

DIE ZEIT

Is this valuable – or can I throw it away?

When artists die, they often leave a stockpile of work. There are now galleries and consultants specializing in salvaging these treasures.

BY TIM ACKERMANN

From the very beginning Keith Arnatt was an accomplished master of the exit, the English artist's breakthrough work being particularly exemplary, in 1969 *Self Burial (Television Interference Project)* interrupted a TV channel's regular evening program with a series of photographs, in which the artist sank bit by bit into the ground. For Arnatt this "self-burial" was the start of an only averagely successful career as a conceptual artist and photographer. Deliberate disappearance again played a crucial role during the last decade of his life – he turned his back on the market, undertook no further solo exhibitions, and severed all links.

Arnatt died in 2002, and it is doubtful that he ever imagined he would still be remembered today. But such is the case with loving relatives – they have their own ideas. In 2012 Arnatt's son approached Loretta Würtenberger and Daniel Tümpel from Fine Art Partners. The Berlin-based specialists in art financing and the managing of estates were excited by Arnatt's art and took a liking to his heir, the development of a joint strategy being the result. Würtenberger and Tümpel subsequently contacted the prestigious Sprüth Magers gallery. This led to his *Notes from Jo*, a striking series of photographs of hand-written notes, which he had created in a low-key manner in the Nineties, being shown in the gallery's Berlin space in 2013.

How do you go about introducing an artist's estate into the market? And what about museums? Whilst these are questions that artists themselves may have given some thought to during their own lifetimes, they are certainly ones their heirs will have to confront. The issue of estates is currently receiving some much needed attention and added momentum in the form of various symposia, such as the ones in January at the Cologne auction house Van Ham or in December last year at the Berlin Academy of Arts, where the founding of a German federal association "Künstlernachlässe" (Artists Estates) was envisaged for the coming spring. As it was, foundations and associations from eleven federal states agreed to undertake joint lobbying. Thinking one step further, Fine Art Partners are about to go online with their newly established Institute for Artists' Estates, which has set global networking as its primary objective: "The Institute wants to provide information, as well as offer estate managers, who are already successfully operating at an international level a platform for interaction and exchange," says Würtenberger. She is in close contact with heirs such as Mayen Beckmann, who looks after the estate of her grandfather Max, and Christy MacLear, the director of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. The Institute is also planning to award research fellowships.

In some cases heirs wanted to simply throw away their relation's art work

A lack of committed supporters will certainly lead to the stalling of any posthumous artistic career. That parts of the studio of Hanne Darboven, who died in 2009, could be seen just five years later in the Museum Reina Sofia in Madrid, was largely thanks to the efforts of influential collector Harald Falckenberg, who from within the Hanne Darboven Foundation had been urging for such an exhibition for years. "It was clear to me from very early on that Darboven's art belonged in the very finest European museums". Falckenberg said. Unfortunately not every artist has such an advocate. Werner Schaub, chairman of the *Bundesverband Bildender Künstler und Künstlerinnen* (the German association of artists), knows of cases where the heirs of deceased artists wanted to simply throw their paintings away as trash. Considering this, in November the association published *Anlass: Nachlass* (Project Legacy) as a kind of self-help book: "It's important for artists to sort their work out during their own lifetime, such as collating a detailed list of their works", Schaub recommends, "then it's easier for an estate to find a home later on."

In any case the number of depots is limited. Even the archive for artists' estates in Pulheim outside Cologne – which is due to obtain a new depot open to the public by 2019, costing 7.5 million euros, a third of which is being jointly funded by the German federal government, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and the Rhineland regional authorities – today only stores a total of 34 estates. And most museums politely refuse: “We get an offer once a month”, says Thomas Köhler, Director of the Berlinische Galerie, for example: “But it’s not a museum’s responsibility to conserve everything. And it would be illusionary to imagine that there’s still space for extensive oeuvres on canvas, not to mention sculptures”. The best outcome is that, individual works or partial bequests consisting of correspondence and other documents, photographs or works on paper, be considered. “A garage full doesn’t always comprise a serious offer”, Köhler warns. The ideal is a well-ordered bequest by an artist whose work already has links to the institution. The most recent arrival has been approximately 1,000 drawings from the estate of the Jewish artist Gertrude Sandmann, who had survived the Holocaust with the assistance of friends and died in Berlin in 1981. The works are due to be shown in an exhibition in 2017 or 2018.

For the market the estates of artists who have been overlooked are becoming a source of new supplies

Gallerists have likewise been more deeply involved in work with estates for some years, as this is a lucrative area that beckons. “The market has discovered estates”, estate specialist Loretta Würtenberger gives her diagnosis. “This trend is the result of the strong market for contemporary art over the last ten years, which has consequently caused problems in the area of supply for galleries. That’s why they are looking for new sources to tap into”. In addition, working with estates signals an opening to the secondary market, which is of increasing significance to major galleries. Galleries proudly announce winning a well-known artist’s estate for their stable, or better still, having snapped one up from a competitor. The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation has demonstrated the benefits of such fickleness: in 2008, shortly after the artist’s death, they moved from Pace, his New York gallery, to rivals Gagosian. Since then Gagosian has once again lost the Rauschenberg estate, to a trio of galleries consisting of Luisa Strina (São Paulo), Thaddaeus Ropac (Salzburg/Paris) – and Pace.

Artists' heirs seem to prefer some galleries to others: for example David Zwirner represents 13 artists' estates in New York and London, including those of Alice Neel and On Kawara, as well as those of Minimalist Art heroes Dan Flavin and Donald Judd. Hauser & Wirth represent a total of 16 estates across a network of galleries encompassing Zürich, London, Somerset, New York, and in the near future Los Angeles. "Ultimately a lot of the artists' estates which we represent today are simply the logical continuation of the gallery's work when the artists were still alive", explains gallery owner Iwan Wirth. "In the last 25 years since the founding of Hauser & Wirth numerous important artists have unfortunately died, including Dieter Roth, Allan Kaprow, Jason Rhoades, Louise Bourgeois and Mike Kelley."

Today Wirth sees a new interest in important artists and movements which have to date been overlooked, not only on the part of art critics and the market, but also from artists' heirs making increased demands on galleries: "Extreme professionalism, higher standards in legal, logistical and conservatory matters, together with knowledge of the global art market are the crucial foundations for successfully managing an estate". Hauser & Wirth undertakes research on deceased artists, maintains their archives, and publishes catalogue raisonnés, employing a restorer at their Swiss premises who deals with complex works such as the fragile sculptures of the artist Eva Hesse, who died young but whose work today effortlessly commands seven figure sums. Managing an estate is sometimes also an opportunity to honour an old friendship – in Iwan Wirth's case the artist Jason Rhoades. The exhibition of his sprawling large-scale installations is today a challenge for any installation team, the close relationship between artist and gallerist in the past turning into an invaluable benefit. "A deep love and appreciation of an artist and an intimate knowledge of his values provide the basis for further research into his work", says Wirth.

However, the approach should not be overly dogmatic in terms of a monopoly on interpretation – a cautionary example being the estate of the artist Oskar Schlemmer, who until 2014 could rarely be shown due to decades of disputes surrounding the estate. A golden rule for the management of an artist's estate is, according to Loretta Würtenberger, that all the stakeholders have, at some point, to emotionally detach themselves. "There's only one way to keep an artist's legacy alive over the long

term”, she says, “each generation has to be given the chance to rediscover the artist in their own way.”

The author is an editor of Weltkunst.