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## Art enthusiast shares collection with Montclair museum

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BY ELIZABETH OGUSS, STAFF WRITER  
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Sooner than we know, today's art won't be contemporary anymore. Pat Bell, an art collector with an eye on the future, knows that the Montclair Art Museum will someday need art of the present day in its collection.

She has been working to build that collection, and in 10 years has donated more than 40 works to MAM, by artists such as Willie Cole, Robert Rauschenberg, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and many others.



In honor of Bell and as part of the commemorations for MAM's 100th anniversary in 2014, the museum has organized an exhibit of the Bell Collection.

"Looking Forward: Gifts of Contemporary Art from the Patricia A. Bell Collection" opens on Sunday. The show is co-curated by Alexandra Schwartz, MAM's curator of contemporary art, and Gail Stavitsky, MAM's chief curator.

The Times spoke to Bell earlier this week about art and collecting. She spoke by phone from her office in Short Hills, where she is a private wealth management adviser for Merrill Lynch.

"This show is exciting for me because I remember the first gifts I made to the museum," Bell said. "And you never think you're going to give someone 45 things! I had a big collection and didn't have room for everything. I wasn't going to store things. If I took something down because I was rotating it, I thought, 'You know what, this belongs at the museum.'"

Bell began collecting in 1989. Her sister was an intern at Tibor de Nagy, a Manhattan gallery specializing in contemporary art. There Bell met an art dealer who asked her what she was doing with her money, and when she said she was investing it, he said, "Don't you want to buy something that will give satisfaction?"

She didn't have to think about her answer, and as she began to look at art with an eye to buying it, Bell realized she didn't want to buy mature art.

She wanted to buy the work of younger artists.

At first she went with the art dealer, and then on her own. She said, "I was never afraid of going by myself. I geared toward photography and female photographers because I thought that was fresh and new and hadn't been done before."

Most of the work she has donated to MAM is photography by women; Weems is one of the first artists whose work she bought.

Alexandra Schwartz told The Times in an email, "Pat Bell is a passionate collector with a wonderful eye for contemporary art. While her interests are broad, her commitments to collecting work by women artists and contemporary photography make her collection especially rich."

Bell says it's not a coincidence that so many of the artists whose work she has donated to MAM were born in the mid-1950s, which is her own era.

"I wanted to buy works of the day," she said. "There's a lot of younger people too but I still have them in my collection. My idea was that once the work became more mature I was going to take it out of my collection and give to a museum.

"So what I'm left with in my collection is very contemporary, people born in the '70s and later," she said. "If you came to my house you'd see a different look." Schwartz says Bell's gifts to MAM form "the cornerstone of our growing contemporary art collection," but Bell said she never thought she'd end up building MAM's contemporary collection.

"When Patterson [Sims, former director] was there, it was like I just wanted to make him happy. It's like having a crush. You see how hard they're working and how hard the staff is working and you see how important it is that you have art of the day, some reflection in the future of what was going on."

Bell also donates to the Newark Museum and the Guggenheim, and enjoys seeing her art when she visits any of the museums.

"You feel like you did something right," she said. "It makes me feel good that a kid's going to walk by there, especially the photo portraiture, [they] see themselves and it makes them feel good and that makes me feel good."

Is Bell flattered about the exhibit?

"Beyond flattered! You couldn't wish for anything better. It gives you a feeling of being taken into consideration and being appreciated for the things you've done.

"I never did it to get attention, because in my heart I love that museum and I love Lora and I love Alix, and I love Frank," she said, referring to Lora Urbanelli, MAM's director; Alexandra Schwartz; and Frank Walter, MAM's board chair.

"I genuinely have strong emotional ties to the museum and to be recognized for what comes naturally for me is a great honor."

Looking Forward: Gifts of Contemporary Art from the Patricia A. Bell Collection  
Sept. 22-Jan. 12, 2014

Montclair Art Museum 3 South Mountain Ave.

An exhibit of works honoring Pat Bell for her role in developing MAM's contemporary art collection  
Co-curators Alexandra Schwartz and Gail Stavitsky

[www.montclairartmuseum.org](http://www.montclairartmuseum.org)

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