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# Norton Simon: The Man with "Two Hats"

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**NORTON SIMON: THE MAN WITH “TWO HATS”**

by  
**HELEN E. RAGEN**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR GORSE  
PROFESSOR TAZZARA**

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## **Introduction**

On March 26, 1965, in the midst of an art auction at Christie's in London, the prominence and influence that Norton Simon (1907 – 1993) held not only in the business world, but also now in the art world, was finally revealed to the public. It was during this auction that Simon managed to reopen the sale of Rembrandt van Rijn's portrait of his son, *Titus*, painted in 1655, after the gavel had fallen (Image 1). After bidding resumed, the painting went to Simon for \$2,234,400, which at the time was a record price for an artwork sold in Britain.<sup>1</sup> It was just short of the highest price ever spent on a work of art, which was the \$ 2.4 million fetched by another work by Rembrandt, *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* (1653), that had been purchased by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1961 (Image 2).<sup>2</sup> Norton Simon was an individual playing in a game against well-established, world-class museums and galleries, but the fact that he could hold his own, not only in winning *Titus*, but over decades of collecting, is an indication that he was both a brilliant businessman and art collector with an impeccable game plan.

Acquiring this prized painting by Rembrandt displayed not only Norton Simon's character as a shrewd and discerning businessman, but also his prowess as an art collector; it showed that he had the rare ability to wear these "two hats" at once. "His acquaintance with *Titus* actually began eight years earlier and continued as an on-again, off-again courtship typical of the collector who often delayed purchases for months or even years in an effort to consider potential acquisitions from every angle, get the best

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Muchnic, *Odd Man In: Norton Simon and the Pursuit of Culture* (University of California Press, 1998), 91.

<sup>2</sup> "Management: The Corporate Cézanne," *Time Magazine*, June 4, 1965, 74.

deal and keep all of his options open.”<sup>3</sup> Every purchase that Simon made was part of a methodical plan to gain the highest returns from his acquisitions, whether that was financially or emotionally.

Norton Simon was a unique collector because he let passion guide his collecting interests, but he controlled his passion by making his purchases based on smart economic decisions bolstered by years of experience in successful business negotiations. In 1966, Norton Simon was quoted in *Business Week* explaining:

“You exist in a state of growth or you die, frankly the things that I do are done out of a sense of learning and growth. You must be interested in things or go stale. I take a profound interest in what is around the corner, and it really doesn’t matter which corner you’re talking about. It could be business, or art, or education . . . . And every company that I go into is an education in itself . . . and a growth experience, I’m not talking about growth in the sense of dollar terms, but in the education and breadth of the individual.”<sup>4</sup>

In early 1965, Simon turned the corner from well-known businessman to a world famous art collector. On January 20<sup>th</sup> of that year, Robert M. Leylan, Head of the American Branch of Christie’s in New York, personally wrote a note to Simon about an upcoming auction at Christie’s; he explained to Simon how the auction house planned to sell “a small group of capital pictures from the famous Cook collection” and that Christie’s had estimated the *Titus* to sell at about \$1.5 million.<sup>5</sup> After years of watching

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<sup>3</sup> Odd Man In, Muchnic, 86.

<sup>4</sup> “Simon Says It With a Broad Brush,” *Business Week*, 14 May 1966, 64.

<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Leylan, letter to Norton Simon, 20 January 1965, Norton Simon Museum.

this Rembrandt, Simon finally saw his chance to acquire a true masterpiece, and he was not going to let the opportunity slip away.

Anxious to have the bidding start, Norton Simon devised a secret method of communication between himself and the auctioneer, Peter Chance, so he could make a purchase in secret and then announce it at the ideal moment. Simon's plan was nothing short of byzantine: "When Mr. Simon is sitting down he is bidding. If he bids openly when sitting down he is also bidding. When he stands up he has stopped bidding. If he then sits down again he is not bidding until he raises his finger. Having raised his finger he is continuing to bid until he stands up again."<sup>6</sup> This carefully thought out and complex arrangement, which was reduced to a handwritten agreement, is just one example of how Norton Simon planned his purchases. Unfortunately for Simon, complex plans like these can lead to confusion and miscommunication.

When Norton Simon discussed his secret plan with Chance, the auctioneer thought his tactics to be too confusing, but entered the auction believing Simon would not be making any open bids and would only bid silently. *Titus* was the last piece of art up for sale in the lot. Simon had made his bid of \$900,000, but the bids continued to crawl up to \$1.9 million. In an attempt to confuse the competition, Simon fell silent, which Chance took as code for Simon's withdrawal from the competition. The hammer went down at \$2.1 million and the painting was sold to David Somerset of Marlborough Fine Arts.<sup>7</sup> The moment the gavel hit the table, Norton Simon was on his feet in rage, causing

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<sup>6</sup> John Herbert, *Inside Christie's* (London: Hoddler & Stroughton, 1990), 105.

<sup>7</sup> Odd Man In, Muchnic, 91.

an unprecedented scene in the great auction house<sup>8</sup>. Breaking his silence, he demanded that Chance reopen the auction. “Simon then jumped up, demanding that Chance abide by their written agreement. Chance reopened the sale, took one more bid, Simon’s, for \$2.2 million, and sold the painting to the Norton Simon Foundation.”<sup>9</sup> This is the perfect example of the business behavior--planned, insistent and sometimes rowdy--that had never been seen in the art world before Norton Simon stepped onto the auction floor.

By bidding secretly rather than openly, Norton Simon hoped to avoid the public’s eye until he returned to Los Angeles, but the scene he caused in Christie’s that afternoon was like no other before in that great auction house, and the impetuous American businessman's conduct became an international news story. *TIME*, *Newsweek* and *The Daily Telegraph* were all interviewing the young business tycoon, and soon photographs of him and his collection were prominently featured. Was he the art collector feigning disinterest so that he could quietly purchase the painting at his price, or was he the businessman ready to send a clear message that he was not a man to be bid against? As this controversy spread throughout the art world and people discussed the dramatic actions that acclaimed businessman, Norton Simon, took that day, it was clear that Norton Simon’s two worlds were no longer separate, as he was the man with “two hats”. Martin Summer, an associate of auctioneer Peter Chance, was present during the sale of *Titus* and explained the dramatic events: “He got the picture and he made himself a name

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<sup>8</sup> "Rembrandt Rumpus Aka Dispute In Bidding For The Titus At Christie's."- *British Pathé*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Mar. 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Odd Man In, Muchnic, 91.

that day. That might easily have been his intention, to nail his colors to the mast and let the world know, ‘I am a collector to be reckoned with.’”<sup>10</sup>

Before Norton Simon brought *Titus* home to Los Angeles, the two stopped by the National Gallery in Washington D.C. because, “the painting has such great beauty and universal appeal that the foundation has a special obligation to exhibit it in the most favorable circumstances for the widest possible enjoyment.”<sup>11</sup> Christie’s shipping manager, Michael Green, hand carried the four-foot-square box containing *Titus* on the non-stop flight from London to Washington D.C., and from there a mass of armed guards escorted the portrait into the museum.<sup>12</sup> J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery’s assistant director, justified the extreme security because the portrait was “one of the most valuable paintings ever received in the National Gallery” and “the precautions were commensurate with its value.”<sup>13</sup>

Simon and his portrait of the young boy returned to America as celebrities. John Walker, director of the National Gallery, held an unveiling of the portrait in front of many important people, including Navy Secretary Paul Nitze, Philanthropist Paul Mellon, and William Walton, chairman of the Federal Government’s Commission of Fine Arts. “*Titus* was ceremoniously brought from the gallery’s basement, and while flashbulbs popped and TV cameras whirled, hung before red velvet in its place of honor.”<sup>14</sup> The best

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Summers, conversation with author, *Odd Man In*, Muchnic, 91.

<sup>11</sup> “East Will See ‘Titus’ Before It Comes Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 1965, sec. 2, p. I.

<sup>12</sup> *Odd Man In*, Muchnic 93.

<sup>13</sup> “‘Titus’ Heavily Guarded on Flight to Washington for First Showing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1965, sec. I, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *TIME*, 74.

of the best wanted to get a glimpse of this portrait and to meet the man who reversed the legendary auction house's sale.

After six weeks at the National Gallery, the portrait of the young boy returned in triumph to California to be displayed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Lines of people filled the museum, and the crowds reflected the two sides of Simon's personality--his "two hats". Some were art lovers waiting in anticipation to see the famous Rembrandt masterpiece, while others were there to see the painting that sold for a near-record price and caused an international controversy. Adding to the moment was the fact that Norton Simon had just topped off one of the greatest and most impressive art collections on the West Coast with one of the most memorable and spoken about paintings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The hype surrounding *Titus* increased and reached the cover of *TIME* magazine on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1965 (Image 3). *TIME*'s columnist explains: "the man who bought *Titus* and brought it to the U.S., after a year of stalking it, is perhaps the only man in the world who could and would execute such a coup."<sup>15</sup> Simon had been collecting art over a decade prior to his purchase of Rembrandt's warm, touching and universally accessible portrait of his son, but this sale marked a major turning point in his collecting career. It brought him a great deal of international attention including offers from art dealers, requests for artwork loans and even an offer to purchase a 150-year-old pub from an old Englishwoman.<sup>16</sup> As Simon brought the now-famous Rembrandt into Los Angeles, everyone--both across the Atlantic and back in Los Angeles--knew who Norton Simon was, the ruthless art collector on a mission for the best.

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<sup>15</sup> *TIME*, 74.

<sup>16</sup> *TIME*, 74.



In the art world, Norton Simon was becoming a national figure, but it was his success earlier in life that allowed him to become the man with two hats, that of the businessman and that of the collector. In 1931 Simon purchased Vita Pac, a bankrupt orange juice bottling company. Through a series of cost saving exercises, shrewdly timed and executed purchases of related companies (including the Hunt Brothers Packaging Corporation), and strategic, brilliantly implemented advertising campaigns, Norton Simon managed to create Hunt Foods, a \$15 billion company that is still in existence today.<sup>17</sup> This is only part of the impact and influence that Norton Simon had on the business world, where his focus was to seek out and buy undervalued companies that he saw as “good deals,” not necessarily to liquidate them and sell them for their parts, but to turn them around to his advantage and that of other shareholders. In the end, however, it was the art connoisseur in Simon that got the recognition. Norton Simon was first a business man and then an art collector, but even he lost sight of the dividing line over his lifetime; he could not determine if he was a business man who dabbled in art, or if he was an art connoisseur who engaged in business.

Simon applied his successful business techniques to his mode of collecting. By examining the progression and establishment of Norton Simon Inc., alongside the creation of the Norton Simon Art Foundation, one can draw multiple parallels between Simons’ unique approach to business and the application of his unorthodox techniques to his purchases in the art world – Norton Simon’s “two hats”.

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Campbell, *Collector without Walls: Norton Simon and His Hunt for the Best* (Yale University Press, 2010), 13.

Norton Simon stood apart from other American collectors at the time for four reasons: first, his unique business experience and methodology, second his age, third, his gender, and finally his personal taste.

His business experience and methods began their development when he was 17, shortly after he dropped out of University of California Berkeley to focus on business, and the ensuing decades gave him more experience in buying and selling highly valuable assets than just about any of his contemporaries. As a result, he acquired exceptional, unconventional business skills at a young age, and by the time he entered the art world he had learned vital lessons from his decades of buying stocks, manufacturing sites and bankrupt companies, and these lessons set him apart from other great art collectors.

Simon was never afraid of acting strategically, and taking his time: He knew how to locate a bargain, but more importantly he had learned to wait for just the right time to step in and buy it. These attributes formed his strategy as he “stalked” *Titus* for a year before successfully buying it, as previously discussed. He also developed the aggressive stubbornness that comes with being a successful entrepreneur, and one of the leaders of his generation.

Norton Simon built his diverse corporations in an untraditional way, by seizing every opportunity and finding value in old companies even if they were bankrupt or defunct. He would purchase these companies, strip them down or shape them up, and use them or their assets to build his multi-faceted empire, and all this provided a business model that he carried--close to his vest--into the art world. It was this business model that he later used in his acquisition of hundreds of artworks, along with the massive Duveen Collection and his takeover of the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art.

In business, Simon also learned to base his decisions on his own unique combination of personal judgment and careful research and analysis, and he transferred these practices into the art world, where he often kept experts on the phone for seemingly endless calls, asking questions about a potential acquisition, but, whatever the experts said, he only bought works that matched his personal standards of taste and value.

In all these ways, Norton Simon's business background had given him methods and strategies that he was able to take with him to the art world, where they gave him an advantage over other great collectors. The success he won in business when he was in his twenties and thirties, however, also gave him something even more tangible, something that set him apart in a second way, namely, the wealth to become a major player in the Art world in his forties and fifties—which was a young age for a great collector with no inherited wealth.

When Simon was twenty years old, the Great Stock Market Crash hit the American economy on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1929, and the United States, along with the rest of the world, entered the worst economic depression in modern history. Unemployment reached a high of more than 25% and hundreds of thousands of Americans found themselves in bread lines or living on the street; yet somehow Simon, the young entrepreneur, came out of the depression with a successful business.<sup>18</sup> In fact he was able to thrive during the Great Depression. He made money by starting the successful Los Angeles Steel Company, which dealt in scrap metal, and even his investments in the stock market were profitable.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kaiser Wilson, "Great Depression." *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013. 987-992.

<sup>19</sup> Odd Man In, 16.

His natural talent as a young businessman and the effectiveness of his methods thus placed him in a unique position of power in comparison to the rest of the recovering art world. Since not many people of his generation escaped the ravages of the Depression, these hard times gave Simon a head start in his later ability to create a collection. Simon left the Great Depression controlling not only a corporation, but also a profitable one, and his economic status was therefore comparable to that of much older competitors, some of whom had acquired their wealth over earlier generations. During the Great Depression, many of the older generation of great American collectors were selling off their collections for cash, such as the Five and Dime Store magnate, Samuel Kress (1863 – 1955). Kress had developed one of the greatest collections of his time with the purpose of educating the American people. Even during the Great Depression, the Samuel Kress private collection toured fifty Italian artworks through twenty-four American cities, and “throughout the 1930s his gifts of art placed the first Old Master paintings on the walls of local museums in many parts of the country.”<sup>20</sup> Still, economic reality forced him to sell at a time when the younger Simon was looking to buy.

By the end of World War II, when the United States emerged as a dominant international power, Simon was in the position to expand his business operations and eventually develop a multimillion-dollar art collection. Simon was a gifted young man, and as a result he amassed a large fortune, which he put to work while he was still relatively young, in creating his collection.

Norton Simon was also successful because of his gender. After WWII, his generation of art collectors began to consist of major female collectors with inherited

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<sup>20</sup> “History of the Kress Collection,” *Kressfoundation.org*, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.kressfoundation.org/collection/history/>

wealth. During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, women were beginning to appear more frequently across the country as they began to enjoy more independence in American society. Peggy Guggenheim, niece of Solomon Guggenheim, for example, mainly collected in the 1930's and 40's, but unlike Simon, she focused primarily on Modern and Surrealist art starting with "high analytical Cubism".<sup>21</sup> The new Abstract Expressionist art-collecting ring was free of the "boys club" network that dominated the Old Master's market. American culture was shifting during this time as women patrons and collectors, such as Guggenheim and Flora Payne Whitney were becoming significant figures in the art world, and many of their collections are still treasured today in collections such as The Guggenheim Museum in New York.

What had been denied to these women collectors, however, was the opportunity to acquire the intense, hands-on business experience that served Simon so well. For this reason, J. Paul Getty (1892-1976) is perhaps the only American businessman and collector with capabilities in business and art that were comparable to Norton Simon's. Like Simon, Getty found success in business: he founded the Getty Oil Company in 1916, and by 1967 he had a personal fortune of roughly four billion dollars. J.P. Getty used this wealth to expand his art collection, and upon his death he left \$1.2 billion to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles for an endowment for the arts and public education.<sup>22</sup> Simon and Getty were both businessmen playing a new type of game in the art world, and their financial backgrounds allowed them a unique insight into investing,

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<sup>21</sup> *Art of this Century: the Guggenheim Museum and its collection* (New York City: Solomom R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1993.), 21.

<sup>22</sup> "J. Paul Getty." *Biography.com*, accessed Web. 19 Apr. 2015, <http://www.biography.com/people/j-paul-getty-9309884#death-and-legacy>

and for Simon at least, this steered his collection in different directions than those taken by the great women collectors of his time.

Finally, Norton Simon stands out as a collector due to his taste in art combined with his passion for what he collected. For example, when American collecting began to rise again after World War II, collectors and art enthusiasts began to look to the new American modern style of Abstract Expressionism. There was a cultural shift after World War II that focused inward on “non-objective” and purely expressive art associated with American “freedom” and “independence.” The older generation of collectors had a shift in taste after the war as well, as investment in art moved from the Old Masters and historical traditional paintings to Futurist and Modern art.<sup>23</sup> Paradoxically, whether it was because of his business experience, his taste or his relative youth, Simon did not follow these trends; he did not let trends or prices dictate his purchases, rather he based his decisions, at least in part, on his personal reaction to art, and he concentrated his collection with unparalleled success, on Impressionist and Old Master works. Norton Simon even stated:

“When I first started collecting art, my thoughts about each picture, about each sculpture, were essentially inwardly directed. What does this picture mean to me? The more I looked, the more I felt my perceptions sharpening, the more I felt the nurturing aspect of art, the more I became convinced that art is the major form of human communication—crossing the years—crossing cultures—crossing age boundaries—crossing all

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<sup>23</sup> Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, (University of Chicago Press, 1983).

political considerations. Much of it gives us enjoyment, yes, but more important, it helps us to understand ourselves more freely.”<sup>24</sup>

His second hat, that of the shrewd business man, was, however, never far from his head, and he also carefully considered the quality of any potential purchase—which he confirmed through those seemingly endless consultations with experts—and the potential for profitable returns in the future.

Norton Simon set himself apart from his competition for the above reasons and many others, but his career as a businessman is what poised him for success. He developed specific business methods, which are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, and he applied some of these methods with great success during his career as an art collector: He purchased the old in order to build something new, but he trusted his instincts and taste in determining which old things he should buy. He used the same instinct and taste to recognize the unseen value in inexpensive things, and he bought them to his great profit. He bought assets—companies, collections, even a museum—“lock, stock and barrel,” and then he culled out the good so that he could keep, buy and display the great. He carefully analyzed his decisions to buy or sell, no matter how long the evaluation process took. He patiently waited until the price was right, sometimes considering a purchase for years and then taking it on approval, and he then drove the best deal he could with the frequently exhausted seller. By doing these things, Simon built a collection from the inside out that was both diverse and harmonious. In the end, Norton Simon’s untraditional investing and natural passion allowed him to create a broad and breathtaking collection that captures the finest the human mind and hand can

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Patterson, Ed, *Handbook of the Norton Simon Museum*, 2003, 9.

produce. Norton Simon was the man with “two hats”: the entrepreneur and the art connoisseur.



## **Chapter 1: Norton Simon, The Businessman**

First child of Myer Simon and Lillian Simon, Norton Winfred Simon, was born into a European Jewish family in Portland, Oregon on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1907.<sup>25</sup> Norton was one of five boys and two girls in the Simon family, and he was sure to stand out while growing up because of his persistence and attention to detail. Norton Simon was loved by his father and from a young age, he worked alongside him as he studied his business practices and watched his father make something out of practically nothing. Myer Simon made his life business by creatively seeking out resources for income: “When a store went out of business, he would purchase the remaining stock at distress prices and sell it for a slightly higher sum at his own establishment, Simon Sells For Less.”<sup>26</sup> Growing up with this life, Norton Simon always saw his dad working hard and finding strategic ways to increase profits creatively, so that he could live the American dream. This idea of hard work and careful planning, together with tough negotiations needed to complete the transaction, all became imbedded in Norton Simon’s mind, and this way of life eventually became part of his personality, and more importantly his identity.

The structure of society and the business world that Norton Simon was exposed to as an adolescent proved to him that something great could be made from many little things. This business strategy is the first, but certainly not the only, business concept that allowed Norton Simon to become the great

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<sup>25</sup> Meyer Simon (1885-1953) b. in San Francisco, son of scrap metal dealer, and Lillian Glickman (1884-1921) b. in Chicago.

<sup>26</sup> Odd Man In, 10.

businessman and art connoisseur who is remembered today. Part of Norton Simon's ability to wear "two hats" comes from the knowledge spillover from his early business world into his later art world. The ability to play multiple roles was also one of the most important factors enabling Norton Simon to overcome his competition. Not only did Norton Simon practice playing many roles at once, but he also believed that one should not be restricted to a single title at all. Harold Williams, who eventually became the President of the J. Paul Getty Trust, began working for Simon as a tax attorney in 1956 and explained his job experience as an interesting one:

"I'd been with him maybe three or four or five years and my job was getting very fuzzy, I was doing all kinds of things without portfolio. One day I said to him, 'Norton, I think I ought to have a job description.' Norton said to me, 'You don't want a job description. Job descriptions fence you in.' That kind of perspective was Norton, taking something and turning it on its head. He had a unique way of looking at things. And I thought, 'He's right.' I never did get a job description and I have never wanted one since."<sup>27</sup>

Norton Simon never let a title restrict his work or creative interests, and here he proved that one man could wear "many hats" at one time. He built off of his father's business model by investing in failed businesses and turning them around. An integral part of this model was the need to research every purchase, however miniscule.

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<sup>27</sup> Odd Man In, 26: Harold M. Williams, conversation with author, Santa Monica, Calif., 27 July 1994.

Motivated from a young age by seeing the struggles his father had endured, Simon always had his eye out for diamonds in the rough. He had the good fortune of a photographic memory and mental calculator that allowed him to graduate from high school at the comparatively young age of sixteen. School seemed too easy for Simon, so he dabbled in other interests in his spare time, such as business and finance. At the early age of sixteen, already inspired by *Simon Sells For Less*, Norton Simon made one of his first risky business moves by purchasing fire-damaged goods in 1923. Suzanne Muchnic, author of Norton Simon's biography and Scripps College alumna, explains: "In one legendary deal in San Francisco... he purchased a large quantity of Cupie toilet tissue from a fire-damaged warehouse and sold the salvageable rolls at a profit. Business was already his primary interest and financial gain was his goal..."<sup>28</sup> Even at this young age, Simon was looking to make profits wherever they were available, and he looked for opportunities in unusual places.

Soon after high school, Norton Simon spent six weeks attending and living at the University of California in Berkeley with the aim of getting an undergraduate degree in anticipation of pursuing a law degree. He soon decided that formal academics were not for him; instead it was his interests in the financial world that drove him forward. In 1923, Simon moved back home to work with his father again, as the business was picking up and they began importing and exporting scrap goods internationally, mainly from Asia.<sup>29</sup> Simon moved his way up from investing in penny stocks to blue-chip companies, and by 1925 he became more ambitious, so he moved from San Francisco to Los Angeles to find new investments on his own. By 1927, Simon made his most important financial

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<sup>28</sup> *Odd Man In*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> *Odd Man In*, 13.

moves by establishing Los Angeles Steel Products Company, a sheet metal distribution company in Southern California.<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after this investment, the 1929 Stock Market Crash and Great Depression hit, which impacted every American's life in the worst ways. Muchnic stated: "In an early indicator of his financial genius, he put three thousand dollars into the stock market several years before the crash and emerged from the depression with thirty-five thousand dollars in stocks and business holdings."<sup>31</sup> Foreshadowing his success in the art world, Norton Simon had learned to hedge his bets and to find investments with such firm value and such low prices that they would withstand even the 1929 crash. He emerged from 1929 with cash, and he was ready to invest it.

By 1931, he invested seven thousand from Los Angeles Steel Products Company in a bankrupt juice bottling company, Vita Pac. Norton Simon's first instinct was to strip the company down and sell it for its parts, but Simon's father convinced him to keep the company for a year to see where it would go. Years later during an interview with *TIME* magazine in 1965, Simon comments on what it means to revitalize a company:

"Picasso says that creativity is a series of destruction. You really don't create anything until you knock something else out of the way. You have to tear down homes before you put in a freeway. But in professional management, and in the investment process, you recognize that you should tear down only so much before it is time to build anew, for excessive tearing down take the destructive process beyond the realm of creativity.

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<sup>30</sup> Odd Man In, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Odd Man In, 16.

Something destructive goes in before the constructive comes out. The question is, how much destruction can be tolerated?”<sup>32</sup>

This advice that Simon’s father gave him—to hold on to the company and determine its true value before selling—was the first major and most important shift in Norton Simon’s business practices, and it may have provided the inspiration for his future accomplishments in the business and art worlds. When the company was successful, Norton Simon decided to switch the name from Vita Pac to Val Vita Food Products Company and move from bottles to cans, which are cheaper to produce, to diversify the business. To save money Simon made a few financial moves to undercut prices of competitors and keep Val Vita on consumer shelves. To save more money and help with the transition from bottles to cans, Simon bought a bankrupt can-making factory along with trucks so he could cut delivery costs and pickup fees while also reducing production costs. Norton Simon was always looking for a deal; even if that deal would only save him pennies, he was willing to wait to cut some corners and take advantage of the marketplace, especially if the deal and the pennies it saved were part of making one of his larger investments a success.

His strategy was clearly paying off, as Val Vita’s annual sales increased from forty-three thousand dollars in 1932 to almost \$9 million in 1942.<sup>33</sup> Within ten years, Norton Simon had created a substantial corporation out of dozens of bankrupt or undervalued food-packing companies.

In 1932, Norton Simon met his first wife, Lucille Ellis, at a Thanksgiving party and in less than six months they were married. They had their first son, Donald, by 1936

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<sup>32</sup> *TIME*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> *Odd Man In*, 17.

and another son, Robert, the following year. Before their sons had reached their teens, Norton and Lucille had settled into their house on Buckingham Road in an upper-middle class neighborhood in Los Angeles.<sup>34</sup> They continued to live in this charming, neighborhood for fifteen years, but even as the money accumulated the Simons remained careful to live below their means and practice a modest lifestyle.

Simon garnered large profits from creating his Val Vita from the inside out, and this process did take a lot of time and much attention to detail; in the process Simon developed a new and more efficient way of expanding. In Simon's previous company purchases, he would purchase already bankrupt or struggling companies and then use them as a resource for his already functioning company. Thus Val Vita benefitted from Simon's purchase of a can making factory and similarly distressed assets. In his next deals, the goal was still to build a more powerful company from the inside out, but not necessarily by buying assets that were dirt cheap because they belonged to a nearly defunct company like Val Vita. Rather than purchasing bankrupt, broken businesses, Norton Simon's strategy shifted again as he began to hunt down companies that were still in operation, just very undervalued. "His strategy was to scour the market for undervalued companies that appeared to have growth potential. Once he had spotted a likely candidate, studied it thoroughly, and satisfied himself that it was ripe for takeover, he would quietly buy up enough stock in brokers' accounts to enable him to demand representation on the board of directors."<sup>35</sup>

Norton Simon was beginning to find his voice as he joined the boards of the newly purchased companies. Most of the members of these boards were soon shocked by

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<sup>34</sup> Odd Man In, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Odd Man In, 18.

how much knowledge this outside figure had about their company—he carefully did his homework before buying shares and he seemed to be aware of countless examples of mismanagement and missed potential. "The incumbent directors often discovered that the interloper knew much more about their business practices than they did."<sup>36</sup> He seemed to be ruthless in his hunt for the tiniest increases in profit. Even though Norton Simon was creating a business empire on the West Coast, he was doing everything he could to stay out of the spotlight. From a young age, Norton Simon used stealth as one of his deadliest weapons; and as Simon became a more diverse businessman, stealth was another business technique he brought with him from the business world into the art world.

By 1941, Norton Simon began to look into other companies to invest in with his new business strategy, and one company he noticed with inconsistent sales was the Hunt Brothers Packing Company, a private-labeling factory. Not only did Norton Simon notice that Hunt's sales were inconsistent, but more importantly he realized how large and consistent its sales could be given the availability of raw materials from the large Southern California agricultural industry and the huge potential demand for processed tomato products. Consistent with his photographic memory and his attention to detail, he noticed that Hunt's stock was undervalued: the book value, which reflected the company's assets on its balance sheet, was eleven dollars per share, but the market price was only eighty-five cents a share.<sup>37</sup> Simon saw the potential in this simple, undervalued company, and he sold Val Vita to Hunt Foods for \$3 million and used these proceeds to increase his holdings in Hunt Company stock to a 25 percent share, thus gaining

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<sup>36</sup> Odd Man In, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Odd Man In, 19.

controlling interest.<sup>38</sup> Not only did Simon take controlling power, he doubled down by purchasing several private-label canneries and putting Hunt labels on their products, to increase demand for his product.

Even though Norton Simon was always looking to save pennies, he made sure to keep his eye on the big picture; and to him a successful business did not just mean large profits or returns, but the advancement of human culture and society. When interviewed for *TIME* Norton Simon explained:

“Most companies will say: ‘We are in business to make profit.’ I think the better companies could just as well say: “Our primary purpose in business is sociological. Our whole objective is to treat our customers right, and treat our stockholders right, and treat our employees right.’ I think many businesses are run on the basis of putting sociological needs first. We are beyond the day and age of the need of capitalism for survival. We need it for only one thing—the betterment of the human being. Certainly we have a lot more than we can eat, haven’t we?”<sup>39</sup>

Norton Simon was looking to create successful businesses in the hopes of enriching the lives of everyone involved. This way of thinking is one that Simon took with him from the business world into the art world, as his main goals in collecting were to enrich not only himself but also American culture.

Naturally, Norton Simon invested at the perfect time, as wholesalers were desperate for private-labeled goods during World War II, they were more than willing to pay for Hunt’s products. People wanted canned products during the war, and were willing

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<sup>38</sup> Odd Man In, 19.

<sup>39</sup> *TIME*, 78



to pay elevated prices for Hunt's food. Norton Simon realized the power he had, and now that he had painstakingly put together the basics of a stable company that made a good product with huge potential demand, it was time for him to get his returns. Simon knew what he had to do, so he launched an aggressive slogan campaign to make Hunt's the new household product. "When they bought control of Hunt in 1942, many housewives had never heard of Hunts Products... Simon told them by billboard, newspaper and radio so loudly and efficiently that 'Hunt for the best' became a household slogan."<sup>40</sup> Norton Simon actually created so much demand for his products, especially his tomato sauce and catsup, that people could not imagine purchasing anything else.

After investing in Hunt in 1943, Simon saw the opportunity to make additional investments that would boost Hunt's value (Figure 1).<sup>41</sup> By 1945 Norton Simon purchased the California Conserving Company, Hunt's major competitor whose factory was located just across the street. With that ingenious strategic investment, and other purchases of canneries and similar assets, the company's sales grew from \$14.5 million to \$102.5 million in only 15 years.

By 1945, Hunt became one of the largest corporations on the West Coast, and once again Norton Simon was not afraid to take on the competition. In 1945, *TIME* magazine wrote an article about Simon describing his rapid success: "Norton Simon climbed to his tin-can throne by a simple formula: don't start a business yourself; buy up those already started and run them better."<sup>42</sup> People from the outside were beginning to see how strategic a businessman Norton Simon had become, but no one was expecting

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<sup>40</sup> "Tin Can King," *TIME*, 8 October 1945, 87.

<sup>41</sup> *TIME*, 76.

<sup>42</sup> *TIME*, 1945, p.87.

him to flip these tactical skills on their head and apply them to a whole other world, the art world.

Unfortunately for Simon, by the summer of 1946, the U.S. government stopped purchasing canned food and by the Fall, all price ceilings were removed, leaving the market overflowing with goods. This shift in demand left Hunt Products with many investors pulling out, but Simon tenaciously refused to let the company fail. Susan Muchnic explained: “Longtime members of the trade said that ethical standards and transitions required Hunt to let its clients off the hook, but Simon argued that a contract was a contract and claimed that Hunt would go broke if it honored all the demands.”<sup>43</sup> This time of transition created many enemies for Norton Simon, but luckily his forceful marketing campaign created enough demand so that the company could stay afloat.

Once Norton Simon stabilized his business so that it was strong enough to stand on its own, he made the strategic business move of specializing in just a couple of products—tomato sauce and ketchup. In 1948, the business journal *Sales Management* described Norton Simon as “aggressive but not slapdash... He makes quick decisions, but they are based on keen analysis of conditions. He is a brilliant statistician, using figures creatively.”<sup>44</sup> Simon used this creativity to launch the massive 1948 advertising campaign for Hunt’s specialization in tomato products, more specifically sauce.<sup>45</sup> Like the true business and marketing man Norton Simon was, his advertising campaign was nothing close to dull. During post World War II America, as the middle class began to rise, consumer demand and the United States economy started to come alive again. This

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<sup>43</sup> Odd Man In, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Collins, 1948, quoted in Collector without Walls, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Odd Man In, 20.

sudden spike in demand gave American producers the chance to push their products in the consumer's faces and onto their plates.

Norton Simon saw the perfect opportunity to supply tomato products for the American people, so Hunt began making colorful appearances, from *Time* magazine all the way to high fashion close ups in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* (Image 4 and 5). Norton Simon poured \$2.25 million or about seven percent of Hunt's sales into this campaign, and he continued to push the campaign to new limits. Not only did Norton Simon spend almost four times the industry average on advertising at the time, but he was also one of the first companies to buy fifty-two consecutive advertisements in a national weekly paper.<sup>46</sup> Norton Simon set himself apart from the competition by flooding the streets and billboards with Hunt's Tomato Sauce advertisements.

Simon may not have realized it, but he was making his first foray into the art world with his waves of radical advertising campaigns. He was harnessing the power of art for use in his world, the business world. This was his first exposure to art and the force that a simple image can exert. While his competitors' ads were busy affairs with multiple pictures of the product, lots of text and, often, plaid or polka dot backgrounds, his sleek minimalist images of tomato products spread across clean backdrops not only drew the customer's eye to the product being offered, but made it seem modern and stylish. Sales went through the roof as this multimillion-dollar campaign worked out better than expected. "Spending more on advertising than most of his competitors were

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<sup>46</sup> Collector without Walls, 13.

spending, and tailoring advertisements to appeal to the aspirations of each magazine's audience, Simon all but forced grocers to carry Hunt's products."<sup>47</sup>

The ads showed simple, sleek images, conveying the point that Hunt Foods would do the hard work of pureeing the tomatoes and making the catsup, so that stylish women could effortlessly serve delicious, modern meals. One ad shows two sophisticated blond women in sharp white dresses against a white background, happily brandishing five bottles of Hunt Ketchup in their white-gloved arms (Image 5). The only text is "Hunt . . . for the best - tomato catsup." A second shows two equally trendy women, this time dressed in black, pushing shopping carts filled with white flowers, and sporting operatic poses as they prepare to pull Hunt's catsup from wall that is red with a thousand perfectly spaced bottles (Image 6). A third and even more powerful ad is described by Hunt Foods executive and later president of J. Paul Getty Trust, Harold Williams, in an interview in which he discusses Simon's creativity:

"Norton's Hunt's Catsup ads in the 1950s were incredible works of art. The idea that Vogue Magazine [used] an entire page showing a white table setting, all white, and the red bottle of Hunt's Catsup in the middle. No words. They were incredible ads. It takes a creative person with aesthetic sense to appreciate something like this—to be willing to invest an advertising budget in something that's as unconventional as those ads were. They were enormously powerful."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Odd Man In, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Harold Williams, interview by Davis Guggenheim, 18 July 1996.

The obvious comparison is to the pop-art movement almost a decade later and artists Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) (Image 7). Hunt's ketchup bottle and Warhol's soup cans were equally gripping images, and while scholars debate whether Warhol's purpose was to critique consumer culture or to show that art must embrace it, Hunt's purpose was to sell catsup, and the ad's success showed Simon that a powerful image can be priceless.

As the confident businessman began to understand the potential impact of art, the "man with two hats" began to emerge. The fact that Norton Simon had so much faith in art and was willing to invest millions of dollars on simple advertisements are important reasons that Simon was able to beat his business competition and later create one of the greatest art collections in American history. His faith in the arts allowed him to take a daring risk that let his product touch consumers in both their hearts and their wallets.

Simon went on to invest in the Ohio Match Company in 1944, partly to advertise Hunt products on the matchbook cover and partly to turn the undervalued company around, which he did, increasing profits from \$9 million to \$20 million. He then invested in Curtis Publishing, which he reorganized, increasing revenue by \$3.5 million over five years.<sup>49</sup> Hunt also continued to expand, merging with Wesson Oil and Snowdrift Co. in 1960, and acquiring, over the years, several other companies (Figure 1). In addition, there were a number of other firms that Simon tried his best to turn around.

By the mid-1950's, Norton Simon was still trying to avoid the public eye, but articles such as "Norton Simon—Like Him or Not" were being published in *Fortune* magazine. Freeman Lincoln, author of the article, noted that Norton Simon is: "the most

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<sup>49</sup> Odd Man In, 23.

unpopular businessman in California” and he is “governed by a profound disrespect for the status quo . . . . He operates on the theory that success depends not on a time-costly bolstering or patching of things as they are, but on sweeping obsolete or inefficient structures out of the way and building new.”<sup>50</sup> Although Freeman Lincoln was correct in claiming Norton Simon’s unique ability to build a new enterprise from nothing, he failed to notice that Norton Simon’s new creation could only exist by building on the foundation of the old. Simon did not simply throw something away and start from scratch, because that would not be time or costly efficient. Rather, Simon used the old to help build something new, which he had always envisioned from the start.

Even into the 1990’s, American culture was still acknowledging Norton Simon’s genius in acquiring companies and artworks. An article written in 1991 in *Business Week* describes Norton Simon:

“More than almost any other man, he represents a single image in both the old and new of American corporate life—both the secretive individual builder of investment empires who flourished decades ago in the country, and the modern renaissance businessman who sees capitalism not only as a way of survival, but as a path toward the betterment of human beings.”<sup>51</sup>

Simon learned which business tactics achieved such betterment. Stealth certainly was part of his strategy. He would often “quietly buy up enough stock in brokers’ accounts to enable him to demand representation on the board of directors.”<sup>52</sup> He was, however, not a corporate raider in the modern sense, because he built his companies up

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<sup>50</sup> Odd Man In, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Business Week

<sup>52</sup> Odd Man In, 18.

rather than scattering them. In doing this, he focused on value. He did his homework so that he could invest in companies with undervalued stock prices and great potential. He became an expert in letting unnecessary assets go so that the business could flourish. He understood the value of advertising, and when he took control of companies, his first demand was often that the boards institute extensive ad campaigns. As he became an expert in corporate takeovers and in maximizing the value of assets in order to create great enterprises, he also began to understand the value of art: that a simple, artistic picture of a red bottle on a white table cloth in a white room was worth a thousand words and a million dollars.

## **Chapter 2: Norton Simon, The Art Collector**

Norton Simon was a creative genius in the business world, and the tricks and trades that made him so successful there were just as rewarding when he applied them to the art world. Not only did Simon help to pioneer the first major public art museum in Southern California, but he also helped introduced fundamental aspects of global culture—including European and South Asian visual arts—to the West Coast. At the age of forty-seven, Norton Simon donned his second hat: he made his first major art purchase. He had stumbled almost unintentionally into the world of great art, but in it he found his soon-to-be life passion. “I don’t think I was very interested in art until we moved into a new house and started putting contemporary art in it,” Norton Simon explained. “A decorator brought in some paintings. I didn’t like them, so I went to some dealers to see what was available.”<sup>53</sup> Norton Simon was under the impression he was purchasing just a few works for the walls of his new ranch style house on Hudson Road in Hancock Park,<sup>54</sup> but soon the excitement of the auction house became a thrill Simon would frequently seek.<sup>55</sup>

The first purchase occurred on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1954, when Norton Simon visited the Dalzell Hatfield Gallery located in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.<sup>56</sup> The historic hotel, located blocks from his office, housed the well-known gallery whose windows Simon frequently peered into as he walked to work. Just as he had done in the business world, Norton Simon confidently dove into the art world on his own, without

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<sup>53</sup> Odd Man In, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Odd Man In, 96.

<sup>55</sup> Collector without Walls, 17.

<sup>56</sup> Collector without Walls, 17.



any professional assistance or formal training, but with important and very relevant skills that he had acquired while wearing his first hat. Norton Simon explained during an interview, “I didn’t jump off a cliff when I started collecting, I had a lot of business experience. I knew a few questions to ask, and I read a lot about it.”<sup>57</sup> In addition to that experience and the ability to ask the important questions, he acquired something else during the years he wore the first hat: he had a certain “drive”--he was not afraid to jump into the entirely new world of fine art and sculpture; to learn everything he needed to know; to take risks; and then to take this new world for all it was worth and then give back even more. The lifetime of collecting began with the purchase of two paintings, one a small colorful oil painting by American artist Dan Lutz (1906-1978) titled *Bass Section*, painted in 1949, for \$300 (Image 8). The eleven-by-sixteen-inch canvas flamboyantly depicts a bass section fiddling in a jazz ensemble. Lutz painted in a very free, impressionist style, which drew Simon in on a personal level.

His second purchase was a little more extravagant, as he spent almost five times this amount on a portrait by French Impressionist Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919). The sixteen-by-twenty-inch oil portrait shows a sweet young girl seated wearing a hat and blouse, entitled *Andrée in Blue* (Image 9). Painted in 1918, it captured the heart of the middle-aged businessman.<sup>58</sup> This post-impressionist work by Renoir is a rare example of a time of stylistic transition for the French artists. Without any formal training, Norton Simon began to buy up any artwork that interested him, and similarly to his business

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<sup>57</sup> Norton Simon, conversation with Suzanne Muchnic, Beverly Hills, Calif., 14 June 1990.

<sup>58</sup> *Collector without Walls*, 17.

purchases, he was not afraid to take a risk. Unfortunately, he became tired of *Andrée in Blue* in only a few years, so in 1956 he donated the painting to Pomona College.<sup>59</sup>

Just a month after these first purchases, Norton Simon had caught the collecting bug and his inventory of art began to grow. He spent \$3,500 on a nine and a half-by-thirteen inch still life titled *Corbeilled des Fruits*, by Pierre Bonnard. Even though this was a small, simple painting, Norton Simon saw the value in it. This purchase showed that, instead of waiting for something big, Norton Simon would seek out the best opportunity in small, spontaneous purchases. Rather than waiting for another gallery or painting that interested him more, he purchased the Bonnard because it was the best deal he saw at the moment. In typical Simon fashion, he would end up using this painting a few years later as part of a trade in a larger deal in order to acquire *Nature Morte a la Serviette*, a much more extravagant and high quality painting, by George Braque completed in 1921.<sup>60</sup>

The fact that Norton Simon would take any good deal, whether he needed the work of art or not, is the first and most important strategy that he carried with him from the business world into the art world. Just as he had with his purchase of Cupie toilet tissue, bankrupt canneries, and fleets of trucks, Simon was always looking ahead at what he could achieve in the future by purchasing a current work. Norton Simon was not afraid to invest in the small or less desirable, because he was always foreseeing the grander empire he could make with all the smaller parts.

As Norton Simon began to acquire more high art, he found his way to the heart of the American art scene, New York City. In the spring of 1955, he became a frequent

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<sup>59</sup> Odd Man In, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Odd Man In, 35.

visitor at galleries and through mutual friends he managed to become acquaintances with Helen Frankenthaler, who was an up and coming American abstract expressionist painter at the time. The young artist quickly captivated Simon, and soon enough he found himself taking the Frankenthaler out to lunch and gallery showings. Sara Campbell, author of Collector Without Walls, claims: “Simon was so taken with her enthusiastic response to the exhibition and their animated discussion about it that he asked her to accompany him to the gallery, where he bought Hoffmann’s 1954 *Floral Composition* for \$1,200.”<sup>61</sup> Simon was not afraid to ask the artists about their lives and personal experiences. He began asking her many questions about her art and her interests, but Frankenthaler’s most important role in Simon’s life was introducing him to important contacts in the art world, including Ben Heller, a well known New York art dealer who would later play a central role in the development of Simon’s Asian art collection.<sup>62</sup>

On this visit to New York, Norton Simon also met E. J. “Mannie” Rousuck, vice president of the Wildenstein & Co. Art Gallery. Rousuck made sure that Norton Simon felt assured he was getting the best for his buck, and just to make the businessman feel comfortable Rousuck began to give Simon tips on how to look at art. Rousuck wrote letters to Simon in an attempt to educate him about fine art: “Pissarro has been called the purest of the great Impressionist painters, and his particular greatness is coming to be increasingly recognized as the time passes. If Monet was the leader of the Impressionist movement, Pissarro was its prophet.”<sup>63</sup> This first piece of advice Norton Simon took to heart, as he was always seeking out the pieces of work that were done at the artist’s

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<sup>61</sup> *Collector without Walls*, 18.

<sup>62</sup> *Odd Man In*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Summers, interview by Davis Guggenheim, 6 June 1996.

stylistic turning point. Simon was constantly searching for the quality that came with a new, fresh style of producing art. Rousuck continued to write Simon about different works of art: “It was at Pont-Aven that, in the opinion of many, [Gauguin] painted most of his *greatest pictures*. This Gauguin is the greatest example of the Pont-Aven period. It is world-famous.”<sup>64</sup> Norton Simon began to search for the best by focusing his purchases around the points in artists career when their style changed. By choosing a particular time period of an artist’s life to focus on collecting, Norton Simon began to specialize his collection, just his specialized in catsup and tomato sauce with spectacular success.

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1955, the new art connoisseur made two of his most important and expensive art acquisitions. The first, Paul Gauguin’s 1888 *Brittany Landscape with Swineherd* sold for \$60,000, and the second, Camille Pissarro’s 1872 *Banks of the River at Pontoise* sold for \$28,000 (Image 10 and 11).<sup>65</sup> Simon was nervous about his large purchases and his own lack of expertise, so the bright businessman thought quickly on his feet to come up with a kind of insurance plan for his purchases. Simon later explained to Sara Campbell in an interview: “The first pictures I bought from Wildenstein, knowing that I didn’t know too much about them, I said, ‘I want to know how much I can sell them back to you for cash in one year if I don’t like them, or two years.’ They said, ‘Well you can trade them in for full value, you can do that any time.’ I said I didn’t talk about trading them, I understand trading. I want to know what I can get for cash and take my loss and run.”<sup>66</sup> Here we see the interplay between Norton Simon’s “two hats”—he was able to use his cutthroat business skills to give himself the confidence to buy artworks

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<sup>64</sup> Christopher Burge, undated [1996] interview by Davis Guggenheim.

<sup>65</sup> Collector Without Walls, 19.

<sup>66</sup> As reported in Sara Campbell to Simon, 5 September 1978.

that other collectors might have shied away from because they were too risky or too expensive. He was not afraid to use tough business negotiations to gain a better deal. His snappy decision making was backed up by ruthless negotiations and escape plans, and as these quickly became part of the collector's reputation, many dealers were enthralled, and perhaps terrified, by this fresh new way of purchasing art. Without these tactics, Simon would have been unable to amass his collection.

There are numerous testimonies of Simon's nerve and tenacity as a bargainer. As his confidence began to build in the art world, the tough business negotiator within him was not afraid to take over. He began to bargain hard to broker deals, such as in the instance of purchasing Édouard Manet's *Still Life with Fish and Shrimp*, 1864 (Image 12). In this epic hagggle, Norton Simon was so persistent that he waited over a year and was not afraid to test the patience of art dealer, Alexander Rosenberg. Rosenberg finally wrote a letter in January 1960, which he ended with, "May I say again that I would be much happier if you could make it a straight deal?"<sup>67</sup>

As the collector's confidence grew, Norton Simon took to the auction scene in hopes of making bigger and better deals. Simon's business mind moved rapidly on the auction floor and, just as he bought companies for the assets that they could contribute to Val Vita or Hunt Foods, he began to create combinations of art purchases that would be beneficial as a whole. The well known art dealer, Eugene Thaw, explained Norton Simon's untraditional nature in the sales room: "It was a real strategy to get Norton to come to a decision because his whole mode of thinking was never to close any door, never to close off an option, so as long as he could keep a thing on reserve, string it out,

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<sup>67</sup> Alexandre Rosenberg to Simon, 20 January 1960.

play it along, or say, 'How much is it with this?' or 'How much are these four together and that one alone?' he would keep going. Then he would come back six months later and start again... You have to try to keep your mind clear to remember what you had told him before because his mind was like a computer. There were many times when I don't know whether I came out with a loss or profit because it became so convoluted with trade-ins and combinations."<sup>68</sup> Norton Simon thus took his familiarity with complicated, multi-dimensional business deals with him to the art world. But as Thaw tellingly noted, the art deals were not measured by whether they "came out with a loss or profit," but by how they played into Simon's efforts to build a collection.

In an effort to keep down prices, Norton Simon started to design strategies to prolong negotiations and wear down the art dealers (Figure 2). One thing he began to notice was the art dealers' eagerness to sell works of art that were to be added to a museum collection rather than a private collection. For example, Norton Simon had taken a liking to Lorenzo Monaco's *Virgin Annunciate*, 1410, but he was reluctant to spend \$130,000 on the painting. "Rather than admitting that he was buying the painting for his private collection, he hinted to [the dealer] that the picture could be a gift to the Los Angeles County Museum. The dealer immediately dropped the price to \$125,000."<sup>69</sup>

A final example of Norton Simon's unique approach to getting a bargain for his purchases is evident in his purchasing of Raphael's *Madonna and Child with Book*, 1504 (Image 13). The painting first appeared on the art market on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1883, in Christie's Auction House, London, in the hands of Thomas Townsend. After a full auction, the

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<sup>68</sup> Eugene Thaw, conversation with Susan Muchnic, Santa Fe, N. Mex., 9 June 1995.

<sup>69</sup> *Collector Without Walls*, 47.

Raphael piece was bought-in.<sup>70</sup> For twenty years, Raphael's masterpiece was mysteriously kept in a Wildenstein & Co., New York dealer's private storage facility, over one hundred miles outside of New York City. Simon learned the story of this painting from Eugene Thaw. The secrecy surrounding this painting undoubtedly increased Simon's initial interest. For years, Wildenstein was asking for \$3.5 million for *Madonna and Child with Book*, but Simon did not have enough knowledge on Raphael's works to feel confident in deciding the price he would be willing to pay for it..

Like the businessman he was, Simon set out to find works of art with comparative worth to *Madonna and Child with Book*. In December 1969, Simon purchased Jacopo Bassano's *Flight into Egypt* (1544) for a little over half a million dollars (Image 14). In a careful effort to value Raphael's work, Simon wrote a letter to John Walker, former Director at the National Gallery in Washington, asking his opinion: "You know I always like to compare completely different objects and I wonder whether you would consider the Bassano, at \$660,000 to be a more extravagant purchase than the Raphael would be for \$3,500,000; or do you know of any other comparisons you might make in evaluating the price of the Raphael?"<sup>71</sup> Finally, in 1972, Norton Simon's hard negotiation tactics paid off as the final price was haggled down to \$3,000,000.

Whether the deal was for a few thousand dollars or three million, Norton Simon was always looking to get the best price, even if the bargaining was long, complicated and intense. Similarly to his development of Los Angeles Steel Company, Val Vita and Hunt, Norton Simon was always looking to save even the smallest amount, because he

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<sup>70</sup> Sotheby's Auction House defines bought-in as: "If there are no bids on a lot, or if bidding does not reach the reserve price, the lot is "bought in," meaning it is left unsold and remains the property of the owner."

<sup>71</sup> Collector Without Walls, 140.

wanted a collection that was greater than even he—great industrialist that he was—could afford.

In addition to this tenacity in negotiations, Simon learned other lessons from his years in business. A month after his 1955 purchases of Gauguin's *Brittany Landscape with Swineherd*, art historian John Rewald wrote asking if Simon's newly acquired Gauguin could be reproduced in the historian's study *Post Impressionism: From Van Gogh to Gauguin*.<sup>72</sup> Norton Simon was now known to possess recognizable works of art that were in high demand all over the country. "Rewald had intended to illustrate the work in black and white, but Simon, drawing on his experience with corporate advertising campaigns and understanding the importance of appearance in promoting a product, decided to pay \$500 to have the work reproduced in color."<sup>73</sup> From his very successful Hunt Food advertising campaign only a decade prior; Norton Simon understood the importance and power a single image could have over its viewer. Even though he was new to the art world, he was able to add value to the world-class works of art he was purchasing by producing high quality reproductions and representing the beauty and emotion in each unique piece of art.

The result of these purchases was a breakthrough collection that would continue to test Simon's business skills and that also would change the rank of Southern California in the art world forever. Pissarro expert and well known art historian, Richard F. "Ric" Brown was the newly appointed chief curator at the Los Angeles County Museum at the time, and even this esteemed art historian was amazed by the purchases Simon was

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<sup>72</sup> As reported to Sara Campbell, April 1977.

<sup>73</sup> David Steadman, speaking at "Collector Without Walls: A Symposium on Norton Simon," 27 October 2007.



making. Simon family friend Lillian Weiner recalled when Brown entered Simon's living room for the first time, "Ric got down on his knees and paid homage to the fact that here was the Pissarro, here in Los Angeles, and Ric had done his thesis at the Fogg on Pissarro. And lo and behold, here it was greeting him in Los Angeles, where he would never have expected it."<sup>74</sup> Brown's reaction as he fell to his knees--as if Simon's home were a shrine--marked Los Angeles' shift into the center of the public art scene, and signaled that Norton Simon could wear his second hat just as comfortably—and with the same effectiveness, power and success—as the first.

After only two years of collecting, Norton Simon had already purchased forty-two objects, and as he began to fill the walls of his ranch style Hancock Park home, the amateur collector's taste in art started to evolve.<sup>75</sup> Norton Simon was initially drawn to works of art that enriched the viewer's experience rather than works of art that were searching for a deep intellectual or emotional significance. So, like most beginning collectors, Simon was drawn to the French Impressionist paintings, such as Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas and Pierre-August Renoir. In the next few years, as Simon was making purchases such as Degas' *Women Ironing* (1886) (purchased for \$260,000) or Paul Cézanne's *Portrait of a Peasant* (1906) (purchased for \$70,000), the process of adding a piece to his collection became more complex and began to entail much more investigation, which could take a very long time (Image 14 and 16). By 1961, his purchases became more extravagant and the art collector in him gained more confidence. Suzanne Muchnic noticed a pattern in his spending: "Simon was spending a considerable amount of money in the late 1950s for someone so new to the field, but

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<sup>74</sup> Ben Heller, interview by Davis Guggenheim, 31 October 1996.

<sup>75</sup> *Collector Without Walls*, 26.

except for the Rembrandt and the \$260,000 he paid in 1959 for *Women Ironing*, by Degas, all his purchases were under \$100,000.”<sup>76</sup> He was comfortably buying great works, but not at great prices. The lesson he learned in business, to tirelessly seek out great opportunities at low prices, served him well. The *Daily Telegraph* even printed a front-page article describing Simon’s collection as “not just the best in California but probably the finest west of the Hudson River in New York.”<sup>77</sup>

As Simon’s collecting expanded, he began to make risky investments in the hopes of higher returns. In 1959, Simon purchased Vincent Van Gogh’s *St. Paul’s Hospital at Saint-Remy* from the French born, New York art dealer, Paul Rosenberg for \$380,000 (Image 17). Painted in 1889, during the prime of the artist’s career, it depicts the asylum in the south of France where Van Gogh was self-admitted. Also at this time Simon bought another Van Gogh, *The Mulberry Tree*, also painted in 1889, for \$300,274 (Image 18). “As Simon began to buy art at a faster pace and pay higher prices, dealers quickly realized that an important new player had arrived on the art scene.”<sup>78</sup> The art world quickly became aware of the power Norton Simon had, and as a result many dealers kept him in mind when they saw a unique deal or something unusually good on the market.

As Norton Simon’s collecting excelled, his determination to learn and gain the upper hand soon became the center of his life. Not only did Simon seek out professional help, but he also asked his friends and employees, who had very little knowledge of art, for their reactions to works of art in an attempt to gain an insight into human’s untrained reaction to artworks. Eugene Thaw, the New York dealer, found that Norton Simon’s

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<sup>76</sup> Odd Man In, 44.

<sup>77</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 1959, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Odd Man In, 45.

attention to public reaction was a unique attribute of the businessman and collector:

“...Norton had a weakness as a buyer in that he was always thinking of the public’s reaction. If a piece was too obscure, too specialized, or too art historical, he thought it didn’t have the power to get the public response he wanted. He tried to overcome that and he did buy some very scholarly things, but in the early days of his collecting you couldn’t get a picture sold to him unless his butler and chauffeur and housemaid and what-have-you liked it. That was part of the gauntlet you had to run.”<sup>79</sup>

Dealers were not used to Norton Simon’s unorthodox need for public approval, but this constant awareness of public accessibility is another factor that made Norton Simon’s collection one of the greatest on the West Coast. Similar to his use of minimalist but compelling images in the Hunt Food marketing campaign, Norton Simon was looking for art and images that create an emotional reaction with any member of the public, no matter what their background. By evaluating this criterion when he made an acquisition, Simon created a collection that could be universally appreciated. He was setting himself up for unique success as a collector while building an audience for art in a region where museums were scarce and where fine art was perhaps less appreciated than other cultural assets. Simon was doing what he had done at Hunt: he was building demand and creating an audience for his collection.

Norton Simon was aware of the balance between the art and business world, but he was also aware he could not take off one of his hats as he left one world and entered another. He explained, “I take nothing for granted. Before I buy a painting I raise questions about its authenticity, condition, history, and ownership. In the business world I

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<sup>79</sup> Eugene Thaw, conversation with Susan Muchnic, Santa Fe, N. Mex., 9 June 1995.

always raise serious questions about the status quo.”<sup>80</sup> Just as Simon shocked corporate Boards of Directors with questions about the companies' unrealized potential, Simon asked wide ranging and forceful questions about each painting he bought, and in addition to sounding out friends and staff members, he often kept curators and experts on the telephone for hours. He owed much of his collecting success to these unusually broad fact finding practices, the very same practices he had employed in the business world when he scouted out the profit potential of a company he wanted to purchase.

1964 marked a turning point in Norton Simon's collecting, not only because it marked his tenth year as a collector, but because it was the year that he took his most successful business practice and applied it to the art world. The was the practice that he perfected at Val Vita and Hunt Foods, of buying an entire enterprise, keeping its best assets and selling the rest. Simon did this twice in the art world: First with the Duveen Collection in 1964, and next with the Pasadena Museum of Art.

The Duveen Brothers was one of the world's best known and respected art dealerships, which reached its peak under the leadership of Lord Joseph Duveen (1869-1939). By the time Simon started collecting, the art house was in New York, past its prime, but still with a superb inventory, under the leadership of Edward Fowles. In 1956, Simon began his relationship with Fowles and Duveen Brothers in the usual way—by haggling over paintings. He was interested two Rembrandts, *Portrait of a Jewish Philosopher* and *Portrait of Hendrickje Stoeffels* and a painting that had been attributed to Titian and then to Giorgione, *Bust Portrait of a Courtesan*. Fowles neglected to

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<sup>80</sup> Marshall Berges, “Jennifer Jones & Norton Simon,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1974, *Home* magazine, p.61.

inform Simon that there were questions as to the attribution of the two Rembrandts.<sup>81</sup> Simon, however, true to form, spent years doing his homework on the paintings, and when he finally bought the two Rembrandts, he demanded a one year approval period which he successfully extended to three years. During this time he concluded that the *Portrait of a Jewish Philosopher* could not be sufficiently authenticated, but he kept the *Portrait of Hendrickje Stoeffels*.<sup>82</sup> After years of back and forth about the authenticity of the *Courtesan*, Simon bought it in 1963 for \$192,500.<sup>83</sup>

All these discussions sparked Simon's interest in the other items in the Duveen Brothers' gallery, and Simon secured, on approval, seven items for himself and another five for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Fowles, seventy-nine and evidently tired of these types of transactions, was ready to sell not just these few artworks, but the entire gallery, including the building on East 79<sup>th</sup> Street that housed it. After what, by Simon's standards, was a very short negotiation period, Fowles agreed to give Simon a ninety day option to purchase all of Duveen Brothers inventory together with the building and the library for \$4,000,000 at \$400,000 per year.<sup>84</sup>

This meant that the *Courtesan* was returned for a refund and became part of the inventory that Simon acquired for the \$4 million. The other inventory included the building, the library, 164 paintings, 21 drawings, and 780 objects. The newspapers reported that the collection was worth \$15 million.<sup>85</sup> As he had done frequently in his

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<sup>81</sup> Sara Campbell, *Lock, Stock and Barrel, Norton Simon and the House of Duveen*. Norton Simon Museum, (2014), 14.

<sup>82</sup> Lock, Stock and Barrel, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Lock, Stock and Barrel, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Odd Man In, 72.

<sup>85</sup> Odd Man In, 72.

business career, starting with Vita Pac, Simon had purchased a concern, “lock stock and barrel,” at a bargain price.

Following his usual practice, Simon immediately invited a host of experts to examine and comment on the paintings. His assistant, Barbara Roberts, recorded their opinions on a spreadsheet, and the comments ranged from “Beautiful,” “Lovely” and “Very Pretty” for one work attributed to Botticelli to “Ugh”, “Oh no,” and “Good God!” to another, *Portrait of a Man*, also attributed to Botticelli (Figure 3).<sup>86</sup> As to some other paintings, the experts contradicted each other, with one expert “very enthusiastic” about a Dossi that another expert deemed “Terrible.”<sup>87</sup> These conclusions confirmed another of the attributes that had made Simon so successful in business: his ability to rely on his own judgment after all his consultants’ recommendations came in. Campbell notes: “The experience of poring over the comments was enlightening, but it also honed Simon’s ability to judge the quality of his holdings and possible acquisitions, and taught him to trust his own eye above anyone else’s.”<sup>88</sup>

As he did when reorganizing businesses, Simon chose to keep the works that he felt were the best and that best furthered his goals of creating a one of a kind collection. He sold lesser works, and some great works that just didn’t fit in, including portraits by Romney and Gainsborough. He used the proceeds to spectacular effect. Campbell notes that “within a year of the Park-Bernet sale in May 1971 when he deaccessioned much of the Duveen collection, he had added spectacular sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings such as Francisco de Zurabarán’s *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a*

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<sup>86</sup> Lock, Stock and Barrel, 27

<sup>87</sup> Lock, Stock and Barrel, 27.

<sup>88</sup> Lock, Stock and Barrel, 28

*Rose*.<sup>89</sup> Even the building went to enhance his collection. He traded it to the Acquavella Galleries for two paintings, *White and Pink Mallows in a Vase* (1895) by Henri Fantin-Latour and *Woman with A Rose* (1916) by Renoir.<sup>90</sup> There are now just 130 artworks from Duveen in the Norton Simon collections, but these works can be breathtaking, and include such masterpieces as *The Happy Lovers* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard and *The Sense of Touch* by José Ribera.<sup>91</sup> The remaining highlights of the former Duveen collection are the subject of *Lock, Stock and Barrel: Norton Simon's Purchase of Duveen Brothers Gallery*,<sup>92</sup> a 2015 exhibition at the Norton Simon, that shows just how skillful Simon could be in extracting masterpieces from an enterprise that he was able to acquire at a bargain price.

Simon had the opportunity to buy a struggling enterprise again, ten years later in 1974, when he gained control of the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art. This museum had many things in common with the companies Simon acquired as a businessman. First, the museum had great assets, including a small but wonderful collection of modern art and a new building on Colorado Boulevard. Second, the museum was nearly bankrupt due to the "incompatibility of grand ambitions and minimal endowment."<sup>93</sup> Third, it had a Board that, while well intentioned and effective in amassing a collection, was, at least in Simon's view, incompetent in running a museum. The similarities do not end there. When the trustees appealed to Simon to lease the museum space and build another smaller space

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<sup>89</sup> Lock, Stock and Barrel, 33.

<sup>90</sup> Odd Man In, 76.

<sup>91</sup> Odd Man In, 73.

<sup>92</sup> "Lock, Stock and Barrel: Norton Simon's Purchase of Duveen Brothers Gallery," *Norton Simon Museum*, April 19, 2015 <http://www.nortonsimon.org/lock-stock-and-barrel-norton-simon-s-purchase-of-duveen-brothers-gallery>.

<sup>93</sup> Collector without Walls, 163.

for the museum's modern collection, he refused, but he continued to keep an active but clandestine interest in the Pasadena site. When the board became sufficiently desperate, he stepped in took control, as he had done so often in business, by taking a majority of seats on the museum's Board.<sup>94</sup>

He then applied the same approach he applied to struggling companies like Val Vita and Hunt Foods, which, through reorganization, re-branding and clear leadership, he had turned into successful enterprises benefiting their stockholders. In Pasadena, he invested in the building, which while new, was in need of extensive repair. He discontinued popular programs he felt were not essential, such as art classes, support groups and children's art workshops, and he ended the museum's focus on modern art.<sup>95</sup> After a standstill period he began to deaccession some of the museums paintings, which supporters of the museum learned about only when they noticed works by Diebenkorn, Kline, Francis and de Kooning for sale at Christies.<sup>96</sup> When the former directors, patrons and artists who had given these works to the museum complained, Simon treated them the same way that he would a hostile corporate board, stating:

Former officers and members of the board of the Pasadena Museum are chagrined because of the disastrous management of the museum. Just because they couldn't run it capably, they are inspiring the artists to cause all this trouble<sup>97</sup>.

The controversy continued for a while, but in the end, Simon did what he always did. He turned the museum around, culled out what he didn't need, including admittedly great artworks that didn't work with his collection, and kept the rest, including the

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<sup>94</sup> Odd Man In, 212.

<sup>95</sup> Collector Without Walls, 166

<sup>96</sup> Odd Man In, 246.

<sup>97</sup> Odd Man In, 247-248.



building itself, and a wonderful collection of modern art that includes fantastic Klees and Kandinskys that are still on prominent display. He then put his own incomparable collection on display, and named the museum after himself.

The final example of how Simon borrowed techniques from his business practices for use in the art world is seen in his creation of the world-class collection of South Asian art now on display on the lower floor of the Norton Simon Museum. In amassing this collection Simon did the same things he did at Hunt Foods: he carefully researched assets, identified undervalued products and bought in quantity.

Simon's second wife, the actress Jennifer Jones, whom he married in 1971, is said to have introduced Simon to Indian temple sculpture. Once he saw the beauty in Indian art, he began to systematically research the field with speed and intensity. Art dealer Doris Wiener said that Simon "started at square one. He wanted to know about Hinduism as compared to Buddhism... and he wanted to know everything right away."<sup>98</sup> Simon contacted Pratapaditya Pal, the Senior Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, to direct him to resources in India where he could see important works first hand. He called dealers to learn which Indian sculptures were considered the best. Simon was indefatigable. Pal writes, "He never yelled, he never lost his temper, but he was relentless-- he weighed you down, he wore you out."<sup>99</sup>

For Simon, not only was the art dazzling, but also the prices were comparatively low. Pal recalls that Simon kept reiterating how impressed he was that one could buy

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<sup>98</sup> Collector Without Walls.123.

<sup>99</sup> David D'Arcy , "The Dealer and Miss Jones", *Los Angeles Magazine*, February 1996.

such "staggeringly beautiful works of art for so little money, when compared with what you got if you were using that money for Western art."<sup>100</sup>

Recognizing a "bargain", Simon proceeded quickly. In 1971, Simon bought in quantity, by purchasing over 70 works of art from New York art dealer J.J. Klejman, who was interested in retiring. This purchase is reminiscent of the Duveen purchase on a smaller scale, and contained many of the objects in Simon's current South Asian collection. Between 1972-1973, Simon purchased 136 examples of the art of India, the Himalayas and Southeast Asia at a cost of \$6.6 million.<sup>101</sup> In two short years he had become a major player in the Asian art market and amassed a collection of South Asian Sculpture that was profiled in the venerable *Connoisseur Magazine* as part of "one the most remarkable art collections in the world."<sup>102</sup>

Just as the companies he revitalized had an effect on their sector of the market, Simon's intense entry into the South Asian art world affected that market. "His very presence in the arena affected prices"<sup>103</sup> At the venerable Parke-Bernet Auction House, "Strict orders were given for Parke Bernet to upgrade its Indian art department because [Simon is] now involved in this area."<sup>104</sup> For Simon, the creation of the South Asian collection was just another example of how well his business tactics worked in art world. As was often the case, however, these tactics had a broader effect. In this instance, they made art experts all over the Western world take note of something they had previously neglected--the intense beauty of South Asian art.

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<sup>100</sup> *Los Angeles Magazine*, 1996.

<sup>101</sup> *Collector Without Walls*, 121.

<sup>102</sup> *The Connoisseur*, November 1976.

<sup>103</sup> *Collector Without Walls*, 121.

<sup>104</sup> *Collector Without Walls*, 151.

## **Conclusion**

Norton Simon achieved great business success in building Hunt & Wesson Industries and other firms. He achieved great success in the art world, becoming a widely respected collector and a force to be reckoned with on the auction floor. It was his third achievement, however, that was the most important: he found a way to share his magnificent art collection with the people of Southern California.

Museums and similar cultural attractions came late to Los Angeles. In 1926, the old Philharmonic Auditorium was constructed in downtown Los Angeles, but by the time it was completed, the architecture did not compare with the modern music and dance facilities that were being created in other large American cities.<sup>105</sup> The county art museum was nothing more than a neglected wing of the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science and Art.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, a divide was emerging in Los Angeles between the upper-class, old-money Protestant community and the liberal, younger Jewish community. There was a marked physical quality to this divide: Old-business Republicans were living in Hancock Park and north in Pasadena, while the more liberal and Jewish groups were living in Beverly Hills and West Los Angeles.<sup>107</sup>

Just as he had conquered the division between business and art, Norton Simon bridged this divide. He was a Jewish entrepreneur living in the old-money neighborhood of Hancock Park. Realizing the divergence of these two communities, he took it upon himself to unify Los Angeles through art, by creating a non-discriminatory, educational public space, that would make great art available to everyone.

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<sup>105</sup> Odd Man In, 48.

<sup>106</sup> Odd Man In, 29.

<sup>107</sup> Odd Man In, 48.

Norton Simon had been living with his collection up until this point. Art scholar and curator Ric Brown commented on Simon's private collection in a *Time* magazine article: "Simon's primary consideration is esthetic quality without regard for periods. And he lives with it just that way, hanging a Van Dyck alongside a Gorky in his office, a Memling alongside a Degas at home. This takes courage and taste, because it means holding a bat at full length, not shortening up."<sup>108</sup> (Image 19) Norton Simon's spacious Hancock Park home appeared very cramped in the magazine's four-page color spread. He and Lucille constantly worked to accommodate the collection at home, and they purchased the property next door, knocked down the house and added an additional wings to their home, with sliding panels displaying art work so guests could flip through the collection. Simon lived a very private life, and a *Los Angeles Times* article written in 1967 was the first time Los Angeles was exposed to his personality and the hundreds of works in his home. In an interview with Henry J. Selidis, art critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, Simon describes his journey of discovering the highest quality art, and he hints that the displays of art at his home are a learning experience, a trial run before he is ready to share the works with the public:

"Before you can communicate with others, you must learn to communicate with yourself, this is only one of the central lessons great art teaches us"<sup>109</sup> ... We are constantly reshuffling things here because I am always looking for a better relationship between the picture or sculpture and me. Putting them in different positions gives new life to them and

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<sup>108</sup> Odd Man In, 97.

<sup>109</sup> Henry J. Selidis, "Norton Simon and the World of Art," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23 1967, 16.

takes away any tendency to become static. As different pros and cons become evident in each work as it is moved around, I am better able to identify with a particular artist's vision. Each artist sees life in a different way and eventually you are able to share that vision to some extent.

Looking out of the window one projects these personal manners of seeing even to nature, thinking of a 'Sisley cloud' or a 'Van Gogh field.'"<sup>110</sup>

Around the time of Norton Simon's move to Hancock Park, Ric Brown arrived on the Los Angeles cultural scene. Brown, a charismatic Wells Fargo heir with a Harvard Ph.D., knew that Southern California was lacking this culture. He decided to create a campaign focusing on building a new museum, and he knew the first person to talk to had to be Norton Simon.<sup>111</sup> Brown told Simon about his dream of separating the County Museum's art department into its own museum.

Norton Simon was intrigued with the idea, and as soon as Brown proposed the plan Simon offered to donate a million dollars towards the cause.<sup>112</sup> Simon saw how important it was for Los Angeles to have a great, free standing art museum, but he could not fund such a project on his own. Luckily, Edward William Carter, art collector and President of Broadway-Hale Stores, was also captivated by the idea of opening a public art museum in Los Angeles. Carter and Simon had lived very similar lives as they created two industrial empires out of almost nothing. Carter got his first job at age ten, but unlike Simon, he earned his bachelor's degree from UCLA and then continued to Harvard

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<sup>110</sup> "Norton Simon and the World of Art," *Los Angeles Times*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> *Odd Man In*, 49.

<sup>112</sup> *Odd Man In*, 50.

Business School where he graduated cum laude in 1937.<sup>113</sup> Because of their different backgrounds, the two men dealt with business situations, and art acquisitions, in very different ways.

Norton Simon was a creative thinker, always considering the big picture. In the early 1960s, as this picture began to include an important, public fine art museum in greater Los Angeles, Simon was motivated by his own intellectual and emotional connection to great art. Close friend and colleague, Harold Williams, explained when discussing Norton Simon's techniques:

“He would say, ‘Harold, art is my religion, it was not just an intellectual experience. He felt the art. In a strange sort of way, the fact that he felt it caused him to push the intellectual side to be sure he wasn’t just reacting emotionally. That was typical Norton. He’d go back and forth that way. But if he didn’t feel it, all the intellectual arguments in the world wouldn’t do it for him.’”<sup>114</sup>

Given this attraction to art, he felt the need to share it with the public in Southern California that had enjoyed so little access to it.

Because of his background, Simon approached art differently than his peers did. He was a man collecting by passion, and financial gain was a secondary reward for his purchases, which did tend to be sure-fire successes. Carter, on the other hand, was a reasonable businessman, and his years of education moved him to approach art in a logical and clear way. Unlike Simon's wide array of paintings and sculptures, Carter built

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<sup>113</sup> Odd Man In, 50.

<sup>114</sup> Harold M. Williams, conversation with Susan Muchni, Santa Monica, Calif., 27 July 1994.

a very concentrated collection of priceless seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes and landscapes. These men had very different ideas about collecting but their drive to create a museum in Los Angeles was enough to make them find a way to work together. Luckily, Edward Carter was already the chairman of the Southern California Symphony Association, so he knew how to run a fundraising campaign.

Carter officially joined the museum's board in 1958 and soon after he became the chairman of the fund-raising committee. Once these two dominant figures of the business and art world had joined forces, their museum project could not be stopped. Working with the advisory firm of McCormick and Associates, they began to plan a great public art museum in Southern California.<sup>115</sup> Carter and Simon agreed to take on the project if three conditions were met. First, the land must be donated to the museum; second, the museum's operating expenses must be funded by Los Angeles or any other government entity; and last the museum must be operated by a private board, independent of public agencies.<sup>116</sup>

These were three very substantial requests from Carter and Simon, but somehow they all became reality. The museum was given very desirable land on Wilshire Boulevard, valued at \$8 million. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors stipulated that the property be used for a public museum, and that the County would pay the operating costs, which they estimated at around \$1 million a year. Finally, "The Museum Associates" was established as the museum's private board, and Carter became its first president.<sup>117</sup> By the end of 1958, the museum had established a board, acquired a

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<sup>115</sup> Odd Man In, 51.

<sup>116</sup> Odd Man In, 50-51.

<sup>117</sup> Odd Man In, 51.

plot of land, and gotten the funding for the operations. There were two major donors at this time that had contributed to the museum; one was Norton Simon, and the other, Howard Ahmanson, chairman of Home and Savings and Loan Association.<sup>118</sup> Now all the museum needed was a building to store and display all the artwork, so the museum board started a very long fund-raising campaign.

As Simon and Carter came together to form this influential board, the ranking of power soon became a constant issue between the men. Just as he hated being upstaged on the auction floor or in a business deal, Simon despised the limited control he had when it came to his influence over the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Still, the museum moved forward. As the two men began collecting more and larger donations, additional buildings were added to the plan, which resulted in the beginning and completion dates steadily pushing back. By 1965, there was so much hype surrounding the opening of this public museum, that the original goal of \$5 million was surpassed as the campaign brought in \$11.5 million.<sup>119</sup>

Two years later, upon announcement of the official opening of the museum, *New York Times* columnist Peter Bart wrote:

“The... Los Angeles County Museum of Art will open officially Wednesday amid a numbing succession of banquets, receptions and other rituals of civic self-congratulation. The new museum, which fills a gaping cultural void in this city, will be the largest west of the Mississippi and the biggest to be constructed in the country in 25 years. . . . The museum represents an impressive achievement for what is essentially a newly

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<sup>118</sup> Odd Man In, 52.

<sup>119</sup> Odd Man In, 53.



emerging cultural establishment in Southern California. The leaders of this new establishment represent an alliance of California's "old families" with "new tycoons" of the postwar boom in an area distinguished mainly for its cultural miserliness."<sup>120</sup>

As the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, also known as LACMA, gained attention, Norton Simon put on both of his hats to ensure that the public was aware of what was occurring in at the new space on Wilshire Boulevard. Reminiscent of his most stylish Hunt's Catsup ads of the 1950s, Simon ran full page advertisements in the *Los Angeles Times* under the name of his business corporation, Hunt Foods & Industries, Inc. One ad, for example, was a full-page image of a twelfth-century French sculpture of a king, and below the image ran the bold text "This Gothic masterpiece is a monument to an unknown sculptor. The new County Museum of Art is a monument to thousands of people, many of them anonymous, whose generosity has helped create this museum for Los Angeles and for America."<sup>121</sup> (Image?) Using the very same tactic he had used to create a mass market for Hunt's Catsup and Hunt's Tomato Sauce, Simon was creating a mass market for the kind of art that the Southern California public had not been exposed to before. Before the museum even opened, membership grew from three thousand to twenty thousand, and by the end of the year the museum had almost thirty thousand members.<sup>122</sup> Simon loaned large portions of his collection to the museum over extended periods of time.

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<sup>120</sup> Peter Bart, "Los Angeles Prepares for Museum Opening," *New York Times*, 29 March 1965, 42.

<sup>121</sup> Odd Man In, 78

<sup>122</sup> Odd Man In, 81

Being a cog, even the most important cog, in the machinery of LACMA was, however, completely inconsistent with everything Simon had learned wearing his first hat. Simon was used to running things. Whether it was the small, bankrupt Val Vita, or the international conglomerate, Hunt & Wesson, or his own art collection, he was used to being in charge. He was happy to take advice, in fact he thrived on it, but as noted above, after all this advice was in, he relied on his gut instinct. At the end of just about every day during his business career, he was the one who had called the shots. This was, in part, made possible by the structure of the American financial system. Simon would buy a minority interest in a company—25% in the case of Hunt Foods—and that was a controlling interest, enough to get him on the board and make the company dance to his tune and implement the cost saving and advertising measures that he demanded. This was not true at LACMA. Even someone like Simon, a major donor who also loaned great artworks, did not have a “controlling interest;” the other Trustees were people like Carter and Ahmanson, who were decidedly unwilling to be controlled.

A series of conflicts therefore erupted among the Trustees. The controversy over the architect is most telling. Carter wanted Mies van der Rohe; Ahmanson wanted Edward Durrell Stone. Eero Saarinen was another candidate. The Trustees could not agree, and they threatened to veto each others' candidates. Finally, the Board of Trustees decided to give the job to a compromise choice: local architect, William L. Pereira.<sup>123</sup> Most critics have concluded that the result is exactly what one would expect from an architect who had been selected “by committee,” and over the years there have been

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<sup>123</sup> Odd Man In, 56-57

repeated proposals to tear down Pereira's buildings and replace them completely.<sup>124</sup>

Simon ultimately concluded that, however much he wanted to share his art collection with the people of Southern California, he did not want it managed by a committee, especially a committee that he could not control. "The museum," he said, "had too many bosses."<sup>125</sup> There were other disputes: for example, he was informed that the shipping and packing costs for works of his that he lent to the museum, and that often traveled to other museums and dealers throughout the country, would not longer be paid with LACMA funding. He resigned from the museum's board in 1971, ending his fourteen year position there.<sup>126</sup> Two weeks later, Kenneth Donahue, the assistant director of LACMA, presented a detailed proposal to Simon suggesting the creation of a Norton Simon Collection Committee with Norton Simon as the chairman--basically a Norton Simon Museum in the walls of LACMA. This, however, was not attractive to Simon.<sup>127</sup>

While Norton Simon spent over a decade working on the Los Angeles County Museum, the Norton Simon Foundation that had been established years before under Hunt Foods & Industries, Inc. was continuously running in the background. By 1972, pieces from the Norton Simon Foundation art collection had made appearances in museums all over the country, and this collection became known as the "museum-without-walls."<sup>128</sup> In the long run, however, Simon wanted two things. First, to give his museum walls—walls that he could control, and second, to share his fabulous collection with the people of Southern California. He made an attempt to build a museum in Fullerton, but

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<sup>124</sup> Christopher Hawthorne, "LACMA Draws Up Ambitious Plans for a \$650-Million New Look," *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 2013

<sup>125</sup> Odd Man In, 57

<sup>126</sup> Odd Man In, 119-120

<sup>127</sup> Odd Man In, 120

<sup>128</sup> Odd Man In, 122-129.

the local city council could not make up its mind on whether to cooperate with the project.<sup>129</sup>

When the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art became available, it provided Simon with everything he needed to meet both his goals. “Simon would take charge of the museum, assume financial responsibility for it, and pay off the debt. In exchange, he would move his collection into the museum, get the lion’s share of exhibition space and—as he had so frequently done in business—take control of the board.”<sup>130</sup> With no Carters or Ahmansons to deal with, Simon could do what he did in the business world, take full control. He explained:

“Basically, I see this program as adding two positive together, the Pasadena museum has a fine building and a collection that is modern and contemporary. The Foundation’s collection, while having some of the same period, are primarily pre-twentieth century. By jointly exhibiting the collections, we will be able to offer the public a broader sweep of the evolution of art. We see the Pasadena Museum as an additional part of a national consortium of museums where parts of our collection are currently on long-term loan.”<sup>131</sup>

This description was modest in describing Simon’s plans. The Pasadena Art Museum officially became the Norton Simon Museum on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1975, and it is the quasi-permanent home of most of the collection he had amassed over his career as a collector including the works owned by the Norton Simon Foundation.

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<sup>129</sup> Odd Man In, 102-106.

<sup>130</sup> Odd Man In, 212.

<sup>131</sup> Pasadena Museum of Modern Art, press release, 26 April 1974, Norton Simon Museum.

The establishment of the Norton Simon Museum was the greatest achievement of the man with two hats. Wearing his first hat during a successful career that took him from a scrap metal dealer to one of the country's foremost industrialists, Simon learned to recognize value in things that were undervalued, to take his time in making a decision, to rely on expert opinion but in the end to trust his own judgment, and to buy whole enterprises, take control of them and turn them around. When he put on his second hat, each of these lessons served him well, and they enabled him to amass an art collection of astonishing quality. He was not afraid to take a risk in the art world, just like in the business world, by combining many things that seemed not to go together into one, and this added a compelling depth to his collection. His last goal was to share this collection with the people. J. Carter Brown, former director of the National Gallery of Art remembers that Simon "asked everybody—his driver, his maid" for an opinion before buying an artwork. Carter asked Simon, "Why do you ask them?" Simon replied: "These are the people who are going to be looking at the pictures in my museum."<sup>132</sup> The Norton Simon Museum is a gift of Simon's amazing life's work—his years of collecting, bargaining, wearing down experts and shouting down auctioneers, and this gift to enrich the people. The Museum is now a vital part of culture, education and art appreciation in the Los Angeles area. Without Norton Simon, the man with "two hats," the people never would have received this gift.

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<sup>132</sup> David D'Arcy, "The Dealer and Miss Jones," *Los Angeles Magazine*. February 1996, p. 77.

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## Appendix A: Images



Image 1:  
Rembrandt van  
Rijn  
*Titus (Portrait of a  
Boy)*  
1655-60  
Dutch, 1606-1669  
Oil on canvas  
The Norton Simon  
Foundation



Image 2:  
Rembrandt van  
Rijn  
*Aristotle  
Contemplating the  
Bust of Homer*  
1653  
Dutch, 1606-1669  
Oil on canvas  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art





Image 3:  
*Time Magazine*,  
 June 4, 1965  
 “The Corporate  
 Cézanne”  
 Volume 85. No.  
 23.



Image 4:  
 Advertisement for  
 Hunt's Tomato  
 Sauce, *Time*  
*Magazine*, May 3,  
 1948.



Image 5:  
Advertisement for  
Hunt's Tomato  
Catsup, *Vogue*  
*Magazine*, April 1,  
1956.



Image 6:  
Suzy Parker and  
Dovima in Hunt's  
Catsup AD,  
*Vogue*, August  
1956.





Image 7:  
 Andy Warhol  
*Campbell's Soup Cans*  
 1962  
 American, 1928-  
 1987  
 Synthetic polymer  
 paint on thirty-two  
 canvases



Image 8:  
 Dan Lutz  
*Bass Section*  
 1973  
 American, 1906-  
 1978  
 Oil on canvas



Image 9:  
*Andrée in Blue*,  
 1918  
 Pierre Auguste  
 Renoir  
 French, 1841-  
 1919  
 Oil on canvas



Image 10:  
*Brittany  
 Landscape with  
 Swineherd*, 1888  
 Paul Gauguin  
 French, 1848-  
 1903  
 Oil on canvas





Image 11:  
*Banks of the River  
 at Pontoise*, 1872  
 Camille Pissarro  
 French, 1830-  
 1903  
 Oil on canvas



Image 12:  
*Still Life with Fish  
 and Shrimp*, 1864  
 Édouard Manet  
 French, 1832-  
 1883  
 Oil on canvas



Image 13:  
*Madonna and  
Child with Book*,  
1504  
Raffaello Sanzio  
also Raphael  
Italian, 1483-1520  
Oil on panel



Image 14:  
*Flight into Egypt*,  
1544  
Jacopo Bassano  
Italian, 1510-1592  
Oil on canvas





Image 15:  
*Women Ironing*,  
 begun c. 1875-  
 1876; reworked c.  
 1882-1886  
 Edgar Degas  
 French, 1834-  
 1917  
 Oil on canvas



Image 16:  
 Portrait of a  
 Peasant c.1900-  
 1906  
 Paul Cézanne  
 French, 1839-1906  
 Oil on canvas



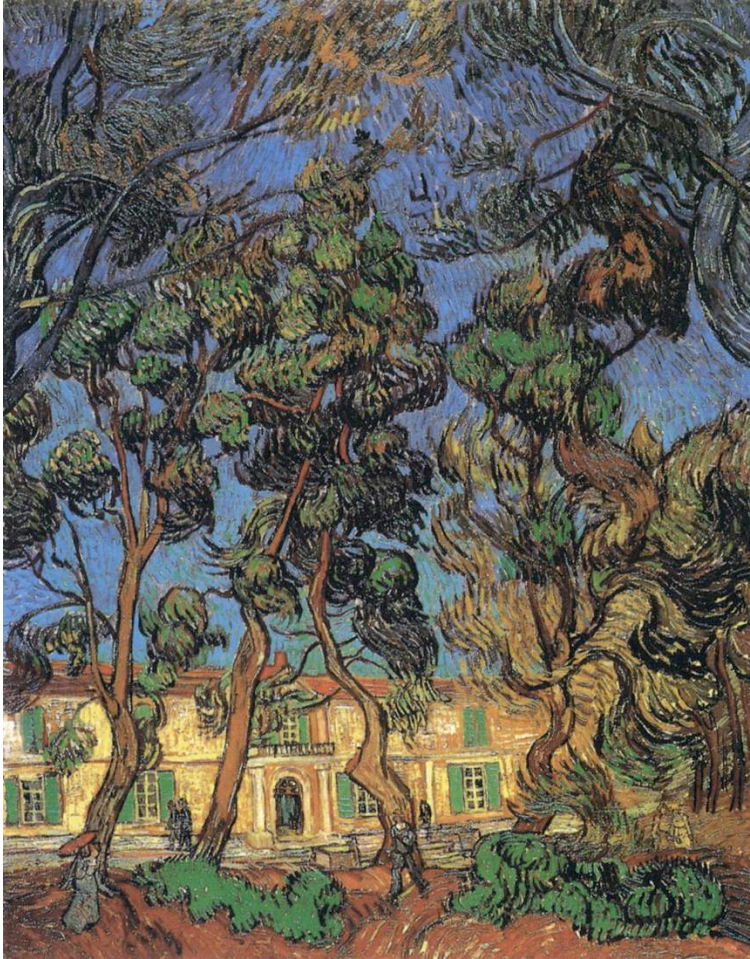


Image 17:  
*St. Paul's Hospital  
 at Saint-Remy,*  
 1889  
 Vincent van Gogh  
 Dutch, 1853-1890  
 Oil on canvas



Image 18:  
*The Mulberry  
 Tree,* 1889  
 Vincent van Gogh  
 Dutch, 1853-1890  
 Oil on canvas





Image 19:  
Norton Simon in his den, Malibu, c. 1978, *Collector without Walls*, 238.

## Appendix B: Figures

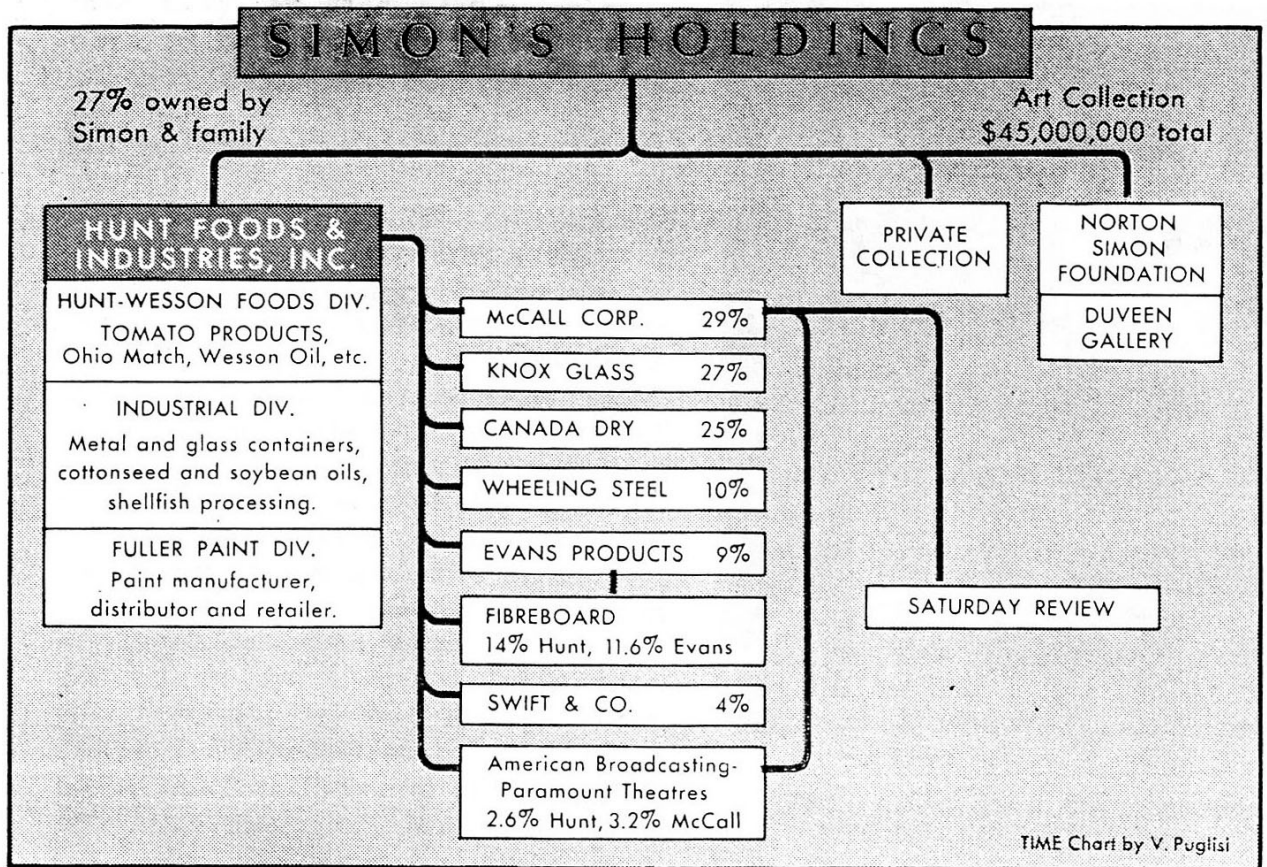


Figure 1:  
V. Puglisi. "Simon's Holdings." *TIME* 4 June 1965: 76. Print.

Dealers with 12 or more sales to Norton Simon  
Listed by number of sales

Dealer	No. Sales	No. Objects	Dates	No. Years	Total in dollars*
Reid & Lefevre	12	81	1968–1977	9	2,319,700
Speelman	12	13	1969–1976	7	1,504,200
Agnew	14	14	1958–1981	23	3,346,700
Klejman	14	68	1972–1977	5	840,000
Perls, New York	14	14	1955–1969	14	103,800
Musée Rodin	14	14	1966–1984	18	806,000
Slatkin	14	14	1958–1965	7	111,900
Schab	16	161	1961–1989	28	190,500
Spink	18	70	1960–1976	16	1,792,500
Hahn	19	19	1964–1972	8	1,796,400
Nathan	19	19	1957–1980	23	1,792,600
Schaeffer	19	30	1964–1976	12	336,000
Heller	26	26	1972–1976	4	2,750,000
Kantor	26	30	1957–1976	19	581,500
Tooth	28	28	1959–1973	14	1,702,200
Vierny	29	34	1967–1980	13	109,700
Knoedler	32	33	1955–1976	21	2,379,300
Oriental Antiquities	37	37	1972–1975	3	910,000
Wildenstein	40	102	1955–1982	27	13,809,300
Thaw	41	48	1963–1983	20	11,099,300
Wolff	41	74	1972–1981	9	1,076,100
Wiener	43	81	1971–1975	4	1,568,500
Colnaghi	45	375	1968–1982	14	2,205,700
Light	55	1,121	1963–1979	16	3,471,900
Marlborough	56	328	1961–1974	13	4,375,800
Rosenberg	63	63	1957–1985	28	7,447,300
Christie's	106	418	1964–1983	19	10,321,700
Sotheby's, New York	109	293	1974–1984	10	7,845,900
Sotheby's, London	203	1,574	1958–1988	30	10,200,500

\*to nearest 100

Figure 2:  
Sarah Campbell, “Dealers with twelve or more sales to Norton Simon,” *Collector without Walls* (Yale University Press, 2010), 220.

Page 2					
	Clem Greenberg	Willy Suhr	Dan Rich	Ted Rousseau	Creighton Gilbert
—Red Curtain Bellini	"Lovely" Was one of his two favorite pictures on first floor.	Only Bellini he liked, and he wasn't too sure of that. Never maintained it was a Bellini.	Liked a great deal and would hang with Bellini attribution.	"Lovely, but some of the restoration not advantageous."	This one really puzzled him and he was unwilling to take a definite stand. Cited certain technical and artistic contradictions.
—Loeser Bellini	Didn't care for	"No"	"Definitely not right."	"Bad."	Liked Loeser least of all.
—Luini's	Thought both were great.	"Nice, and you don't have any trouble deciding between them."	"Excellent, perfect. Condition is fine too."	"Very good. You'll take both, won't you?"	"Excellent; no problem either as to artistic merit, condition or attribution."
—Francia's	Preferred one of St. Catherine	Liked both and suggested taking both.	"I would only select one." Preferred one with 2 saints.	Preferred one with 2 saints.	Definitely and positively preferred one with St. Catherine (which Ric has always favored). No attribution problem.
—Bassano	"It's a real Venetian picture but rather dull."	Liked it. Said it was better than Giorgione Man. No comment.	"Dull and uninteresting"	"Good, and probably by Bassano"	Liked academically, although he felt picture rather dull. Attribution should be Venetian, 15th C. Costume will pin down date.
—Nuzi		No comment	"Very mediocre. It's out."		"Nothing really"
—Grasset Botticelli	"Beautiful"- his other favorite.	"Lovely, but I wouldn't risk calling it Botticelli. Should read Bot. - attrib. to."	"Very interesting. I'd take it and call it Botticelli-?."	"Very pretty. Would call it Bot. and assts. It's far better to under-attribute."	"Good picture. It's School of Bot. but late school by artist who had talent. Superior to other School pictures."
—Dossi	"Terrible"	Was very enthusiastic about it.	Didn't like it at all.	He and Liz Gardner both liked. They felt it was by Dossi too.	"Definitely possible that it's a Dossi. Check further and restore."

Figure 3: "Spreadsheet with comments about artworks in the Duveen collection, 1964," *Lock, Stock & Barrell*, Norton Simon Museum, (2014), 27.