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PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROE ETHRIDGE



OVERFLOWING WITH CONTEMPORARY MASTERPIECES, PHILANTHROPIST AND ART-WORLD ICON **AGNES GUND**'S NEWLY REDESIGNED PARK AVENUE ABODE GIVES NEW MEANING TO THE TERM "ART HOUSE."

MOST DOG OWNERS TRAIN THEIR PETS NOT TO BEG AT THE TABLE, JUMP UP ON GUESTS OR BARK AT THE MAIL CARRIER. BUT TINA AND GIOTTO, BOTH Wheaten Terriers, are art-trained dogs, and being that their mistress is Agnes Gund, they'd better be. They know not to wag their tails too close to the Christo sculpture or to even think about lifting a leg over the Louise Bourgeois totem, tempting as it may be. The fluffy beige canines miraculously avoid crashing into the ancient Chinese and African sculptures collected by Gund's second husband, lawyer Daniel Shapiro (from whom she is now separated), and clustered on pedestals. More astounding, they disturb not one grain of rice poured in piles on a slab of marble in a floor work by Wolfgang Laib, even while alternating between barking, snarling, growling and nearly mauling each other, which Gund waves off as "playing." "They are my favorite beings, those dogs," she says. "But we have a problem that they do get very excited."

In her feminine floral dress, pearl button earrings and mammoth brooch, her hair coiffed and sprayed, Gund, 70, is a study in patrician elegance with a healthy dose of quirky flair. After striding into her spacious Park Avenue living room, she sits down on a new banquette, designed by Kristen McGinnis, her 33-year-old decorator. On a table in front of her is a grouping of small Bourgeois pieces along with Jasper Johns's sculpture of a flashlight, which she has promised to the Museum of Modern Art because, she says, "I was aghast that the Modern had no sculpture of Jasper's." Many of the other works around are also promised gifts, either officially or in her mind. The sensational 1963 *Map* painting hanging behind the sofa, a rare example in private hands, is likely

This page: Roy Lichtenstein's *Masterpiece*, 1962, above an antique English mahogany table and chairs in Gund's dining room. The rug is on loan.
Opposite: Agnes Gund in her living room, with her Wheaten Terriers, Giotto and Tina.



In the living room, Jasper Johns's *Map*, 1963, above a banquette designed by decorator Kristen McGinnis. To the left, an assortment of 11th-century Shang bronze vessels and, in the dining room, Sigmar Polke's *Der Arm*, 1994. Eyre de Lanux horsehair-upholstered chairs flank a Jean-Charles Moreux oak coffee table, and, in the foreground, a Pierre Chareau walnut table is surrounded by a pair of Jean-Michel Frank cerused-oak chairs.

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bound for her hometown museum. “They pretty much know they’re getting it in Cleveland,” she says with a shrug.

Without a doubt, the art is the star of the show here. And it is Gund—who spent 11 years as the tireless president of MoMA, has been a pivotal philanthropist in art as well as education, and is a prominent collector with a trove of some 1,400 works that meander from Rothko to Rauschenberg and Richter—who directs its selection. It fell to McGinnis to unclutter the furniture and redesign the lighting to let the Arshile Gorky and the Sol LeWitt, the Brice Marden and the Roy Lichtenstein shine. “It’s about Aggie,” says McGinnis, a sunny blond. “It’s about the art.” With four children and 11 grandchildren (not to mention the dogs), Gund likes a cozy, lived-in look, but she also entertains nonstop—her apartment is the Grand Central station of the art world. Gund, McGinnis explains, “is very, very practical. She didn’t want anything that people couldn’t sit on.” What evolved was an inviting, serene scheme dominated by early-20th-century French furniture. Clean lines and a muted palette prevail but with some unexpected, bold touches, like the deep blue walls in the dining room.

Along with redecorating, Gund took a fresh look at her collection, which she has been amassing since the mid-Sixties. Some pieces, like Johns’s *Untitled* (1995), which she loaned for the recent “Jasper Johns: Gray” show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are old standbys. But others, including a James Rosenquist in the living room and a Lynda Benglis wall sculpture in the dining room, have never been installed before. “I don’t like to keep things in storage,” Gund says. “This installation has brought back very clearly in our minds how much we have in storage that is really beautiful.”

Gallerist Angela Westwater, who has known Gund for more than 30 years, seconds that notion, raving about the Rosenquist and the intriguing juxtaposition of different periods and styles, which, she says, any museum curator would do well to see. “There’s not a collector I admire more in the world,” Westwater says, adding that Gund combines knowledge with intuition and daring. “Aggie’s not one of those collectors who [says], ‘I want a Schnabel; I want a Johns.’ No. Aggie wants *that* Johns, *that* Nauman, *that* Bourgeois. She’s very deliberate in her choices.”

The de-installation (to allow for part of the apartment to be gutted) and reinstallation involved meticulous planning. Gund decided to give a Frank Stella star-shaped painting called *Plant City*, which had roosted beside the fireplace, to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in memory of its late director Anne d’Harnoncourt. Getting it out, recalls Arabella Ogilvie-Makari, Gund’s longtime curator, meant unstretching it and hoisting it through a living room window and down 14 floors. Johns’s *Untitled* arrived home from the Met via the same crane (but through a bigger bedroom window) and took up residency where the Stella had been. The large, vibrant Marden canvas now in the dining room needed to be stretched on-site, while the Robert Rauschenberg hanging catty-corner to it, a promised gift to MoMA, required that the museum’s conservators oversee its installation. An abstract composition that Scottish artist Richard Wright had painted directly onto the dining room ceiling (there was no room on the walls) in 2001 was destroyed in the renovations; Wright graciously agreed to travel to the U.S. to re-create the piece, which he has never done before. And some

This page: Brice Marden’s *Epitaph Painting 2*, 1996–97, in the dining room. Opposite: Louise Bourgeois’s *Pillar*, 1949–50, stands in the foreground; to the left is Mark Rothko’s *Two Greens With Red Stripe*, 1964, with Christo’s sculpture *Nine Packed Bottles*, 1965, below it. Sol LeWitt’s *21 A*, 1989, hangs from the dining room ceiling.

of the artworks are on view by kismet: In the midst of the reinstallation, the doorbell rang; it was a man from the Smithsonian, a Joseph Cornell assemblage in hand. It had been on loan and now occupies a wall in the living room.

Gund grew up in Shaker Heights, Ohio, the second of six children. Her father made a fortune in banking; her mother died when Gund was just 14. When her mother became sick, Gund recalls, the children were shipped off to boarding school, Gund to Miss Porter’s. “It was tough not being home,” she says. “I would never recommend that for children with an ill parent. I think it’s had a big effect on me. But anyway, that’s beside the point. I was lucky because I was older. I had a sister who had to go away at 10 years old.” The children came home for vacations, but Gund says her father, a workaholic, “didn’t really know what to do with us.” She did learn her way around the kitchen, since their housekeeper was a terrible cook. One summer Gund’s father made her work as a teller. “I kept taking them chocolate-chip cookies; it was the only way they tolerated me,” she says of her colleagues. “My manager said, ‘You never make the same mistake twice, but you make so many mistakes.’”

She’s still a giver, not just in terms of her large-scale philanthropy but on a more intimate level. She is known for the treats she sends when a friend needs a pick-me-up, whether Graeter’s ice cream from Cincinnati (her own freezer is chock-full of the stuff—and little else) for a woman who just lost her husband or a succession of flowers and gifts to fellow philanthropist Lewis B. Cullman’s ailing wife, Dorothy. Dinner guests often receive books, individually selected. In a nice case of what goes around comes around, Gund sent Ellsworth Kelly flowers when he was hospitalized in the early Eighties. “I did a drawing of them and gave it to her,” Kelly says, referring to *Three Lilies*. Another Kelly, *Siberian Iris*, now hangs in the hallway, where works on paper by contemporary masters—think choice examples of Lichtenstein, Bruce Nauman and Lee Bontecou—are mounted frame-to-frame the way family photos line the corridors of typical homes.

When Gund began collecting in earnest, after her father’s death in 1966, she had in fact hoped to concentrate on Old Master drawings. “But you have to live in the dark if you do,” she says. “You can’t have light, or you have them in a room where the shades are down mostly. I had that [seasonal affective disorder] thing where you really need light or you get very depressed.” Instead she took up contemporary art because it offered the added perk of meeting its creators. Beyond an introduction at an opening, Gund has become friend and confidante to many of America’s most prominent artists. “Everyone falls in love with her,” says Kelly. “You can tell her I’m in love with her.”

Chuck Close, who recently donated some works to MoMA in her honor (and who also enthuses “I love Aggie”), recalls how Gund conspired with then chief curator of painting and sculpture Kirk Varnedoe and trustee Anna Marie Shapiro and her husband, Robert, for the museum to buy the first large painting he made after becoming a quadriplegic 20 years ago, a portrait of the artist Elizabeth Murray. MoMA’s stamp of approval, Close says, showed the art world “the work is there.” “Obviously the Modern is not going to buy something out of sympathy,” he says.

Not content to be just a wealthy collector and patron, Gund enrolled at Harvard in the late Seventies when she and her first husband, Albrecht Saalfeld, were living with their four children in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned a master’s degree in art history. She is, Ogilvie-Makari says, “a champion of contemporary art in its most progressive manifestations,” and was insistent that not just household names hang in the apartment—hence the presence of James Lee Byars’s circular lace abstraction, Teresita Fernandez’s intricate wall sculpture and Cai Guo-Qiang’s enormous drawing made from gunpowder. Johns marvels at Gund’s ability to collect avowed masterpieces while also connecting with untried, experimental artists. “Her interest in the scene is much broader than mine,” he says. “I don’t really know what most young artists are doing. But Aggie does.”

She developed her taste for the avant-garde early on. In 1979, for example, she bought a small Laib *Milkstone*, a piece of very polished white marble with a barely discernible rim designed to hold, as the title suggests, milk—it was



a favorite of her cat's. One day Gund was leading a group of out-of-town collectors on a tour of her collection when a man stood a little too close to the shimmery floor sculpture. "My daughter Jessica turned to me because [the milk] was seeping up his pant leg," she recalls, adding that after she gave *Milkstone* to MoMA, it sat empty on Saturdays and Sundays because the unionized handlers weren't there to change the milk, which would have spoiled if left out all weekend.

Gund became a MoMA trustee in 1976 and served as president from 1991 to 2002, during which time she shepherded the construction of the new building. "Aggie's a ball of energy. She's driven and she's smart and she's committed," says director Glenn D. Lowry. "She was at the museum five, if not seven, days a week." Back then, Gund notes, it was like a full-time job. Now, as president emerita, she serves on "only" 11 or 12 committees.

She remains a staunch defender of the museum, in particular the Yoshio Taniguchi edifice that opened in 2004 and has been panned by critics. Gund singles out Roberta Smith, who lamented in *The New York Times* that Herzog & de Meuron lost the competition for the commission, calling the art critic "wrong" and asserting that the Swiss pair's proposal "was not good." The Taniguchi, Gund declares, "is a gem of a building. You've got the greatest collection, anywhere in the world, of modern art, and [the building] enhances, it takes a backseat to the collection. And that's what we had to do." Gund is beloved enough that she can get away with taking a friendly jab at the rival Met uptown: "Most times you can be in [MoMA] with those 9,000, 10,000 people a day—that's a lot of people—and not feel crowded and still not have the walk that you have to take at the Met. I'm not putting down the Met—I love the Met; I support things at the Met. But I'm usually on the run, and by the time I walk the distance that I have to go, I can't spend any time looking at the artwork, or I'm exhausted, or I have too-high shoes on." In another moment of partisanship, Gund bemoans that the Met landed the memorial for Rauschenberg, who died last spring. "The Modern is much more of a Rauschenberg museum," she gripes.

The Met has never put a priority on cutting-edge art, whereas Gund has long been dedicated to living artists. Lowry points to her role in MoMA's merger with P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center. "I think there's no question her legacy is already defined by her deep and passionate commitment to living artists," he says. "She believes in artists; she's willing to take risks."

Gund's loyalty is such that she avoids selling work by living artists. "I just don't feel right about it," she says. (One exception was an artist who, a curator assured her, wouldn't mind.) When she does sell, it's not to reap great profits or even to buy other works, but only to make charitable donations. It's also worth noting that in this age of philanthropy as personal monument, Gund is not all about seeing her name in bronze. At MoMA she used her naming rights to a gallery to honor Varnedoe, who died of cancer in 2003. (David Rockefeller insisted on naming the garden lobby after Gund.) "I really did feel I had to



Above: Robert Rauschenberg's *Rhyme*, 1956, with a Ming console in the dining room; to the right is an African Djenné sculpture. Below: Cai Guo-Qiang's gunpowder drawing *Wolf and Lion*, 2005, in the entrance gallery, next to figures from Nigeria and Mali. Opposite: In Gund's bedroom, Gerhard Richter's *Horst With Dog*, 1965, above a Ming table.

give a lot to MoMA, even though many of the trustees have a lot more money than I do," Gund says, a note of irritation in her voice. "There's only one other person I would say I'm like on the board of MoMA, and that's Lewis Cullman. Now, Lewis has more money than I do, but not a lot more, and he gives a lot of it away, but proportionally he gives more of his money, like proportionally I give more of mine, than, say—I won't name them but any of them you know, and that excludes David Rockefeller, who's been extraordinarily generous."

Gund is strong, but she's no bully. Even at MoMA she relies more on diplomacy than on the power of the purse strings. A year or two ago she asked Ann Temkin, whom she is quick to call a "great curator" (and who is now chief curator of painting and sculpture), why there was no Bourgeois or Joan Mitchell on view. "It is kind of awful," Gund says. "I mean, the museum has a reputation, as do many museums, for only having male art," and while in some periods the omission may be justified, "now that's just not true." Pieces from both artists went up in short order. Another situation wasn't so quickly remedied. When the new MoMA opened, Gund loaned about 10 works, all promised gifts, for a show highlighting the museum's collection. "The [Hans] Hofmann they hung in a terrible way, where I thought it really diminished it," she recalls. "They said they were taking that arrangement down, but it was up there for about a year and a half."

Among her other major philanthropic endeavors is Studio in a School, which she founded in 1977, when the New York City budget crisis virtually eliminated art education from the public schools. Some 30,000 children participate each year. "If she accomplished nothing else," Close says, "that would be big. There's really no limit to her generosity." Adds Johns, who sits with Gund on the board of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, which he cofounded, "Her importance to the contemporary art world has been enormous." And beyond art, to humanitarian initiatives, he notes, "I frequently hear things that hint at the involvement of Aggie."

Gund admits she's a softy when it comes to a good cause. After growing up with extreme affluence and inheriting a fortune at a young age, she says, "I had a deep sense of guilt about having money."

Whether it's guilt or good old Midwestern practicality, Gund to this day has very specific ideas about how to spend that money. There remains, for instance, the matter of the dining room rug. McGinnis found what Gund concedes was a "wonderful Swedish rug," turn of the last century, but the price tag was not so wonderful. Gund declines to reveal the dollar figure for publication because, she says, "I was embarrassed to even look at a rug like that. I can't afford that. I just can't—we don't spend that type of money." (Suffice it to say a middle-American family could buy a comfortable home for less.) Gund facetiously accuses McGinnis and Ogilvie-Makari of being "in cahoots" to get her to trash the rug she's long had in the room and pony up for the Swedish number. "My life is being visual; that's what I do," Gund says. "I know the rug is bad." When it came time to replace a rug in the hallway, her thrifty-gal side took over again: She schlepped to a sale in Queens and bought one there. McGinnis, she notes wryly, "has not mentioned it." ●

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