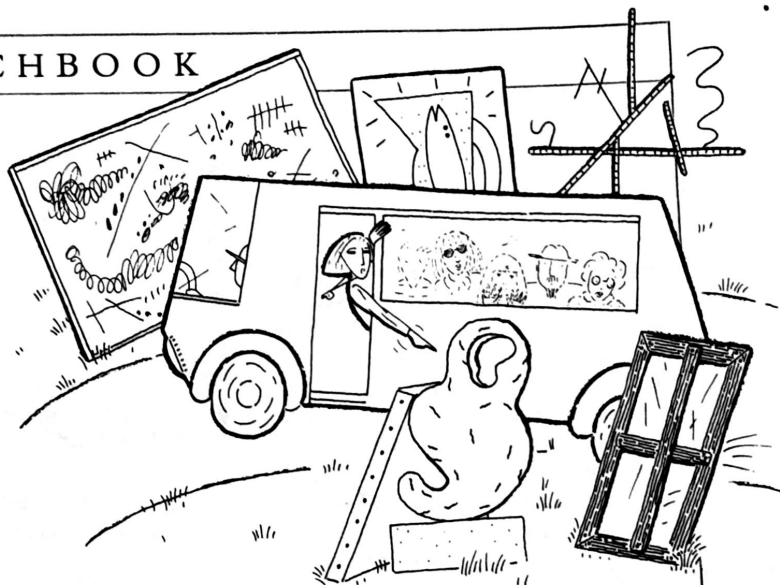


# TAKING THE ART BUS

Novices learn how to fill in the spaces over their sofas.



## CRASH COURSE

Los Angeles art collector Marcia Weisman puts a whistle between her teeth and twenty aspiring art collectors file back onto the bus. According to schedule, they're off to the next artist's studio or private collection. The title of this class? "I Have a Place Over My Sofa and I Want to Buy a Painting" or "Collecting Modern Art."

Weisman began teaching on an informal basis in the late '60s, when visitors

would come to her Beverly Hills house, gawk at the stellar selection of paintings by Mark Rothko, Willem De Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns, and ask how she always managed to buy the works—inexpensively—just before they became popular. (Of course, her own discerning eye was then paired with that of her husband, Fred Weisman, from whom she is now divorced.) After a few years of answering the same questions, she decided it would be easier to give a class on the subject.

"I have to emphasize that it is not for profit," says Weisman. The fee of \$250 per person or \$400 per couple includes transportation, a membership at Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art, a signed, framed poster as a diploma, and a lot of art-viewing. The first of three classes opens on a Thursday night at Weisman's home, where her charges sample hors d'oeuvres, look at her paintings, and discuss what they like most or least and why.

The next Saturday morning, they gather for breakfast, and then hop onto a bus for a whirlwind tour of four artists' studios and four private collections.

For the final session, the class gathers again at Weisman's house for dessert and a rehashing of what they liked or disliked about what they saw. Many leave, diploma in hand, with new insight, and courage, to start acquiring art. Some graduates, such as Charles and Beverly Firestein, have since become serious collectors, and credit Weisman with inspiring them: "When we first took the class seven years ago, I thought her De Kooning painting was awful. We enrolled again last June and when I saw it the second time, I thought it was wonderful." Weisman's main purpose is to stress that there are no rights and wrongs when it comes to art. "People shouldn't feel intimidated," she says. "If they have a place over their sofa, they should go out and buy something to fill it." *Hunter Drohojowska*

## HOLY HAMBURGERS

The Diocese of London plans to convert an 1820s Greek revival church into a branch of Garfunkel's, a burger chain where beer will replace communion wine, but conservationists are aghast. Apart from religious considerations, they claim the scheme will ruin the magnificent marble and stained-glass interior of St. Mark's Church in Mayfair.

The Church of England decided to shut St. Mark's down in 1977, forc-



ing its tenants, the American Church in London, to find a new home. Now empty, the church has deteriorated. The conservationist group leading the fight against the restaurant plan say rain is pouring through the roof and repairs are estimated at \$425,000. The Anglicans have decided to put the case before the public. "The Diocese needs to make the most of what assets it has," said a spokesman. "What is important in this building will be retained and enhanced. Garfunkel's proposes to make this church into a high-class restaurant." *Alison Beckett*



THE QUEEN OF ARTS

Queen Margrethe II of Denmark once said that she feared becoming a spectator to life. But these days, she's successfully leading two lives—as queen of her country and as an artist who designs books, costumes, embroideries, and stamps.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's recent exhibit of Danish book art included two volumes illustrated by the Queen. Her swirling landscapes and twisting figures (above) enliven J.R.R. Tolkien's

*The Lord of the Rings*, a book that captured her heart when she was crown princess.

Margrethe's 1970 and 1983 Christmas seals and her 1985 postage stamp (left) have enabled her subjects to purchase a bit of her art. They've also seen her work dance across a stage—for a local ballet production, she designed 140 costumes and even went out bargain-hunting for the fabrics. Not to be overshadowed, her husband Prince Henrik has written, illustrated, and designed a private collection of poetry. □

DIVING FOR DOLLARS

Christie's auction house may one day decide to reject fine art in favor of salvage. For the past five years, its Amsterdam branch has been selling cargo retrieved from shipwrecks. No one paid much attention, however, until last spring when they featured the recently recovered remains of a Dutch East India Company tradeship, including an enormous quantity of eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain made for export—50,000 teabowls and saucers, 2,000 plates, and fifty complete dinner services. Many dealers questioned the value of the haul, describing it as “humdrum stuff” that would probably sell for so little that the already-deflated market for Chinese export wares would suffer a further blow. Instead, the results

were astounding. Lured by the historical romance surrounding the loot, crowds of people paid five and even ten times the going rate for these commercial ceramics and the sale reached a total of \$15,255,102. Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum angrily labeled the auction “a souvenir hunter's orgy,” but Christie's is ready to take the next plunge. On December 4, they will offer 542 silver bars and copper coins (below)

salvaged from another Dutch vessel.

Margot Guralnick



THE PASSIONATE COLLECTOR

Betty Asher never drinks tea, nevertheless, the living room, kitchen, and bedroom in her Beverly Hills condominium are filled to the brim with teacups. Some are crocheted or stitched together from bark, others are welded in metal, and many are made of traditional materials like porcelain and plastic. Very few have actually held tea, however, because for the past fourteen years Asher has been collecting artist-designed cups that are more sculptural than functional. Styles run the gamut of art history—impressionism, cubism, surrealism, abstraction, and Asher's favorite, pop art. If there



is any common denominator among the cups, it's a sense of humor. Robert Arneson contributed a ceramic cup of coffee with rising ceramic steam, and Jeffrey Vallance's cup is decorated with the improbable combination of barking dogs and eels.

Asher, seventy-one, a grandmotherly sort with ice-white hair and mirthful dark eyes, is in a good position to find the best cups. Since 1979, she has been co-owner of the Asher/Faure Gallery in Los Angeles. Whenever a cup appears by accident or intention in any of their exhibitions, it winds up in her collection.

In 1983 Asher sold (and partially donated) 105 of her favorites to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where they are now on view in the new building for twentieth-century art. That acquisition opened up some space on the shelves and Asher decided to continue in her quest. “I can't stop,” she says, I'm compulsively acquisitive about art.” H.D.