

# Buyers, Collectors and Sellers

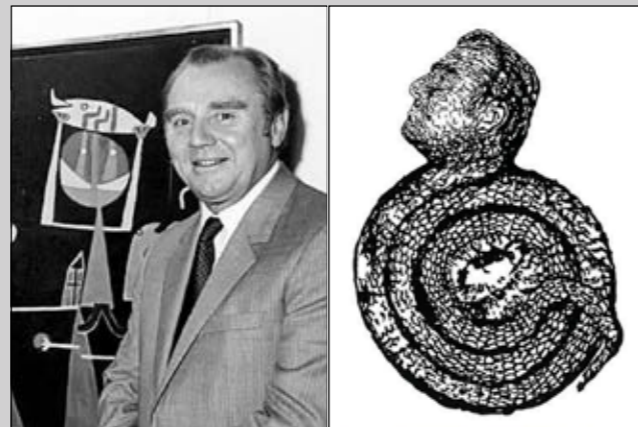
## Karel P. van Stuijvenberg

(b. 1931)

There are many different types of collectors who, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, can influence and define the direction of art and the entire market. When it comes to CoBrA, there's no getting away from Dutch businessman and major collector Karel P. van Stuijvenberg, whose collection has been exhibited at several museums around the world – and where the provenance is in itself a great marker of quality.

Stuijvenberg lived in Caracas and began collecting CoBrA art in the 1970s. Over the years, he built up a generous collection, which provided a unique picture of the brief moment that was CoBrA; told through a long list of artists from Corneille, Christian Dotremont, Asger Jorn and Karel Appel to those more peripherally associated, such as Henry Heerup, Stephen Gilbert, C.O. Hulten and Karl Otto Götz. He set to work systematically, first acquiring works by his compatriot Appel, then one by each of the Dutch artists in the group, later by all those who collaborated with CoBrA, and finally he specialised the collection to include at least one work by each individual artist from the period 1948–51.

Today, a great many of the works have been donated to the CoBrA Museum in Amstelveen, while others are still in private hands, and on rare occasions – like here – appear at auction.

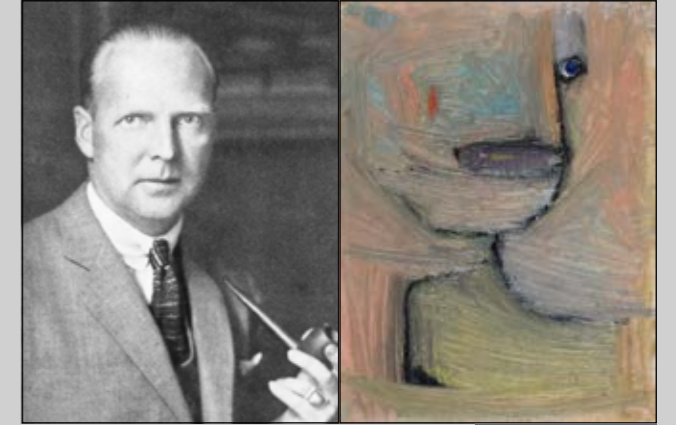


Karel P. van Stuijvenberg, 1995.  
Courtesy of Gemeentearchief Amstelveen  
Karel P. van Stuijvenberg as CoBrA from  
"Cobra er mit spejl". Brandts Klædefabrik,  
Odense, 1988

## Baron Herbert von Garvens-Garvensburg

(1883-1953)

In the time before and during the Second World War, a large number of artists and intellectuals made their way to the Danish island of Bornholm in search of refuge from the horrors unfolding in Europe. One of them was the anti-Nazi German baron and art collector Herbert von Garvens, who was interested in the very art that Hitler was fighting. He understood early on where things were leading and fled to Denmark, along with his enormous art collection, which was safely transported there with the assistance of the Danish fishermen. He opened his home "Abildgård" near Sandkås to a whole generation of Danish artists, including Carl-Henning Pedersen, Else Alfeldt, Asger Jorn, Erik and Anna Thommesen, Sven Dalsgaard, Erik Ortvad and Henry Heerup. However, foreign artists such as Eugène Brands, Constant and Anton Rooskens were also attracted by the thriving artistic environment and travelled to the island to work and meet their fellow artists.



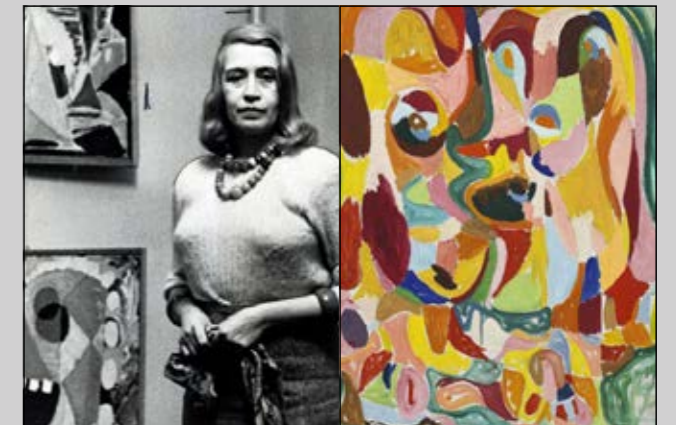
Herbert von Garvens, ca. 1920.  
Unknown photographer  
Asger Jorn: "Portrait of Herbert von Garvens",  
1942. Courtesy of Bornholms Kunstmuseum  
Photo: Simon Lautrop

## Elna Fønnesbech-Sandberg

(1892-1994)

Growing up in a bourgeois environment, Elna Fønnesbech-Sandberg was able to establish her first collection in the late 1920s. Already as a child, she had collected reproductions by famous painters, but her focus was now on classic modernism, which she had become captivated by during her art history studies. The works were later auctioned off due to financial hardship, but this created the basis for a new collection – this time the abstract-expressive art of Asger Jorn, Henry Heerup, Carl Henning-Pedersen, Else Alfeldt, Ejler Bille and Egill Jacobsen. Despite having modest means after the war, she managed to build an amazing collection and wanted to share her passionate interest with other like-minded people. Every Wednesday, she opened the doors to her home in Frederiksberg, and the apartment soon became a popular meeting place. She was later encouraged by Jorn to stop collecting in order to become a painter herself, and in the summer of 1944, they jointly created "Didaskærne", made up of Fønnesbech-Sandberg's nickname Dida and an abbreviation of Jorn's own name, Aska.

Fønnesbech-Sandberg was portrayed by many artists, including Asger Jorn, Olaf Rude and John Christensen, who were captivated by her beautiful face and flaming red hair.



Elna Fønnesbech-Sandberg, 1944. Unknown  
photographer (Gentofte Lokalarkiv)  
Asger Jorn: "Didaska I", 1945.  
Courtesy of Kunsten Museum of Modern Art  
Aalborg

## Elise Johansen

(1884-1970)

Elise Johansen was introduced by her nephew Ejler Bille to several of the young artists of the time. She had lost her husband in 1932 and felt that she could make a meaningful difference through her cultural work as a collector and art patron with the annuity he had left her. She didn't have a lot of money but purchased works directly from the artists. Over the course of 20 or so years, she built an extensive art collection, primarily consisting of works by the artists of the CoBrA movement: Else Alfelt, Ejler Bille, Henry Heerup, Egill Jacobsen, Asger Jorn and Carl-Henning Pedersen as well as Karel Appel, Constant and Christian Dotremont. She took on her task as a duty, and while her living rooms provided a salon, academy and incubator for the abstract art, she herself provided patient and practical help when conflicts and clashes arose.

Through her enthusiasm, intuition and love of art, she built an extensive collection, and in her desire to make abstract art the property of the people, she donated more than 80 works to the National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen in the late 1950s, while others were given to the larger, provincial museums.



Elise Johansen at the opening of Egill Jacobsen's exhibition, 1945, Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen. Unknown photographer  
Sonja Ferlov Mancoba: "Solidarité". Hommage à Elise Johansen, 1968. Courtesy of Estate Ferlov Mancoba, Copenhagen

## Børge Birch

(1906-1993)

For many of the abstract artists, the forward-looking Børge Birch was the leading art dealer of the post-war period. He began selling Asger Jorn's works back in the 1930s, and in 1946 he established his gallery on Palægade, Copenhagen, which is still open to this day, making it one of the city's oldest. At the gallery, he introduced and sold many of the artists of the CoBrA movement to Danish buyers. Pierre Alechinsky, Karel Appel, Corneille, Walasse Ting and Reinhold d'Haese, as well as Pierre Soulages and Pablo Picasso, were just some of the foreign artists exhibited at Galerie Birch, and, over the years, he co-organised major exhibitions at Charlottenborg and Den Frie.

With his uncompromising approach to art, he helped to shape public taste and founded several private Danish collections.



Børge Birch, 1946/47. Photo: A. Moe

## Robert Dahlmann-Olsen

(1915-1993)

Over the years, the architect Robert Dahlmann-Olsen hosted many of the CoBrA artists' gatherings and lively debates. As a student, he set out on an artistic path, and his hand in spreading awareness of Danish spontaneous abstract art is indisputable. He became one of Asger Jorn's closest friends and served as the group's "handyman", assisting with writing, organising exhibitions and the typographic layout of catalogues.

Dahlmann Olsen was, for example, editor of the art magazine "Helhesten", which was published nine times in the period from 1941-1944. The magazine was a mouthpiece for the younger generation of artists and consisted of articles and discussions written primarily by Asger Jorn, Ejler Bille, Henry Heerup and Carl-Henning Pedersen. Interested readers of "Helhesten" could immerse themselves in the latest knowledge in the fields of archaeology, psychology, ethnography, literature, pedagogy and art history as well as encounter original graphics by the various artists.



CoBrA-kongressen, Bregnerød, 1945. Asger Jorn (smoking a pipe), Christian Dotremont. In the front row Carl-Henning Pedersen and Robert Dahlmann Olsen. Photo: Søren Cock-Clausen

## Sam Kaner

(1924-1990)

Another key contributor to the popularity of the CoBrA artists in Denmark was the gallery owner Sam Kaner, who for a number of years ran the American Art Gallery - later the Court Gallery - in central Copenhagen. Kaner had a wide network of artists at home and abroad and introduced many of the names of the time from Europe, Great Britain and the US to Danish collectors and art enthusiasts, including the CoBrA artists Karel Appel, Pierre Alechinsky and Anton Rooskens, as well as Lucio Fontana, Lynn Chadwick and Sam Francis. Through his network and connection to several of the most acclaimed galleries around the world, such as Gimpel Fils in London, the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, and his friend Peggy Guggenheim's The Art of This Century Gallery, he managed to create a modern exhibition space with a broad global vision.

In addition to working as an art dealer, Sam Kaner was also an artist himself, who in his works combined the gestures of abstract expressionism with the colour and form of the CoBrA artists.



Sam Kaner, 1980ies. Private photo