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Stanford's Anderson Collection museum to feature trove of couple's art



Harry and Mary Margaret Anderson -- known as Hunk and Moo -- are moving 121 works by 86 artists from their personal collection to an elegant new museum on the campus of Stanford University called the Anderson Collection.

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Along a shady road here, you can glimpse large estates behind gates and hedges bought with fortunes earned in Silicon Valley. Then you come to the driveway of a ranch house that stands pretty much as it was when built in the 1960s by Harry and Mary Margaret Anderson.

From the unpretentious exterior, few would guess that inside the house a single painting in their collection is worth as much as one or even two of those neighboring estates. This is the home of people who not only live with art, they live for it, searching for "the best of the best," as Harry Anderson puts it.

Paintings by Willem de Kooning and Philip Guston in the foyer, [Jackson Pollock](#) in the dining room, Sam Francis and Morris Louis in the living room while the narrow hallway is lined with huge abstractions by Ellsworth Kelly, Richard Diebenkorn, Agnes Martin and Robert Motherwell.

It goes on and on, through the library, kitchen and three bedrooms. This September, however, 121 works by 86 artists, half from the house and half from Quadrus, a Cliff May-designed complex where Hunk Anderson maintains an office, will be moved to an elegant new museum on the campus of [Stanford University](#) called the Anderson Collection.

The Andersons — known widely as Hunk and Moo — along with their daughter Mary Pat Pence, known as Putter, and granddaughter Devin Pence are on hand to provide a tour of the ranch house's collection before it is transferred to Stanford.

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Stanford is really making the arts equal to the sciences, math, humanities and so forth. To be a part of that is really a great thing.

— Harry 'Hunk' Anderson

Hunk explains that the family has a "collection of collections." They began buying art after their first visit to the Louvre in 1964, acquiring

work by French impressionists like Renoir, then American moderns like Georgia O'Keeffe before focusing on work by the Abstract Expressionists, Color Field painters and Pop art.

Then the Andersons began giving it away. Key works such as Robert Rauschenberg's "Collection," 1953-54, and Jasper Johns' "Land's End," 1963, were given to the San Francisco [Museum of Modern Art](#) in 1972. Thirty works of Pop art by Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol and others were donated to the museum in 1992 and seven Frank Stella paintings from 1959 to 1988 were given in 2001. Much of their collection was shown at the museum in 2000, in "Celebrating Modern Art: The Anderson Collection." (They also collected prints and gave more than 650 to San Francisco's Fine Arts Museums in 1996, which transferred them to the De Young.)

However, what the Andersons call their "core collection" remained at the ranch house. Along with their association with SFMOMA, the couple have enjoyed a lengthy relationship with Stanford University, though neither is an alumnus. For decades, Stanford doctoral candidates in art history have worked as interns with the collection, including Neil Benezra, now director of SFMOMA. Benezra harbors no ill will that their collection is going to Stanford, not his museum.

"What the Andersons have wanted for many years is to have a museum-quality space dedicated to their collection," he said. "That is something that of all the institutions in the Bay Area, probably Stanford was best able to provide. What is most extraordinary in the collection is the representation of Abstract Expressionist paintings at a time when a museum can only dream of acquiring paintings by Pollock or De Kooning. The treasure of the collection, unquestionably is "Lucifer," by many people's lights the outstanding drip painting still in private hands, an absolutely beautiful painting, which would make any museum's collection sing."

Hunk says, "We think the collection deserves dedicated space and they have provided us not just with a gallery but with a dedicated building. It's great."

An additional motivation for the Andersons was Stanford's recent Arts Initiative, accelerating an emphasis on the arts in a school better known for producing leaders in business and science, including founders of Yahoo and Google.

"Stanford is really making the arts equal to the sciences, math, humanities and so forth. To be a part of that is really a great thing," Hunk added.

In addition to the Cantor Arts Center, an encyclopedic museum originally built in 1894, a new art and art history building designed by

Diller, Scofidio + Renfro will open in 2015. The nearby Bing Concert Hall opened in 2013. All are part of a \$227-million investment during the last decade that includes a requirement that all students take cultural courses as part of their curriculum.

The Anderson Collection is also part of a larger arts renaissance in the Bay Area that includes the renovation of the Oakland Museum of Art and buildings for the Berkeley Art Museum and SFMOMA.

Albert Elsen, the late professor of art and art history at Stanford, took the couple under his wing in the 1960s and guided them in their initial purchases of key works from the New York School as well as Bay Area artists. The Andersons also befriended Nathan Olivera, an artist and professor at Stanford who frequently offered his advice.

"The collection is really built on relationships," says Hunk. "Five of the Abstract Expressionist works here at one time belonged to Bill [William] Rubin, who was chief curator of MOMA [the Museum of Modern Art]. We built that relationship with Bill through Al Elsen. They were classmates together at Columbia."

He adds, "Bill [Rubin] was interested in selling off his collection. There was a question of ethics here, in selling works that could have gone to the museum, but he always said that he had offered them to the museum first." Anderson gestures toward the splashy black and white "Figure 8," 1952, by Franz Kline and "Pink and White Over Red," 1957, by Mark Rothko.

In the living room, with 18th and 19th century English furniture, Morris Louis' "Number 64," 1958, hangs over the comfortable sofa while Sam Francis' "Red in Red," 1955, is over the brick fireplace. The cozy, casual atmosphere reflects the intimate relationship the Andersons have with their art. Each of them knows quite a lot about it, and they take turns sharing stories.

Indicating Philip Guston's "The Coat II," 1977, Hunk recalls, "We had a fantastic relationship with Guston. He used to sit here on the partners desk and drink a little brandy and smoke cigarettes, and I'd stand here taking in the secondhand smoke. He was little bit of left and I'm a little bit of right, so it was interesting."

Pollock's "Lucifer" hangs over the buffet in the dining room. "This is a room where you can have a feast without having a meal," Hunk says. The room also bears major works by Clyfford Still and De Kooning as well as a tapered resin column by Peter Alexander.

"That is one of the things about the collection that I like to think," Hunk says. "It is not only the great artists from the East, but it is the great artists from the West. And it includes the resin people, the light people and the ceramics people. The Anderson collection is different

in that it tries to include all these things."

From the outset, the Andersons wanted to engage their daughter Putter in art, but her passion was for all things equestrian. When she was quite young, the family visited an Emil Nolde exhibition at Marlborough Gallery in London and encouraged her to pick out one of the drawings for herself. She chose a rather abstract landscape, but Hunk liked a drawing of sunflowers; Moo liked a portrait of a woman. "Let's take all three," said Hunk enthusiastically, and all remain in the house.

Putter's Nolde drawing hangs with paintings by Josef Albers and Sam Francis and dozens of blue ribbons and trophies reflecting her horse show triumphs. For many years, Pollock's "Lucifer" hung over her bed, ignored by her and her friends during slumber parties.

Initially, she resisted her parents' passion. "I studied business in college and had no interest in art at all." But after graduating from USC, she worked for artist Sam Francis and then for curator Maurice Tuchman at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Soon, she was collecting contemporary art and ran the Pence Gallery in L.A. from 1986 to 1992. She is now a private art advisor and guides her parents in collecting work by contemporary artists such as Susan Rothenberg, Terry Winters, Martin Puryear and Robert Therrien. Many works by them will go to the Stanford museum.

However, the ranch house will be far from empty. An additional Jackson Pollock painting, an Alexander Calder mobile, the family Noldes and many other works of art will remain in their possession.

Anderson, 91, earned his nickname in high school playing football after the Notre Dame player Heartley "Hunk" Anderson, though he was no relation. A tall man with inquisitive blue eyes, he still sports the period crew cut. His father had emigrated from Sweden in 1912 and worked as a gaffer at Corning Glass. His mother was Norwegian.

After serving as a [U.S. Army](#) private first class in World War II, Anderson attended Hobart College in upstate New York on the G.I. Bill. When the Hobart cafeteria closed, Anderson and two friends offered to prepare food for the students for a set fee. Their success led other schools to contract their services and soon Saga foods was on its way to success.

As Anderson put it, that \$500 investment in 1948 led to a major profit when the company was sold to Marriott in 1986 for \$502 million. He offers another Hunkism: "I didn't know it couldn't be done. I just went ahead and did it."

The same might be said of the couple's courtship. He met Mary Margaret at the yacht club in Geneva, N.Y. She returned to D'Youville College in Buffalo to major in social studies. Both graduated in 1949 and were married the following year. Her nickname was Murma until a friend of Hunk's misunderstood and pronounced it "Moo Moo," which stuck. Their only daughter asked to be called Putt Putt while in the first grade after her friend understood her name as Mary Put. In high school, it evolved to Putter.

After the tour of their home, the Andersons drove to the Stanford campus in a later-model VW bug, a silver convertible, to the new museum. There was no parking in sight, so Hunk pulled into the no-parking zone. As he got out of the car, he shrugged and said, "Let's not worry about it."

Jason Linetsky, the museum's founding director, met the Andersons to give them a progress report on the nearly completed structure. A study center and library on the first floor will be used as a conference room for Stanford students to use the Anderson Collection as a resource in classes on modern art history. Impressive stairs lead to the second-level galleries, where gently concave ceilings add a sense of compression when facing the expansive gallery wall where Pollock's "Lucifer" will reside.

Clerestory windows bring soft natural light into the galleries, but the amount can be controlled by a computer. The building was designed by Richard Olcott, a partner in Ennead Architects who renovated and expanded the [Yale University Art Gallery](#). "We worked with Richard for 21/2 years on this building," says Moo, 86. Will she miss having the art in her home? "I think in order to enjoy art, you have to share it," she says.

Olcott was inspired by the accessibility and openness of the Andersons' ranch house to create flexible galleries that can be dedicated to the Abstract Expressionists, Color Field painting, the art of Southern California including Robert Irwin, Larry Bell, Peter Alexander and Vija Celmins, as well as Northern California artists such as David Park, Richard Diebenkorn, William Wiley and Robert Arneson.

The Andersons made a point of organizing the catalog according to the dates that works were acquired to illuminate how the collection was formed but also to highlight that work by West and East Coast artists were purchased simultaneously.

"We've been waiting 20 years for this," says Hunk, looking around the empty galleries. "Moo and I have always said that we'd like see that the world is a grain of salt better because we've been here. A trite phrase, but that is one of the things we've been getting out of this."

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