictures.

Talking actually about portraiture, it's interesting to see that my great-great grandfather, who was also a real art lover, had his wife painted by Ingres and his daughter painted by Ary Scheffer. At the time, the Ary Scheffer cost him more than the Ingres did, so, it shows the evolution of taste, how things move from one artist to another. When I see all the young artists, especially at the moment, I always wonder what is actually going to happen to their market value. I was in New York in the seventies, and there I became great friends with Warhol, with Lichtenstein, etc. Can you imagine what fun it must have been to have been in The Factory at that time with Warhol? It was extraordinary, you saw an enormous amount of artists, and you saw Warhol who was there and who was full of energy and passion. It was an extraordinarily exciting time. There again, it was a time when they were young and you were able, if you had a little bit of money, you were able to acquire their art.

The interesting thing about that time in fact, both in London and in New York, is that for me it was a time when I was absolutely certain of myself. I knew Freud was a great artist, I knew that Andrews was. I bought a Bacon but much later, because I never actually found the one I really liked at that time; the one I bought, I bought quite a bit later. In the sixties and seventies my cousin León Lambert was a brilliant banker and also a brilliant young collector. I was very close to him, more on collecting than on the banking side, and León said to me

'You know, with modern art, with contemporary art, you collect well but only for ten years in your life.' You have ten years in your life then you know, you understand in art and it's your time, you're in complete osmosis with those periods. I was absolutely sure that Warhol was a great artist and he had this thing of completely distilling the mood of the period, the seventies in New York, which was a really fascinating time when America was coming of age. It was the end of the Vietnam War and all of a sudden there was a desire to move on from a simplistic view in which everything was in black and white. If you analyse American advertising in the late the sixties and seventies you'll see it was almost childlike, and then it changed completely in a few years. Warhol was suddenly ridiculing the dollar sign, and revealing that there was a certain amount of interest. All of a sudden you had the cans, the Campbell's soups, expressing what America was actually going through. It was the end of a period, and that I found particularly interesting.

I make my brother-in-law [Pierre Rosenberg] absolutely mad with rage when I say that there is a great similarity between Warhol and Fragonard. And you say, 'Why Fragonard?' Fragonard painted at the time of the French Revolution, and when you look at *The Swing*, or you visit the Frick [Collection] you feel that there's anguish in those paintings, he is really explaining that the marvellous time of the happy kings in Versailles is coming to an end. And when you look at the pictures you discover this, and that is why I absolutely adore Fragonard; I can spend ages looking at his paintings because they contain a sort of suspended time and anguish. My brother-in-law doesn't agree at all, I can tell you that.

Later on I was in Paris, and there I had many artist friends and I knew quite a few dealers. There was one dealer I was madly in love with, although she was about thirty years older than I was, who was Marianne Feilchenfeldt. I don't know whether any of you have heard of her, she was a German lady who ended up in Zurich after the war, and she had a most extraordinary eye. I used to go with her, I was a student in Zurich and I used to go and have lunch with her once a week, and she would show me what she had for sale. She always had the great paintings by the artists. She had a way of really choosing *les chefs d'oeuvre*; there's something about that which in a way I've always tried to do and that is, when you like an artist, waiting till something comes up which really is his *chef d'oeuvre*. Maybe I'm boasting, but I think I have at least two and probably three that can be counted among the masterpieces. I have an extraordinary Balthus which came straight from Renou, his first dealer, and when he died Marianne (Marianne Feilchenfeldt) was sort of in charge of looking after the collection which his children didn't want, and she said, 'That is the picture you should buy, Éric', and I broke my piggy bank and bought it. It's the same thing with a very beautiful Bacon which I have, called *Two Figures in the Grass*, and what I love about it is that it has an enormous tenderness in it. I met Bacon later on in my life, but you felt with him that he was somebody who cared about other people. When he was drunk he was terrible, he would fight, but when he was himself in fact he was somebody who had an enormous tenderness, and this is revealed in

his painting. I think it probably is one of his most extraordinary paintings, and there again it was. The man who had it, I don't know why, he rang me up first and said, 'I've got *Two Figures in the Grass* for sale. Do you want it?', and there again, I broke my second piggy bank and jumped on it, and was able to get that.

And recently I was able to buy a Poussin. To be able to get hold of it was also a bit of an adventure because it had been promised to the Louvre Abu Dhabi, but the sheikh didn't come to see it at the right date and the owner said, 'Oh, I gave him the right of this date, the date is passed, you can sell it to somebody else.' Indiscreetly, I'd seen the painting, and the man rang me up and said, 'Do you want it?', and I said, 'Of course I want it, you'll have the cheque tomorrow!' So it was again, I think, a question of jumping at the occasion and making sure that you completely forgot whether the painting is too expensive, or not too expensive. I always say the only regrets I have are the paintings that I haven't bought. That is my greatest regret. It's funny, because I've never had any advisers but, as I was saying, I've always really bought on impulse and I like my collection!

The art world is at a very curious moment; it is probably experiencing a bubble. The bubble could perhaps come from the fact that there isn't that much good art around and yet there are more and more people who want to buy it. It's a little bit like wine: there's a limited amount of wine and there are more and more people who want to buy wine. Exactly like what has happened with wine, the Russians began buying art and now the Chinese are entering the market and so are the tycoons. It's become a sort of fashionable thing to collect, so that's why people ask you 'Do you collect?'

Something I find very disturbing is that there's now a sort of branding. All of a sudden you see pictures that are not very interesting but are by well-known artists and so the prices that are put on them are absolutely ridiculous. They're brand names. This week, however, I've seen that quality has once again shone through. Probably in a very short time buyers have become much more sophisticated, because you see differences in pricing between an extraordinary collection but which to a certain extent is rather brand-like. The prices are aggravatingly high and very few people can actually begin to think about buying such paintings. The market has bubbled, although in recent times I think the branding has slightly worn down and the quality has increased.

I wanted conclude on this point. I think that loving art is not about money, it's not about owning; it's rather a marvellous feeling. I was in New York last week and had two mornings when I didn't have much to do so I spent one in the Met and the other in MoMA, and I had that marvellous warm, extraordinary feeling which you have when you look at great art. For me, it's a moment of pleasure, a moment of peace, a moment of understanding. It's also a moment of sharing, and that is the joy of art. I feel, to make a comparison, that when you're in a museum it's as if you're warmed by the sun. The sun belongs to everybody, so you see these pictures that belong to everybody, but you feel this marvellous

feeling of being warmed by the sun. And when you're in your own house and it's your own collection, it's a little bit as if you're warmed by your own fireplace. I must say that I feel this warmth and I feel, as I say, very lucky to have been able to get this warmth in me. It's given to you by your own, of course, by your own soul, by the artists you know, by the dealers you know, by the amateurs, but also by your family, by your friends. I feel very lucky to have been able to have this passion and with the small means I had, and which grew a little when I was a bit older, to have been able to satisfy this passion by buying a certain amount of works of art and having them in my house.

Thank you very much.

Q: I'd like you to talk to us about your greatest disappointments.

ER: Ah, my greatest disappointment. Ah, the greatest disappointment was when I didn't buy, the paintings I didn't buy. One of the paintings I remember very well was the *chef d'oeuvre* by Marquet. [Albert Marquet], he paints ports, etc. There was once a painting that Marianne Feilchenfeldt had, a beautiful painting of a nude girl (I still remember) in mauve stockings. It was at the time when I was a student in Zurich, and it was way above what I could afford. I remember the sadness I felt at not being able to put my hands on it. And there are some Schieles which I really very much liked, which I wasn't able to buy. I bid for them and I was overbid, and that was a sad moment. When I was young I very much had to swap paintings because I didn't have enough money, so I had to give one to get another. Those paintings that I had to give in order to get others (which I love today) I'm quite sad at not having been able to keep at the time.

Q: Apart from a collector, we know you are a great supporter of artists through the Foundation. Could you tell us a little bit about the Foundation of which you're the chairman? It seems to be one of the most important Foundations in France.

ER: The FNAGP [Fondation nationale des Arts graphiques et plastiques] is a very curious structure. It was created by Bernard Anthonioz, who was one of Malraux's advisers when he was Minister of Culture. The State actually owned two curious houses which had been given: one of them (given by my great-great grand-aunt) was this rather beautiful house on the Rue Berrier, which is just off the Faubourg Saint-Honoré in the centre of Paris, and the other was a rather extraordinary property in Nogent-sur-Marne. Anthonioz put the two together and created this Foundation. There was also a donation by the Smith-Champion sisters [Madelaine Smith-Champion and Jeanne Smith]. One of the reasons for Nogent was to house old artists. It was made as a house for old artists, and it was an absolutely marvellous place, but the State was doing nothing with it until it became a Foundation and they began to manage it more intelligently.

Dominique Bozo, a good friend of mine who was running the Pompidou at the time, asked me to take the project on. In about six or seven years I transformed

the whole structure that took care of old people into something organised, supported by the State, and from then on it ceased to cost money. So all those artists who couldn't pay got a State pension. And from then onwards we were able to get the Foundation in shape and to do a certain amount of things, notably increasing the rent on all the properties they had, which were very badly rented. In general, the Foundation looks after artists when they are young and productive, because we give grants for creation, so if an artist hasn't got enough money to create a work of art which he really wants to create we can give him up to fifty thousand Euros to this end. And there's no other structure in France which has got the means to do that, because we distribute over half a million Euros every year. On the other hand, we have numerous studios, ateliers, so we can give them places where they can work, and when they get old we can look after them. So, we take care of the whole process. It's actually a rather nice thing to be a chairman of, especially now. The first part, which is helping the artists when they're young and productive and need support, we've only been able to do for three or four years. Although I've been chairman now since 1989, it takes a long time to move this sort of structure.

Q: Inaudible question.

ER: I buy paintings and sculpture and I actually from time to time sell the furniture to buy paintings. You also think to a certain extent of what you buy, you've also got to think of your children. In fact, they don't really want to have furniture or things of that sort. But I think if the old masters are not too large, they'll love them. When my eldest son had his own apartment he took along a Chevalier Volaire [Pierre-Jacques Volaire] of the explosion of Mount Vesuvius. And my youngest son took a Lichtenstein when he moved to his own house. They have a free pick of everything. It's now common knowledge too that my brother and I were selling these two extraordinary Rembrandts which were in the collection. If I hadn't had any children I would certainly have bought his picture and kept them both. But I was also in a way thinking about my children; it's not the sort of things which they will have houses for, where they'll want to put pictures of this sort. So, in a way it's quite nice because I now have a nice little piggy bank, so even in this inflated world I can make new purchases.

Q: You have been surrounded by extraordinary works of art, you are a collector, you've been with many artists, what do you think is the key for promoting art collecting?

ER: Promoting art collecting ... You can collect art with a very small budget, and if you're buying prints and such you can have a marvellous collection. The only problem is that usually you begin collecting something that's very cheap, and then ten years later you can't carry on buying because it's become too expensive. I love prints, I love old master prints, and you used to be able to get them for next to nothing, even the great and the very good examples of prints, and now if you want a really good print they are very expensive. But I think it's more a question of encouraging people and making the museums places where people

want to go, and this is happening. Years ago, when there was an exhibition it was visited by five or ten thousand people. Today you have a great exhibition, even of old masters ... I think the Velázquez show in Paris received a thousand hundred visitors. So people want to see it. Perhaps it's also the fact that it's become popular and that people are talking a lot about art, and the awful thing about it is that they are talking about the prices of art, which is why people want to go and look at it. There's something not very nice about that, but there's certainly a curiosity which comes from the fact that people talk a lot about the sales. Art is fashionable today, and in much wider circles than it was before. And a real tycoon has got to have an art collection. A film star suddenly has to have his own art collections or otherwise he's nobody. This is happening and I think it leads more and more people into going to see art and quite a lot of people even into buying it.

[CaixaForum Madrid, November 10th, 2015]

## ÉRIC DE ROTHSCHILD



Baron Éric de Rothschild was born on 3 October 1940 in New York, where his mother had traveled for safety during the Second World War. After the war Éric and his family returned to France, and he received an international education, in England, Paris and he then studied engineering at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich.

His first professional experience was in the family-owned shipping company Saga. During the 1970s he moved to the Banque Rothschild in Paris, where he focused on corporate finance. Later he went back to Saga, of which he was chairman.

In 1982, the then French President François Mitterrand, nationalized the Bank Banque Rothschild in conjunction with other members of the banking industry. This prompted Éric and his cousin David René de Rothschild (b. 1942), to create a new financial services company, PO Gestion. In 1984 the company received but a banking license. The young bank was allowed to operate under the name Rothschild & Associés Banque in October 1986 (later changed to Rothschild & Cie Banque) after a new government came to power.

Since 2004 Éric de Rothschild has been Chairman of the Paris-Orléans SA. He and his cousin David led the merger of the banking activities of the English and French branches of the Rothschild banking family, which was completed in 2008. Baron Éric de Rothschild served as Chairman of the Wealth Management & Trust Business and of Rothschild Bank Zurich (RBZ) from 2000 until stepping down in December 2014.

Besides his career as a banker, Éric took over from his uncle, Baron Elie Robert de Rothschild (1917-2007), the management of the family-owned winery Château Lafite-Rothschild in 1974. In 1983 he married Maria Beatrice Caracciolo di Forino (b. 1955) and they have three children. Éric is involved in numerous Jewish and charitable organizations. Among other things, he is president of the Mémorial de la Shoah (French and Centre de documentation Juive contemporaine, (CDJC), dt Shoah Memorial), the central memorial to the Holocaust in France.

Baron Éric de Rothschild is Chair of The Rothschild Archive Trust, and Chairman of Fondation nationale des Arts graphiques et plastiques.

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