

The art estate

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THE ART ESTATE

Gottfried Honegger There was once a time when artists had no problem with their estates. They were in the service of popes, emperors, kings and the nobility. Art survived in churches, guildhalls and palaces. What we presently keep in our museums is part of their estates. Today the artists are free, and for the sake of their freedom, need to look after or dispose of their estates themselves.

Fritz Glarner, one of the pioneers of concrete art, gave his estate to the Kunsthau Zurich, where it has slumbered up until the present day and may await display in a distant future.

Camille Graeser and Paul Lohse have established foundations. Elected executive committees are responsible – but foundations are nursing homes – for once the artist's active friends are dead, the dust of time will settle on the estates and the works, and they will slowly sink into the stillness of oblivion. The Tinguely Museum in Basel, the Gertsch Museums in Burgdorf and the Museum for Josephson are instances of private patronage. Yet the private museums as well will only live on, if the exhibition programme is expanded. The artist's work alone will not draw crowds.

When at the age of almost ninety I was confronted with this dilemma, I tried to find a solution together with my gallerist: He looked for art collectors, who then formed a group named "GOHO". They took over my entire estate on favourable conditions. Each member chose his or her share from the estate. 30 per cent the work

are sold in support of the "GOHO", about 10 per cent remain in a trust of one of these collectors, reserved for exhibitions. The sales revenues permit "GOHO" to employ a part-time art historian. She creates an oeuvre catalogue, and she monitors the loans to museums and the sales in galleries.

This solution gives me the liberty to carry on working without worry, knowing that my work is open to the public.

When I co-founded the Foundation for Concrete Art twenty years ago, my goal was to create a "car park for art" for the estates of artists and collectors. I knew by experience of the sad lot of some artists' and collectors' estates.

My idea was to offer the "car park for art" to the Art History Department of the University of Zurich for the students' practical training. Filing, compiling oeuvre-catalogues, restoring and the planning of exhibitions, would promote skills. In this way art history students should gain a real insight into the work of artists.

It is up to the artists themselves to develop ideas and to realize them. We have enough patrons of the arts and collectors in Switzerland and there is no shortage of funds to make them come true. Moaning, lamenting and ranting will not do. The artists themselves must finally wake up and act.