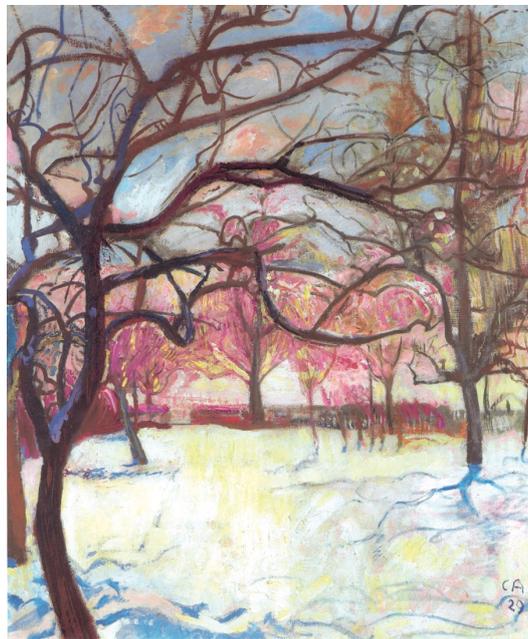


Interview with Loa Haagen Pictet, curator of the Collection Pictet and chair of the International Association of Corporate Collections of Contemporary Art

1) What was it like starting the contemporary art collection? Can you remember the first piece or pieces you acquired and what was the initial process like?

Loa Haagen Pictet: It is a privilege for an art historian or a curator to be able to build up such a patrimony and to be able to initiate the collection in 2004 was a chance. Generally, we inherit larger collections and then one tries to add elements into something, which is already established. In this case, despite the very old and venerable age of the Bank, we actually did not have a proper collection in 2004 so the decision was made to found one. The aim was to assemble a body of work that reflects the events that have shaped the Bank since its foundation in 1805 until the present day. There is obviously a large range of choice and a selection process that needs to be operated, and through which the collection gets its identity. It was important to make the partners and owners of the Bank confident about the project. The budgets slowly followed and actually later on they were the ones pushing for greater expansion. The initial process consisted of having an acquisitions committee of four people plus myself proposing works and then we started buying. The first pieces we bought for the collection were early 20th century modernist paintings by Cuno Amiet who is one of the three main important painters bringing modernity into Swiss Art.



Cuno Amiet, *Winterlandschaft*, 1929, oil on canvas

2) Is there a particular artist or work that you have acquired that really stands out for you? Perhaps on a personal level

LHP: That is difficult for an art historian to answer. We have about 650 artworks in the collection by now, from more than a hundred artists. Building up a collection is not about buying the most expensive or biggest piece. It is about finding the right piece, the best work by the best artist. It is about quality. I had huge satisfaction from buying a wonderful Jean Arp sculpture, which is displayed in our main entrance hall in Geneva. We had been searching for it for eight years and we managed to buy it before the market went crazy about the artist in the last five years. There was a great sense of satisfaction about firstly finding the right piece by the artist and secondly the joy of installing it.



Jean Arp, Concrétion humaine sur coupe, 1948, bronze

3) What would you say are some of the main ambitions and goals for the Collection Pictet?

LHP: It is important for a financial institution that provides services to have a cultural patrimony that can tell its story. We firmly believe that art is a way of staying alert to what is going on in society. By telling the story we can stimulate new and innovative thinking and the art also brings in humanity to the environment among other things. We are very happy to have young new collaborators coming to us and asking for more art training. I can tell you that ten years ago nobody talked about art at Pictet so this is most satisfying. There is this wish to build up a cultural patrimony that can not only accomplish the task of showcasing our history but also reflect who we are. We are a wealth and asset managing company and it is important to actually always offer a vision of what we do even in what we hang on the wall. It needs to be done in a responsible way and be seen as a long term investment. We are not

at all a speculative art fund. We do not sell at all. We are in the arts for the love of it so we can support the artists and the art scenes. We also support the market and dealers and art in general by buying 19th and 20th Century works as well. Pictet now has 26 offices around the world and there was no talk about art before that. We have more and more demands for more artworks from offices, which have never had art or wanted art before and overall, a lot of banks, insurance companies and financial institutions build up collections. These are companies who do not produce anything, I mean of course there is a cash flow and they produce money but there is nothing visual in a sense. Therefore, it seems eventually more pertinent to be building up something tangible that will last. These institutions have always been confronted by the constant need for innovation as a key element of their survival. They also have a long history of patronage and I guess most of them have always been aware of the power of art.

4) Has the collection proved to be a useful contact point between clients? Is the collection an important point of common ground? In a sense, clients can clearly see that you care about your art collection and so this ethos resonates with the corporation as a whole.

LHP: We definitely use the art collection both with prospecting and current clients because it gives us a different type of conversation. It contributes to bring our interested clients closer to us. This was not our primary motivation but it is certainly an additional benefit. We do have quite a lot of events around the arts, they are incredibly popular and they reinforce the connections. They are intended for both the clients of the Bank and the collaborators. It has sort of become part of our DNA, which it certainly was not before. I think I can say it has improved business relations. There have also been clients who are very knowledgeable and like to come to see the collection. They are impressed by our perfectionist approach both culturally and humanely, this is most stimulating and satisfying. I met a collector who had a very fixed image of Pictet in his mind as this old fashioned, and maybe even conservative, but solid bank. He was delighted to find works here that he had in his own collection and was able to learn something new, which actually inspired him to buy more works himself. He remarked that he did not think we were as independently minded and his change in mind-set was most satisfying.

5) What kind of specific art related benefits do you offer your staff?

LHP: We help certain collaborators go to art fairs. We also have a photography club and exhibitions. When collaborators start they get an introduction, we explain that the art is for them. We put all the information about the collection online so there is an open access. Accessibility is so important. There are sessions where we talk about the artworks and sometimes colleagues want to know more about the works on their floors. We also have visits, which are mainly focused around one artist. When I have finished a hanging I will then offer information about the new or relocated artworks. We have just recently had a big Prix Pictet talk and an

accompanying tour for people to understand what it is. All these elements have really built up over time as the collection itself has grown.



Valérie Belin, *Still Life with Dish* (14020501), 2014, pigment print on Enhanced Epson paper, 108 x 144 cm. She won the 2015 Prix Pictet on the theme of "Disorder"

6) You are chair of the International Association of Corporate Collections of Contemporary Art (IACCCA). What is the purpose? How does it work? What is your role within the organisation?

LHP: I think the main purpose of the IACCCA, which is now 10 years old, is to bring together curators of corporate collections who have the same preoccupations about how to position art inside a company where we are not necessarily the main concern. How do we make art go beyond just decoration so that it comes alive? IACCCA is a forum where you can meet and exchange ideas, it is very stimulating. Like me, many of the curators in the association were museum curators before. We have workshops on photography conservation like our recent workshop at the Fundación MAPFRE. We also had workshops on corporate social responsibility and on how the artworks work within all these debates, the companies share their experiences. My role is to organise and run the activities. We are now doing a symposium at the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam on art and corporate private collections in relation to museum collections. In 2019, we are also working on a joint exhibition program with an independent curator, who will pick artworks from the various corporate collections with the ambition to freely share them with public institutions.

7) What advice would you give to corporations who are considering starting an art collection?

LHP: I think first of all they have to figure out why they want to do it. It is more about a way of thinking rather than building up a trophy collection. Why is it important and why do we want to live with it? Then I would recommend that they get proper advice and utilise professional help. You can have art clubs

and you can have collaborators agreeing and buying but it is not going to make a great collection I am sorry. You need to have some guidance. You can be inclusive and you can build up an art library and people can pick what they want but someone must really want it. This is someone who constantly makes sure the conservation, preservation, the inventory and the loans are up to date. There has to be some sort of professional running of the art collection to make sure of its long term quality. At least that is what we demand from the people who enter into our association in order for the quality of the collection to be maintained.



Prix Pictet Ceremony 2015. © SKISS 2015

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