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The Sculls' Warhols, Jasper Johns and Rauschenbergs All Together Again

By Sarah Fones

April 13, 2010



In 1973 taxi magnate Robert Scull and his socialite wife, Ethel, auctioned off 50 pieces from what was then considered one of the most enviable modern art collections in the country. The Sculls--aka "Bob and Spike" to anyone who's read Tom Wolfe's titular essay from *The Pump House Gang*--divorced soon thereafter an estimated \$2.2 million richer, ultimately selling off the remainder of the Oldenburgs, Rosenquists and Rauschenbergs to private collectors and public institutions in 1986. Starting today, 44 of those works from 23 of the last century's most prominent artists will be **on view** at New York's Acquavella Galleries through May 27.

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The couple's appetite for art was voracious, and in a relatively short span of time they managed to gobble up a sizable chunk of iconic works, many of which are now considered masterpieces. After sating their craving for Abstract Expressionism (Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko) they moved on to Pop Art, acquiring James Rosenquist's "F-111," Jasper Johns' "Map," and commissioning Andy Warhol's first portrait, "Ethel 36 Times." Another Warhol painting from the collection, "200 One Dollar Bills" sold last November for a record \$43.8 million, having initially fetched \$385,000 at auction in 1986.



The Scull collection indeed appreciated exponentially over time, a testament to both its owners' taste and prescience. In fact, the early '70s sale may have kickstarted the art market as we know it today, catalyzing the occasionally peculiar, often persistent desire for trendy works potential collectors neither know they want or need. **According to Scull's son**, James, however, his father's motivations were not simply those of a savvy, greed-driven businessman, but of a frustrated onetime painter himself, happy (and

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able) to help out then-struggling artists like John Chamberlain and James Rosenquist. Regardless of Scull's original intent, perceived or otherwise, the collection at Acquavella Galleries is irrefutably a formidable one whose cultural value is, in a word, priceless.



Robert & Ethel Scull: Portrait of a Collection, April 13 - May 27, 2010, Acquavella Galleries, 18 E. 79th St., NY, NY. www.acquavellagalleries.com.

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