Paralleling the passion for Picasso that flared in New York, something equally dramatic was happening simultaneously—indeed on occasion at the same sales. The prices for contemporary art also shot upward. This boom began at Christie’s on November 9, 1988, when thirty-two works from the collection of Burton and Emily Tremaine were sold. Burton Tremaine had made his money from industrial lighting, and Emily had been one of the handfull of collectors who had bought Jasper Johns’s work at his first one-man show at Castelli back in January 1958. Along with the Albert Lists and Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, they had moved into Pop Art in the Sixties, and together with Philip Johnson and Robert Scull, they had been among the first to buy Warhol’s early silk-screen pictures turned out at “The Factory” on Forty-seventh Street.

Contemporary American works had been traded consistently at auction only since the Scull auction in 1973. Scull owned a fleet of New York taxis (“Scull’s Angels”) and was known as a rough, tough, coarse character. Most people in the art world believed that Max Kozloff was referring to Scull when he wrote in Art International in 1962 that the new breed of collectors were “pin-headed . . . gum-chewers, bobby soxers, and, worse, delinquents.” But Scull had backed Richard Bellamy’s Green Gallery by agreeing to buy eighteen thousand dollars’ worth of paintings a year. When he sold off most of his collection in 1973, many of the artists were shocked, in much the same way that the Impressionists had been shocked by the Duret sale.

Robert Rauschenberg had turned up at the auction, drink in hand, and had proceeded to punch Scull afterward, at least according to Scull’s wife, Ethel. He thought the Sculls had profiteered at the artists’ expense. So the Scull auction had something in common with the Kahnweiler sales—where there had also been fisticuffs—as well as with the Duret auction.

The Scull dispersal had started a process that Tremaine confirmed. It showed that it no longer took artists a generation or more to transfer from dealers to salesrooms: 1973 was just fifteen years after Castelli’s early shows.

Sotheby’s gave the sale much the same PR treatment that would become routine ten years later: they arranged for Les Pléiades, the art trade’s watering hole on East Seventy-sixth Street, to serve Médaille de veau Robert Scull (“medallion” being an important word in the cabbie lexicon) and also advertised that Castelli would be giving a dinner there on the night of the sale, with some of the Abstract Expressionists invited.

Seating was as important at the Scull auction as it was at the Dr. Gachet sale. Tamenaga, from Japan, had five seats, Marlborough attended in force. Some things had not changed. The lots were still presented by black men in white gloves, a touch Thomas Kirby would have relished. Estimates were not printed in the catalogue and were revealed (and piecemeal at that) only to people who could convince the auction house that they were bona fide buyers. Cabbies protested Scull’s wage rates outside the salesroom, alongside feminists protesting that there was work by only one woman in the sale.

But, inside the auction house, nothing could dampen the enthusiasm of the evening and the Scull auction set high levels for contemporary works, giving this new market a flying start. Thaw, by Rauschenberg, which Scull had bought for $900 in 1958, went for $85,000, and Johns’s Double White Map, priced at $10,000 in 1965, went for $240,000. Overall, the sale made $2,242,900, including the Jasper Johns cast of a couple of Ballantine’s Double-XX ale cans, which fetched $90,000, reconfirming, if it was needed, that Castelli could make anything “art.”

After the Scull sale, contemporary art was at last taken seriously by the salesrooms. This was important in trade terms for it meant that Sotheby’s and Christie’s would now consider trading in artists in mid-career, and it therefore marked a further change in the relationship with dealers and collectors. Though this was not new in Paris (where contemporary art had been widely auctioned at the time of the Impressionists and in the Twenties), it was new for the Anglo-Saxon countries and its eventual success would lead Peter Wilson to say that he, and Sotheby’s, would “bury” the art dealers. Perhaps
was aware that Cortlandt Field Bishop had said much the same in the
entries.

since the Scull sale, contemporary pictures had moved fast but had not yet
acted the attention they were about to at the Tremaine auction. The star
that collection was a Jasper Johns composition called White Flag. It was
of the original five works that Castelli had seen in Johns's studio that
month in 1957 when he had stopped by Robert Rauschenberg's apart-
ment to look at his works, then found out that Johns was only a floor be-

cially the picture resembles the "ghost of the American flag," as one
 observer put it, because it is in various shades and textures of white and is

tioned from newsprint, wax and inks.

At this point the record for a living artist was held by Johns's The Diver,
which had sold for $4.18 million the previous May. White Flag surpassed it
v incingly, fetching $7 million and going to Hans Thulin, a Swedish real-
ite developer. Thulin was delighted with his prize and informed the trade
press that he intended to form a collection of twenty works, two each by
ten most important artists painting between 1950 and 1980. Naturally
I drew attention to what he might buy the following day, for by yet
other bit of remarkable symmetry, Sotheby's had a sale of contemporary
works that also featured a Johns and works from the collection of an Amer-
ic couple who had been early supporters of contemporary artists.

Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz had started with Picasso, buying large
numbers of important works when the Spaniard was on the verge of his
controversial late period. In the Fifties they had bought directly from Kah-
ner. Then they moved on to Johns, Rauschenberg and Stella. On this
ning the main drama surrounded a Jasper Johns. Johns's work had
gaped dramatically soon after his first show at Castelli's. He now used oils
rather than encaustics, and he had veered away from flags, targets and
numbers to painted patches of color with stencils over certain areas. Whereas
Rauschenberg used bits of the everyday world in his pictures, Johns went in
opposite direction, being concerned only with paint, color and form. The
first step in this new direction of Johns was False Start.

The bidding began at $3 million and in no time had passed the $3.6 mill-
on for Johns's Out the Window in 1986, the $4.18 million for The Diver in
1988, and the $7 million paid only the day before at Christie's for White
Flag.

But it didn't stop just because those records had been broken. There
was a bidder in the room and a bidder on the telephone—a dealer—and the
people went on and on. In the end the dealer on the phone won. He paid a
record $17 million, and his name was Larry Gagosian.

The Tremaines and the Ganzes, and others like them such as Karl Ströher,
also sold his collection of Pop Art that month, were all as distinguished
in their way as the Havemeyers, Jean Baptiste Laffon and Jean Guillaume.
They had the appetite and eye for new work. It was fitting that their collec-
tions should be sold when a great art boom was under way; it set the seal on
their taste and knowledge.

The taste and knowledge of the new collectors was a subject of great specula-
tion in the Eighties. It was as if no one quite knew whom they were dealing
with—neither the auction houses nor the dealers. The connoisseurship of
these new players was an especially tough subject. Art-world professionals,
especially in the auction houses, did not wish to be thought snobbish or
arrogant in calling the new collectors ignorant, for this might frighten busi-
ness away. After all, many collectors in the past had started off ignorant but
learned rapidly once bitten by the bug. Nevertheless the feeling remained
throughout the Eighties, and especially in the late Eighties, that many of the
new collectors were speculators rather than true art lovers. Observers wrote
about this as if it were brand-new. The scale of it may have been modern, but
the motive was ancient, as this narrative has shown.

By the end of the Eighties, Michael Ainslie, the chief executive officer of
Sotheby's, estimated that there were roughly 400,000 serious collectors
worldwide—"serious" meaning that they spent at least $10,000 a year in the
art market. This is too large and too disparate a group to be studied sys-
tematically; the best one can do is to fall back on the lists of collectors
published by the art magazines. Allowing for overlap and changes from year
to year, these lists provide a microcosm of between 250 and 350 very seri-
ous collectors, whose collections are worth millions. What generalizations about
them are possible? The most obvious is that collecting contemporary art is
twice as popular as collecting modern—that is, twentieth-century—as
time as popular as collecting Impressionists and four times as popular as
collecting Old Masters. Good Old Masters are much harder to come by these
days, of course, and the religious content of many Old Masters is unap-
pelling to many buyers. The high price of Impressionist and modern works
probably accounts for some but by no means all of the appeal of contempo-
rary art. Many of these collectors—Edye and Eli Broad from Los Angeles,
for instance, or Mara and Donald Rubell of New York—like to know the
artists whose work they buy. Others, like Adrian Mnuchin of New York, are
associated in some way with museums. Collecting contemporary art, espe-
cially in the United States, is a social and sociable activity and recalls life in
Paris in the 1907-14 and 1918-29 periods. Other forms of collecting seem to
be more private.

This difference is so marked that one could assert that serious collectors

today may be divided into three categories, collectors of contemporary art being the first and largest. Collectors in the second group are not all interested in contemporary art and have funds and the appetite to acquire the very best in their chosen fields. Among these more old-fashioned collectors are, in no particular order, T. T. Tsui (Hong Kong, Oriental porcelain), Heinz Berggruen (New York, Impressionist and modern art); Stavros Niarchos (London, Switzerland, New York and Paris, Impressionists and post-Impressionists); John Paul Getty II (London, nineteenth-century European painting); Fred Koch (New York, rare books); Sotaro Kubo (Osaka, early Japanese art); Leonard Lauder (New York, Cubism); K. S. Lo (Hong Kong, Oriental ceramics); Paul Mellon (Upperville, Virginia, English paintings and sporting art); Jaime Ortiz Patiño (Geteza, rare books and manuscripts); Norton Simon (Beverly Hills, Impressionists and Old Masters); Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza (Lugano, Old Masters and Impressionists); Walter Annenberg (Palm Springs, California, nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting); Barbara Piasecka Johnson (Pinceton, New Jersey, Old Masters); Gloria and Richard Manney (New York, rare books); Clarice and Robert Smith (Arlington, Virginia, European paintings); Lana and Michael Schlossberg (Atlanta, Georgia, drawings); and Peter Ludwig (Aachen, Germany), the only world-class collector who may be said to collect everything, though his medieval holdings are arguably his best.

The third group of collectors is characterized by the idiosyncratic nature of their collections. They have the funds, the appetite and the eye but have confined themselves to a smaller canvas than the second category. This list is not exhaustive, but they include Richard Ketta (Los Angeles, aboriginal art); Ann and Gilbert Kinney (Washington, D.C., Asian art); Thomas Monaghan (Ann Arbor, Michigan, Frank Lloyd Wright); George Way (Staten Island, New York, English oak furniture); Mitchell Wolfson (Miami, propaganda art—advertising, political art, etc.); and Charles Zollman (Indianapolis, ancient masks).

According to ARTnews, in 1990 the three greatest collectors of American contemporary art were all non-Americans: Charles Saatchi in London, Peter Ludwig in Aachen and Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo of Varese, Italy. Despite this, there is a good deal of nationalism in collecting; for example, many American collectors of American contemporary art extend their holdings into American folk art rather than into the contemporary art of other countries. Britain, France and Germany all have strong local markets. Alexander Apsis of Sotheby's realized in the Eighties that the Scandinavian countries had strong economies, and he and Sotheby's were very successful for five or six years in promoting Scandinavian art.

There was something, if not facile, then forced, about the nationalist ap-

proach to contemporary and modern art, and in some ways the most extraordinary example of this trend has occurred in Australia. Of course there are Australian collectors with international collections, among them Warren Anderson (Perth, Old Masters and English pictures); William Bowmore (Newcastle, Old Masters and Impressionists); René Rivkin (Sydney, Oriental art); Penelope Seidler (Sydney, contemporary art) and lastly the man who did—and did not—buy Irises, Alan Bond. In general, however, Australian collectors tend to stick to their own artists: Arthur Boyd, Sir Sidney Nolan, Fred Williams, Russell Drysdale and Brett Whiteley. Australians themselves are the most outspoken critics of this situation, pointing out that in the Eighties their country became a particular victim of the "Yuppy" culture, and that a lot of arid corporate collecting made the situation worse. That said, the most distinguished collection in Australia that this writer has come across belongs to Joseph Brown, a Melbourne dealer. His houseful of Australian art, beginning in colonial times and extending to the present day, not only contains examples of every Australian painter of note but has some of the most historically interesting pictures as well. His home is already a private museum and someday ought to become a public one. It shows at its best the rewards of being a dealer.

By 1992 collecting contemporary art had turned on its head. It used to be that this field took nerve and involved going out on a limb, but in the Seventies and Eighties this changed. More and more people were at home with newness and thrilled on change; the shock of the new was less and less disconcerting. At the same time, it began to appear that the collectors who were most adventurous, most curious, most likely to go out on a limb, were the people who collected Old Masters and antiquities—in short, the art of the past.

Another kind of new collector was the corporation. Some such collections go back a long way: for example, the Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad in 1896 began collecting oils showing the populating of the West; IBM began collecting American contemporary art in 1939. But the most authoritative survey of corporate collecting, published in 1990 by Rosanne Martorella, confirms that 90 percent of such collections in the United States have been formed since World War II, 80 percent since 1960, and that the main growth has been since 1975.

The impact of corporate collecting has been mixed and paradoxical. One reason may be that companies collect with their heads rather than their hearts. If Rosanne Martorella is to be believed (and her survey of 274 corporate collections is much the most thorough to date), most corporate
collections were started by enthusiastic chief executive officers who invariably had a specific interest, but whose pioneering influence eventually gave way to an "acquisitions committee." As often as not, this was made up of people anxious to please the CEO but with few qualifications in the field of art, and who therefore appointed a corporate art consultant. This is a new specialty for theoretically an art consultant in this context is part connoisseur, part curator and part dealer. In practice many art consultants are trained in art history and therefore resemble curators more than connoisseurs or dealers. Rosanne Martorella reports that many of them have been disappointed, on taking over corporate collections, to find that though there may be a handful of fine works, most of the collection is made up either of works by unknown living artists or of prints and posters. Up to 90 percent of the work has been thrown away by the consultants or, in their words, "should have been."

Corporate collections, Martorella tells us, are of three types. There are a few that consist of first-rate names, usually of contemporary American masters. There is a slightly larger second group, which are "documentary collections"; for example, Coleman's collects mustard pots and Iroquois Brands collects tea caddies. Third, the vast majority consist of agglomerations of pictures by local artists from the area where the company operates who do not necessarily have any discernible merit. In addition, according to Rosanne Martorella, many corporate consultants are in reality interior decorators, and the pictures they recommend are generally idealized figurative pictures, often "serene landscapes." The paradox is that corporate art now accounts for 20 to 30 percent of the business of New York galleries who sell contemporary art and as much as 40 percent elsewhere, but such purchases have had no impact whatsoever on the avant-garde. Indeed, Rosanne Martorella concludes her study by saying that the overall importance of corporate collecting has been much exaggerated. It too has had a false start. This is confirmed by many dealers, who confess that there is a certain type of art they don't even show to corporations, and by art consultants, who acknowledge that many companies shun work that is "politically or psychologically inappropriate." Art collecting by corporations has become a form of nationalism, a subtle kind of propaganda, and suffers accordingly.

Only one set of corporate collectors have had an important effect on the mainstream art market, and of course they are the Japanese ones. But here too the effect has been paradoxical, though in a quite different way (see Chapter 41).