

Mordant Collection Highlights

Edited by
Anaïs Lellouche

FOREWORD

Catriona's and my journey in the arts started from different directions but combined when we met and married over thirty-five years ago. Catriona grew up with a theatrical background. Her mother was a professional dancer and ice skater, then started her own dance-wear business. Catriona was sewing shortly after she could walk, and went on to make costumes for the theatre. Meanwhile, my art journey started at boarding school where I lived for a period with the head of the arts department, Robin Child. He opened my eyes to the visual arts and school holidays were often spent in galleries and museums. I bought my first artwork by Judith Feaney, *The Hangman's House, Salzburg* (n.d.), at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and was intrigued by its title. I wrote to the artist, who replied and explained her story. The work still hangs at home, with the letter sitting behind the frame. Prior to emigrating to Australia I bought a few further works and they came to Australia when I moved in 1983. However, the vast proportion of our works have been acquired together.

We never set out to build a collection. What has driven us is a passion to be surrounded by creative people, whether in the visual or performing arts. We have only purchased a work when it evoked a reaction in us, and we have never sold a piece. However, on one occasion, we swapped a work for another by the same artist. We have never bought a work for a particular wall or because someone told us the artist was important. We have loved this journey together: exploring far-flung geographies and visiting studios to see something, or spending hours debating where to locate a sculpture on our land. We have bought the work of some artists at their first shows; others we have supported over decades. Occasionally, we have sat up all night to buy something at auction. Most of the artworks we have acquired have come from the artist's gallery, as we believe the gallery is a critical part of the arts ecology.

This book highlights selected pieces from our collection. A full list as of today can be found in the Appendix (p. 280). If a second volume is published in the future, some of these works will be featured.

We have produced this book with Anaïs Lellouche for several reasons. Firstly, we want to celebrate great artists who have challenged and stimulated us and brought us immense pleasure. Secondly, we want to share our interest as we know we have encouraged others to engage with art along the way. Finally, we want to document these works, as some will inevitably be gifted to institutions – an undertaking we commenced with Annette Larkin some years ago.

We would like to thank the artists who have brightened and enriched our lives and who we have learnt from, and the gallerists and museum directors and curators who have shared this great journey with us. Our thanks go also to Annette for her many years of hard work documenting the collection, and to Anaïs for her encouragement, energy and passion in creating this book with us. We have been blessed with every encounter.

— Simon and Catriona Mordant
September 2024



Simon and Catriona Mordant
at home in Italy (2023) with
Bernar Venet, 226' Arc x 5 2008.
Photo by Alessia Bruchi.

*'For us it is all about the art. We love
to be challenged and stimulated by great
art whether it be visual or performing.
We have enjoyed every moment of discovery.'*

IN CONVERSATION: SIMON MORDANT TALKS TO ANAÏS LELLOUCHE

CHILDHOOD, EARLY YEARS

Simon, you were born in the UK where you lived until the age of seventeen, then you travelled to Australia and New Zealand. You moved to Australia more permanently in 1983, aged twenty-four. What was it about Australia that appealed to you so much, prompting this move?

I grew up in London and when I finished school at seventeen, I travelled to Australia and fell in love with the country. I tried to emigrate at that stage, but as I had no qualifications, I was not able to, and so returned to London to qualify as a Chartered Accountant, eventually moving to Sydney in 1983.

I met my wife Catriona in 1988 on a blind date. We were engaged within thirteen days, and we got married only a few weeks later. She has been my life partner through everything, and we have a shared passion for the arts.

Growing up, did you visit many museums?

At home, there was little to no art that I recollect. I first became interested in the arts generally at boarding school as I loved drama and I wanted to be an actor. I was billeted at the home of the head of the arts department, Robin Child, which is where my engagement with visual arts really began.

I have kept in touch with Robin, who is now in his 80's and after whom we've just named a scholarship for a student who could not normally go to a private school.

As both my parents worked full-time, my brother and I were looked after by nannies during school holidays. I have very fond memories of going to museums with them.

I read that the first work of art you bought was at the Royal Academy whilst still at school! Could you expand on that? Was it during the Summer Exhibition?

The family of one of my school friends owned a tea business in Piccadilly and I spent many school holidays working there. During my lunch break, I would often visit the Royal Academy or wander through the galleries on Cork Street. The first artwork I ever bought was an

etching by Judith Feaney from the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. It cost fifty pounds, which was my weekly wage at the time.

It was a beautiful picture with a very odd title that did not seem to match the image, so I wrote to the artist asking her to explain the work. Our correspondence remains stuck to the back of the frame. That was the beginning of my real engagement with art and I still have the etching. Since we started collecting, we've never sold a work.

It's remarkable that you contacted the artist who created the first work you acquired, as you still do today. Did this initial dialogue shape your approach to artists and to collecting?

We love contemporary art as you can engage with the living creator. In the case of nearly every work we've bought on the primary market, we've gotten to know the artist either before or after the purchase. Many have become friends.

SEMINAL ENCOUNTERS

Which encounters were important to you and Catriona when you began collecting?

Galleries were always an intimidating experience, whereas Biennales were places you could freely wander through. Ever since we got married, attending the Venice Biennale has been one of our rituals together. It's a place where you can immerse yourself in art and engage with artists from around the world.

Have you ever supported the commissioning of works presented at the Venice Biennale or acquired works you saw there?

We've bought many works we've seen at the Venice Biennale and other biennales around the world, as well as at exhibitions we've seen in museums.

What has influenced your taste?

Our taste in art has one important criteria: a work has to be something we love. It has to be something that makes you think and challenges you, which speaks to the heart. Often people ask us why we don't have work by X or Y in our collection and we say it doesn't resonate with us.



Were you guided by some important professional friendships, such as with dealers or curators, particularly at the beginning of your collecting journey? And if so, what do you think is the value of these relationships?

We're self-taught and enjoy the process of discovery for ourselves. Of course, over the last thirty-five years, we've met some amazing curators, museum directors, artists and gallerists who've become life-long friends, but that's not how the journey started.

Is it important for you to connect with artists personally? Can you speak about some of your greatest friendships with artists? How did you meet them and when? How have they influenced and enriched your experience of art and the art world?

For pretty much every artist in our collection, we've got to know them either before we bought the work or after. Meeting the artist is important to us. In the case of some artists, we bought from their first show and have supported them over many decades.

The intention of the artist has never influenced the actual purchase, but once we've fallen in love with a work, we want to understand the meaning behind it and meet who made it.

PHILANTHROPY

Can you tell us about your most cherished accomplishment as a philanthropist to date?

Oh, gosh! That's an impossible question. When we started our philanthropy journey together, we used to give to pretty much anyone who asked, particularly if it was a friend seeking support for something they were passionate about. Over time, we found this unfulfilling and narrowed our focus to a much smaller group of organisations that we believed in passionately and whose leadership and ambition we endorsed, organisations that we could support in a more meaningful way, both financially and intellectually.

An early example of this was the Bundanon Trust, which was the first non-profit board I sat on in 1997, and here we supported the new library. Another was the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), where we were one of the founding donors in 1990 and gifted a thousand dollars to support its establishment. Little did we know that twenty-three years later we would be leading the campaign for the museum's expansion, transforming it into the most visited contemporary art museum in the world.

Another example of something that means a huge amount to us was leading the campaign for the redevelopment of the Australian Pavilion in Venice. This was a ten-year, highly complex process, culminating in the construction of the first twenty-first century building in Venice, and enabling Australian artists to have an extraordinary space to showcase their work on a world stage. This couldn't be more rewarding, with Archie Moore winning the Golden Lion at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024.

I'm also very proud of the work we do with the American Academy in Rome, where I'm a trustee, and where we've funded a residency for a great Australian visual artist to participate in that community each year.

I'm very passionate about Tate, where I'm vice chair of the International Council and particularly proud of how Tate is now championing First Nations artists.

We supported the Sydney Dance Company during the Wharf renovations with a studio in memory of Catriona's mother, Joan Barrie.

I'm also deputy chair of MoMA PS1 in Queens, New York, and I love the energy of that team and their ambition in bringing extraordinary exhibitions to New York, and how they champion the local community and artists.

What was important to you in taking on cultural leadership positions, such as chairman of the MCA in Sydney and commissioner of the Venice Biennale? What did you enjoy most in these roles?

Our support has been both financial and strategic, and we've been blessed by being able to work with some extraordinary leadership teams. The learning process from one can be used to help another, and we've met some remarkable people on this journey. Life's short, and we want to leave the planet having bequeathed a cultural legacy to others. We believe each one of us can make a difference.

THE MORDANT COLLECTION

The Mordant Collection is particularly striking in that it's truly international in scope and truly intergenerational. The collection comprises key figures from modern art, icons of contemporary art, and emerging artists. How did you go about building such a collection? Did you ever set yourself some criteria? Is it a purely organic reflection of your discoveries?

Interestingly, we never thought we were building a collection. This journey of over thirty-five years has been about finding works that are impactful to us. We needed to love the work enough to want to live with it.

Can you talk about your interest in video? The Mordant Collection comprises a large ensemble of time-based pieces, some of which are installations. Who was the first artist working with video that you started collecting?

We used to go to biennales and art fairs and see video and film works and simply couldn't understand how people could live with such art. When Gene Sherman showed Turkish artist Kutluğ Ataman, it was a lightbulb moment for us. We saw two works which we were totally absorbed by and so bought both (*Image (FACE)* and *Nothing (EYE)*, both 2003). From that moment we suddenly understood the medium and have acquired a very significant moving image collection over the last twenty-five years. Eventually, we built a house around moving image works! The joy of video work is that because it's portable, you can put four or five great works in your bag and play them in hotel rooms instead of watching TV!

How do you approach large-scale works and installations? How do you decide whether to keep them in your home or share them with the public?

We try to match our artworks with the best available space we own. At our home in Italy, we have enough space to have large-scale sculptures, whereas in New York, we can control the light in our home, so we mainly have photographs.

You are mostly based in Italy now. Has this move impacted the collection, which has a strong ensemble of Italian artists? Did you discover some of the

lesser-known Italian artists once you began exploring the local cultural scene and is it important for you to support the cultural scene where you live?

We've had a house in Italy for the last twenty-three years and about ten years ago we started spending six months there and six months in Australia. When Covid hit, we made Italy our base. Since we've been here, we've had more time to engage with the commercial galleries in Rome, Milan and Bologna and see things we wouldn't otherwise have seen, as well as going to art fairs and meeting other collectors. I'm also on the board of the American Academy in Rome, so we see a lot with them.

However, we're not particularly focused on the nationality of the artists, as we only buy things we love. Where the artist comes from doesn't feature in our thinking. It's more the content of the work which matters to us.

Tell us about living with the art that you own. Do you need to live with it, study it, and appreciate it? Some of the works you own are museum-scale installations, which would make that more challenging obviously. The sheer number of works in your collection makes the display of its entirety impossible. How do you approach collection rotations and loans?

Having numerous homes and an office, we're fortunate to be able to surround ourselves with things we love. We still have a huge amount in storage, and we gift works that we will not be hanging again to institutions. We're delighted to lend work when asked, as it's important to share with others. We don't formally rotate our collection, but when we acquire something new, inevitably we have to take something down to make room for the purchase and move works around.

The Mordant Collection contains a great number of women artists and women form the majority of the collection. When you began collecting works by women artists decades ago, this approach was not as popular as it is today. Was this a conscious decision?

Like nationality, we've never thought about gender when we buy a work, only about whether it strikes a chord in our hearts. Some years ago, we had to

document the collection for insurance purposes, and Annette Larkin who did this work had a similar observation. At the time, we were surprised it was even a point of discussion, and now it has emerged as a major issue amongst institutions. For collecting institutions, whose audience is half women, to have such an under-representation of women artists is a big surprise to us.

The Mordant Collection contains key First Nations artists, some of whom have produced the most sociopolitically engaged works in the collection. They express deep protests about Australia's colonial past, and how it ripples into contemporary societal fracture, opportunity gaps and cultural biases.

Could you tell us about the qualities that draw you to their engaged practices?

We have works by First Nations artists from all over the world. These are the longest continuous art makers. Again, when we see a work, we don't think of the artist's origin: if the work speaks to us, we'll buy it.

Some of the works we own do have political messaging in them that attracted us at the time, but we didn't go out of our way to look for it. We haven't collected traditional First Nations art, we've collected more contemporary First Nations art, and not just Australian. We've been buying Sámi art from the Inuit and also from Scandinavia. It's more the messaging in the work that interests us rather than the fact that the artist is First Nations, which, again, didn't come to mind at the time of purchase. It's interesting when people like you, Anaïs, especially since you come from a curatorial background, look at the works and draw those threads, but they're not threads that we thought about at the time.

I saw that Richard Bell's Embassy 2013-ongoing, which was first installed at the Sydney Biennale when you were chairman of the MCA, subsequently travelled to Tate. Could you tell me about your relationships with these institutions? Do you feel like your role somehow contributes to raising awareness of certain artists?

Having lived in Australia for forty years, I was very aware of how difficult it is to get Australian contemporary art seen in

international institutions. The challenge is getting overseas curators to come to Australia when they could just as easily be in Paris or New York. To advocate for Australian artists, we started with the campaign to rebuild the Australian Pavilion in Venice, which took us ten years to do. This was followed by working with Liz Ann Macgregor at the MCA and the Qantas Foundation to initiate a first-ever joint acquisition programme with Tate, which began in 2015. Qantas gave a significant amount of money from its Foundation to enable the MCA and Tate to jointly acquire Australian contemporary art. Tate then set up a programme with its curators who would come to Australia three or four times a year and spend time in artists' studios looking at art; a significant body of work has been acquired.

The Richard Bell *Embassy* tent is a work that's jointly owned by the MCA and Tate. When Tate decided that they wanted to show it in the Turbine Hall, it was a first for an Australian or a First Nations artist. We put together a fundraising programme to get support from Australian philanthropists to enable the exhibition to happen and it was incredibly well received. It is very interesting to see how Tate has transformed itself to put First Nations artists at the centre of everything they're doing, as very few international institutions have made that commitment.

Tate also has a significant collection of works by contemporary artists from the MENA region, some of which are also in your collection. How do you go about exploring local scenes that are not as well known internationally?

When we travel, we always spend time exploring the local art scene and finding things that are of interest to us.

I went to the first Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale in Saudi a couple of years ago and I found that really interesting. I know Hoor Al Qasimi, president of Sharjah Art Foundation and artistic director of Sharjah Biennale 15 (2023), and she asked me to come to the Sharjah Biennale. It was extraordinary. It well exceeded my expectations in terms of seeing, as you say, emerging talents from the Middle East, and I also spent time visiting commercial galleries

and seeing work that we hadn't seen before. Hoor also programmed twelve or thirteen Australian artists into that Sharjah Biennale, which was fantastic.

Do you do much research when encountering a new artist or are you guided by your instincts?

We do very little research unless we're buying a significant work, then we may do some research on the provenance and recent sales history.

When you collect with your wife, Catriona, how do you make decisions on a particular piece? Do you need to agree? Or do you give each other the freedom to have your own tastes regarding the collection?

We like to think we consult with each other, though on occasion I've come home with something Catriona dislikes. There are works we've gifted, or which go to my office as a result of her reaction. Any major purchase we try and agree on. But it's not usually about one taste, hers or mine, generally we like what the other likes.

What's your approach to managing risk within your collecting practice? How do you negotiate collecting based on love, and keeping an eye on your financial investments?

We've never sold a work and have never thought of art as a trading asset, so financial issues haven't been a consideration. Risk is an issue in the case of conservation or keeping up to date with new technology and experimental media, but that's something we're attuned to.

Speaking of new technologies, are you interested in AI-generated works?

I'm very interested in virtual reality. We haven't explored AI and it may be a step too far from the artist for me.

Interestingly, AI-generated work may be less experimental than virtual reality, as images generated from machine learning software are imitating, compiling and collaging existing images, which are then often presented in traditional two- or three-dimensional forms. On the other hand, virtual reality, VR, brings the viewer into a whole new physical experience with the work of art.

What are your thoughts on collecting VR works, and can you say a bit about some of your most memorable experiences with this medium?

We were early adopters of virtual reality. I was drawn to it because I was beginning to find the museum experience challenging. You would go to a museum and would see people rushing to photograph a work of art and post it on Instagram, but they weren't actually looking at it. You were being jostled around and you weren't getting an opportunity to immerse yourself in the work.

To combat this, we did a couple of things. First, we initiated a programme with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne – a commissioning programme allowing a young Australian artist to work in virtual reality or augmented reality when they haven't done so before. ACMI commissions and shows the work.

We've also supported Shaun Gladwell for many years, from his art school days all the way through to the virtual reality works he is making today. He was one of the first artists to do this and we bought his first VR work. Whilst it's not the easiest thing to live with, it's a great experience because you're completely immersed and you're not distracted by anyone around you. Whether it perpetuates as a medium into the future I don't know, but we've enjoyed acquiring some.

Regarding AI, we would be open to owning work if it resonated with us. The fact that an artist uses AI in the making process doesn't trouble me, but I don't know that I'd be buying a work created entirely by a machine.

NFTs. Do you think of them as a temporary market disruptor or are they here to stay?

I simply don't understand NFTs to be honest, Anaïs. The whole crypto thing, I'm deeply cynical about it and it feels to me like it's being driven from a trading perspective rather than from an artistic merit perspective. We've never been drawn to art as a trading commodity and given our discomfort with crypto generally we haven't got involved in NFTs. I've seen some NFTs, but not things that we've sought to acquire.

Tell us about the ones that got away.

Anaïs, not much gets away! There are works we've bought five, ten and twenty-five years after first seeing them, either because we couldn't afford them at the time or we pondered over them for too long. These works have eventually come to us.

What do you love most about collecting?

We love observing our artworks, living with art and being around creative people. This is what drives us. Life is a creative process.

What are the greatest joys you've had so far with your collection?

Being able to share the collection with visiting collectors and institutions, and even school children who are learning about art.

Could you tell us about some of your plans for the future of the collection?

We hope we'll continue to be challenged by new discoveries.

We built this collection for us and we don't see it as having a life beyond us. However, if an institution wants to borrow a work, we'll always lend it. Increasingly, we're thinking of works we won't be hanging again and finding ways to gift these to institutions where others may get the opportunity to enjoy them.

HIGHLIGHTED ARTISTS

- 14 MAITHA ABDALLA
- 16 HODA AFSHAR
- 18 LAWRENCE ALMA-TADEMA
- 20 DARREN ALMOND
- 22 GHADA AMER
- 24 BROOK ANDREW
- 26 RUSHDI ANWAR
- 28 SHUVINAI ASHOONA
- 30 KUTLUĞ ATAMAN
- 32 KADER ATTIA
- 34 MAARTEN BAAS
- 36 STEPHAN BALKENHOL
- 38 RICHARD BELL
- 40 GORDON BENNETT
- 42 BERTOZZI & CASONI
- 44 CRISTIANO BIANCHIN
- 46 ALIGHIERO BOETTI
- 48 MARION BORGELT
- 50 ALEXANDER CALDER
- 52 YOAN CAPOTE
- 54 CÉSAR (CÉSAR BALDACCINI)
- 56 TONY CLARK
- 58 CHUCK CLOSE
- 60 MAX COLE
- 62 MYRLANDE CONSTANT
- 64 MICHAEL COOK
- 66 PETAH COYNE
- 68 DANIEL CROOKS
- 70 DESTINY DEACON
- 72 JEREMY DELLER
- 74 WIM DELVOYE
- 76 MELVIN EDWARDS
- 78 WILLIAM EGGLESTON
- 80 TRACEY EMIN
- 82 DALE FRANK
- 84 GUNYBI GANAMBARR
- 86 ROSALIE GASCOIGNE
- 88 KENDELL GEERS
- 90 GAURI GILL
- 92 SIMRYN GILL
- 94 SHAUN GLADWELL
- 96 DAVID GOLDBLATT
- 98 OSVALDO GONZÁLEZ
- 100 ANTONY GORMLEY

102 FIONA HALL
104 MONA HATOUM
106 CLAIRE HEALY AND SEAN CORDEIRO
108 BILL HENSON
110 CANDIDA HÖFER
112 CRAIGIE HORSFIELD
114 MARGUERITE HUMEAU
116 CALLUM INNES
118 LINDE IVIMEY
120 C. T. JASPER AND JOANNA MALINOWSKA
122 TIM JOHNSON
124 NARELLE JUBELIN
126 ISAAC JULIEN
128 TAMMY KANAT
130 ANTON KANNEMEYER
132 ANISH KAPOOR
134 WILLIAM KENTRIDGE
136 RAGNAR KJARTANSSON
138 RACHEL KNEEBONE
140 EMILY KAME KNGWARREYE
142 MARIA KOZIC
144 WOLFGANG LAIB
146 ROSEMARY LAING
148 DAVID LARWILL
150 JANET LAURENCE
152 LINDY LEE
154 RICHARD LONG
156 RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER
158 CRISTINA LUCAS
160 DAVID MACH
162 TIM MAGUIRE
164 mandla
166 DANI MARTI
168 RICKY MAYNARD
170 JOHN McCracken
172 JOHN McLaughlin
174 CLEMENT MEADMORE
176 RICHARD MOSSE
178 CHRISTOPHER MYERS
180 SHIRIN NESHAT
182 BABAJIDE OLATUNJI
184 BRONWYN OLIVER
186 YOKO ONO
188 DAMIÁN ORTEGA
190 JONATHAN OWEN
192 FIONA PARDINGTON
194 CORNELIA PARKER
196 GIUSEPPE PENONE
198 STIEG PERSSON
200 AMALIA PICA
202 PIERRE ET GILLES
204 LILI REYNAUD-DEWAR
206 JULIAN ROSEFELDT
208 PETER SACKS
210 HANNES SCHMID
212 CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN
214 KATE SHEPHERD
216 CHIHARU SHIOTA
218 YINKA SHONIBARE CBE RA
220 STEPHEN SHORE
222 GEMMA SMITH
224 TIM STORRIER
226 DANIEL VON STURMER
228 MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY
230 DO HO SUH
232 FIONA TAN
234 SAM TAYLOR-JOHNSON
236 TEAMLAB
238 KATHY TEMIN
240 MY LE THI
242 MAXIE TJAMPITJINPA
244 GAVIN TURK
246 CHOE U-RAM
248 HOSSEIN VALAMANESH
250 BRENDAN VAN HEK
252 BERNAR VENET
254 FABIO VIALE
256 BILL VIOLA
258 MASSIMO VITALI
260 BOUKE DE VRIES
262 FRANK WALTER
264 JENNY WATSON
266 KEN WHISSON
268 MING WONG
270 JOHN YOUNG
272 ANNE ZAHALKA
274 MICHAEL ZAVROS
276 ZHENG GUOGU

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Simon and Catriona Mordant would like to thank all the artists who contributed to this book. Additionally, we extend our gratitude to the photographers, galleries, and institutions for their assistance in documenting the artists' work in this publication.

Editor

Anaïs Lellouche

Contributing Editors

Joanna Coryndon

Annette Larkin

Simon Mordant

Content Writers

Harry C. H. Choi

Katya Conrad

Dr Keren Goldberg

Arielle Lande

Anaïs Lellouche

Adi Puterman

Christine Takengny

Texts © Mordant Collection
and the content writers, 2024

Archivist

Annette Larkin

Design and Artistic Direction

Sarah Boris

Photography

Angus Mordant

Geoff Boccalatte

All photographers are listed
in the artwork captions

Mordant Collection gratefully
acknowledges permission granted to
reproduce the copyrighted material in this
book. Every effort has been made to contact
copyright holders to obtain permission for
the use of copyrighted material.

Printed in Germany

September 2024

First Edition

ISBN 978-1-3999-9328-9