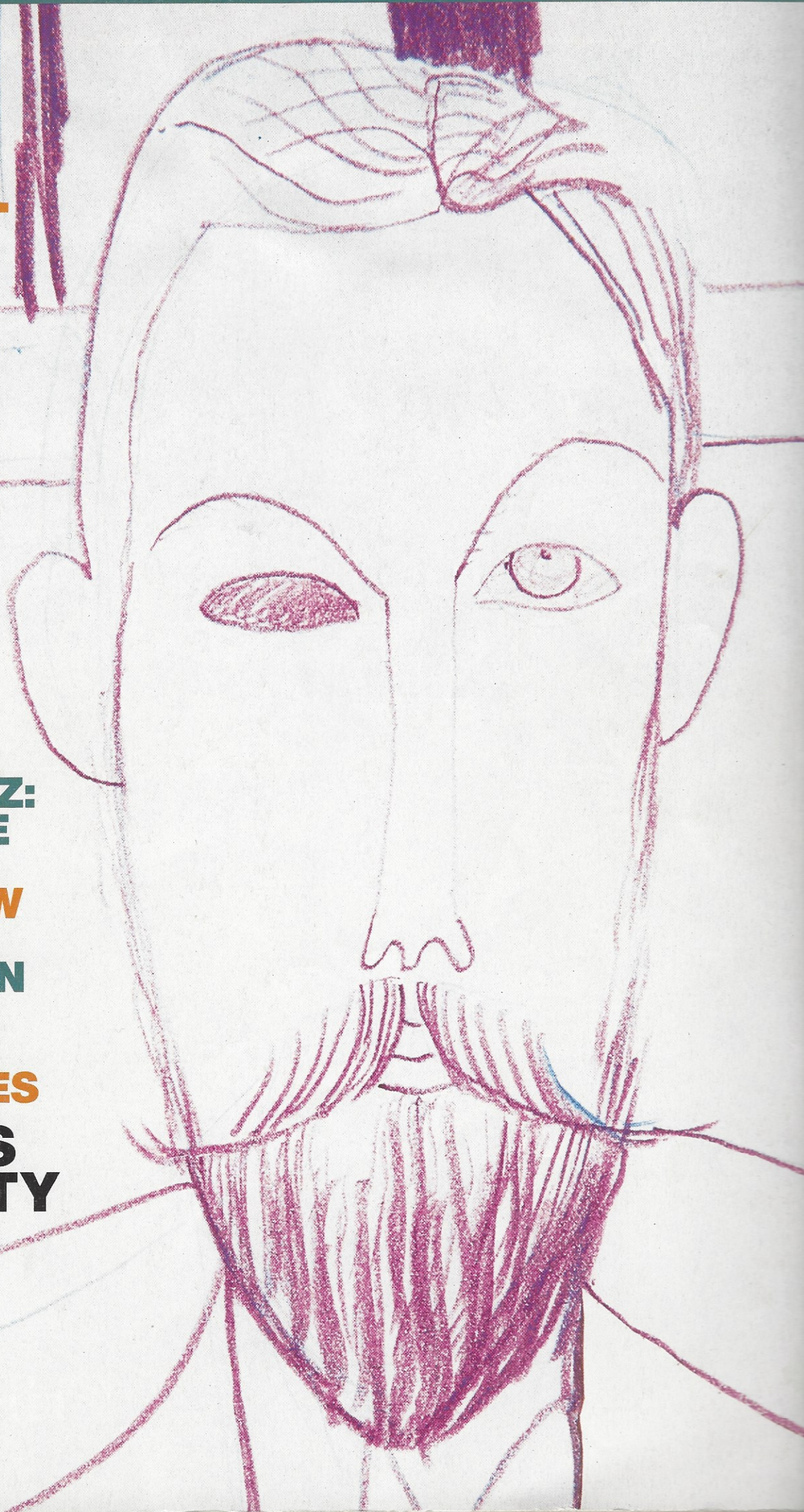


RA



**GEORGE ORTIZ:
A PASSIONATE
COLLECTOR**

**SANDRA BLOW
REASSESSED**

**THE UNKNOWN
MODIGLIANI**

**THE GETTY
MASTERPIECES**

**DRAWING'S
VERSATILITY**

Three Academy exhibitions reflect the consuming passion of the collector. Elspeth Moncrieff talks to George Ortiz and, overleaf, reveals the personalities behind the Getty and Modigliani shows

LEAVING FOOTPRINTS

'Look at that sculpture – do you see the planes, the volumes, the relationship of forms, of one part to another, it is unbelievable.' George Ortiz is mesmerised, eyes gleaming, as he slowly revolves the small figure of 'an.Aumakua' – a sorcery figure from pre-contact Hawaii. Its grotesque head topped with human hair, squat little body and hideous grimace are savage, fearsome even. He assures me it is no longer evil, for it has been exorcised by a Greek Orthodox priest, but it radiates the raw, untamed power of a primitive votive piece.

Every object in the Ortiz Collection – which spans almost the entire art of the ancient and primitive worlds from Ur to Byzantium and from the Caroline Islands to South America – has this same power to move. 'I believe that certain people can project on an object the spirit they have within them.' It is this spirit, echoing down the millennia and across the continents, that unites the 280 objects in the Academy's exhibition of works from the Ortiz Collection.

George Ortiz began his collection (which, including the many minor pieces, numbers over 1,600 objects) 44 years ago, when a visit to Greece in 1949 knocked him sideways. 'I realised that unlike any previous culture, in ancient Greece man is the centre of things. He has a sense of ethics, and with his rational mind he can discover everything there is to know about the world. [He knows] that the answers to all our problems lie within ourselves.'

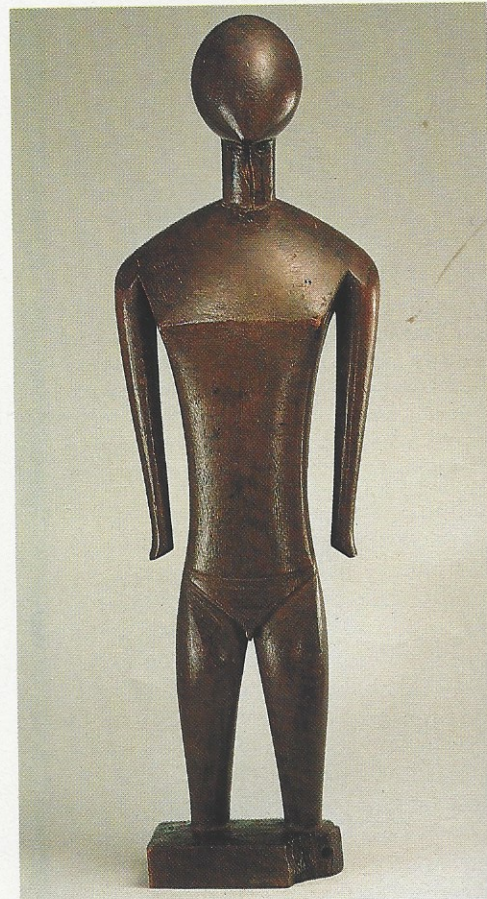
The son of Jorge Ortiz-Linares, a Bolivian aristocrat who married Graziella Patino, daughter of the tin millionaire Simon I Patino, George Ortiz was born in 1927 in Paris, where his father was serving as a diplomat. Though surrounded by wealth and exquisite works of art (his parents collected 18th-century French decorative arts), Ortiz had an unsettled childhood. A Bolivian born in France, brought up as a Catholic and looked after by an English Norland nanny, he did not visit Bolivia until he was 10. Even today he speaks little Spanish. He was sent briefly to school in England at Downside in 1939 until a German plane crashed on the playing fields and his parents evacuated him to a Protestant school in America. After studying philosophy at Harvard, he returned to Paris in 1948, where he became involved with Marxism, a somewhat confused young man.

His pursuit of antiquities is far more than a hobby, it is a consuming passion that has formed the focus of his life. From Greece, the country that has provided the most complete part of his

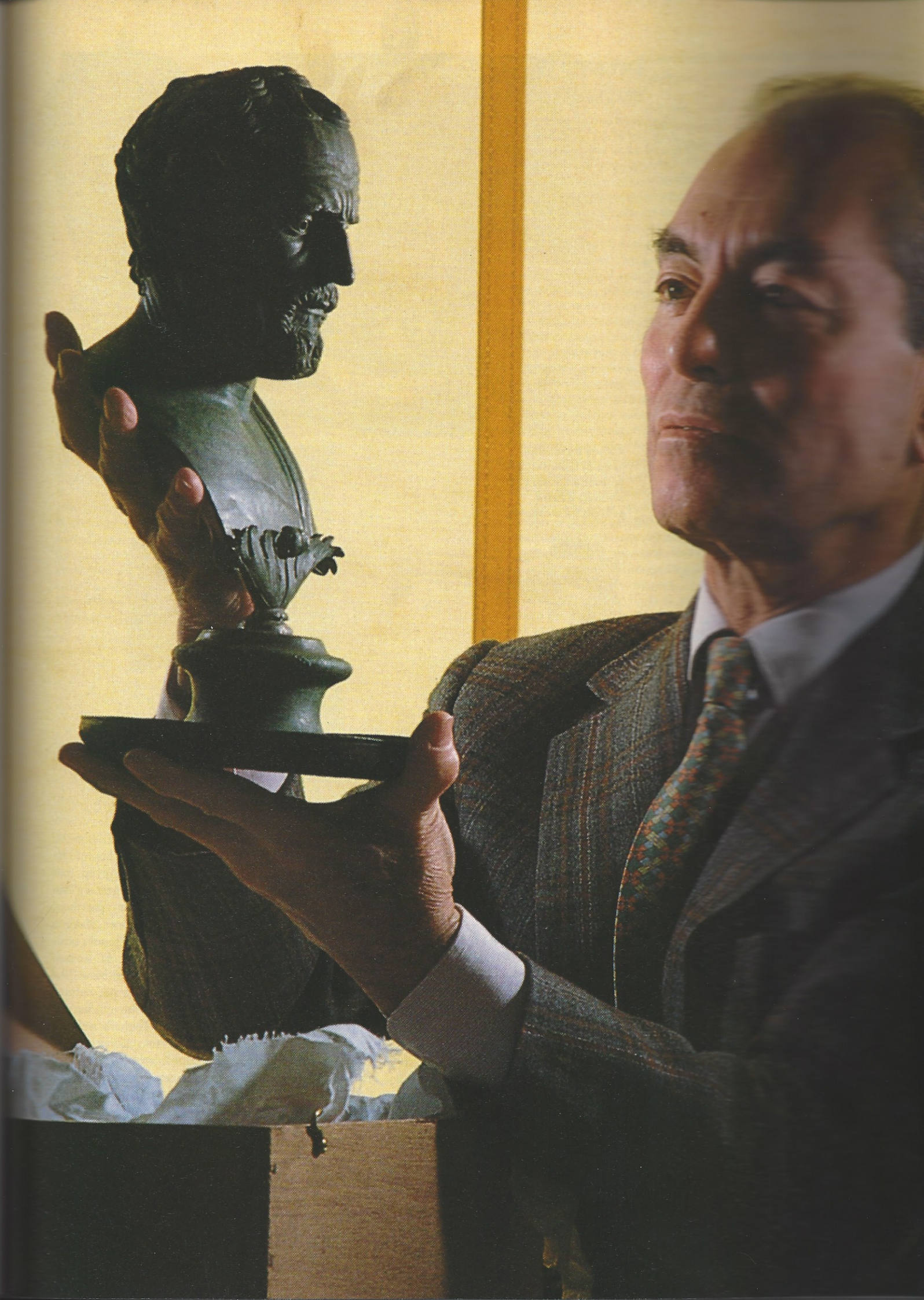
collection, his taste has expanded to encompass the entire ancient Mediterranean world – though so far he owns only one Chinese object in the exhibition. He claims that he has learned everything visually up to now, being too active to read art books. Somewhere along the way the transformation from enthusiastic amateur to world-respected authority took place; the publication of his exhibition catalogue will assure his scholarly reputation.

Museum directors now beat a path to the door of his 18th-century country estate just outside Geneva. Ortiz purchased the property in 1972, 10 years after he first fell in love with it, and restored every detail. The main house lies at a discreet distance from the converted barn where he entertains and where he masterminds his collection. Even here, Ortiz's impeccable eye is evident: Flemish tapestries mingle with Renaissance furniture and 15th-century Florentine maiolica. A 12th-century sarcophagus serves as a log basket, a Roman sacrificial altar acts as a coffee table, and when he rings for the plates to be cleared it is with a 13th-century Javanese bronze bell. His bronzes are kept sealed in a bullet-proof air-conditioned vault which connects the barn with the main house, but the marbles and carvings are dotted around the rooms. In late September, the room is littered with a scale-model of the Royal Academy rooms, mock-ups of the cases in which Ortiz is painstakingly arranging each object, and boxes and packing cases of all sizes and shapes.

Ortiz pours scorn on the nouveau riche who buy Impressionist and Modern works for the wrong reasons – because they cannot write a cheque and stick it on the wall. And he has no time for contemporary art, claiming that many of today's artists are neurotic and unskilled. It is the more challenging medium of sculpture, the art of the three-dimensional which really excites him. 'There are many real collectors among those of little means. The only difference is that I have inherited wealth and for the last 44 years everything has been secondary to my collection. You can buy the best possible example of Hawaiian or neolithic art for one 50th of the price of a great Impressionist, although if I was starting today it would be impossible to put together a collection of this quality. I have paid dearly, not only financially [95 per cent of his wealth is now tied up in the collection] but emotionally. My family life has suffered at times, my wife gets very upset and the last two years have been totally consumed



George Ortiz's collection spans centuries and cultures. Above: a 19th-century wooden deity from the Caroline Islands. Right: Ortiz holds a second-century Roman bronze of Demosthenes



PHILIP SAVER
with organising the exhibitions.' Had he known what he was in for, Ortiz professes he would never have taken it on.

Ortiz first decided to go public and show his collection as part of an exchange exhibition with Russia last year. After London he hopes for a venue in Berlin and possibly Paris. Single-handedly he has done the work of a team of curators, personally supervising every detail of the packing and display, and working night and day to complete the catalogue, for which the world-renowned scholar Sir John Boardman, Lincoln Professor of Classical Archaeology and Art at Oxford, is writing the preface. His library now numbers some 5,000 volumes. 'I started buying the books long before I ever opened them. Perhaps I absorbed some of the knowledge through osmosis but they are certainly in use now as I don't have any time to visit libraries.'

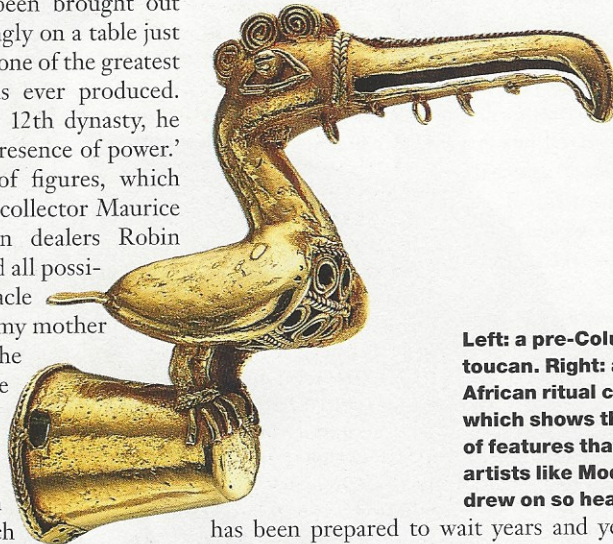
In the evenings, does Ortiz go to his underground vault like some Midas to marvel and gloat at his pieces? He admits not. 'The great moment is the moment of acquisition – it's like falling in love – the chase and the conquest are all-important. There is a moment of contact with a great work of art, it hits you in the guts and you are never the same again.' As he speaks he gestures towards the 4,000-year-old bust of Amenemhat III which has been brought out specially and sits disconcertingly on a table just behind my left shoulder. 'It is one of the greatest works of art that Egypt has ever produced. The greatest Pharaoh of the 12th dynasty, he emanates an overwhelming presence of power.' Ortiz first saw the group of figures, which had belonged to the Belgian collector Maurice Templeman, at the London dealers Robin Symes. 'The price was beyond all possibility, but a year later the miracle happened and an investment my mother had made in Brazil before the war was sold. I was on the next plane to London, Symes refused to split the group so I offered him a price for them all and immediately gave him three back to sell, two of which are now in the Egyptian museum in Munich.'

The purchase was typical of Ortiz's method of acquisition and explains why in range and quality his is probably the greatest collection of antiquities ever formed. 'Before I saw Amenemhat, I knew nothing of Egyptian art; I felt it was the art of the infinite, like the desert, not human like the Greeks.' His purchases are emotional and visceral. He is not looking to fill a gap or find the best example of a particular style or period. Two terracotta Etruscan votive boots which stand there so touchingly, as if the owner had just jumped out of them and walked away, take their place in the collection alongside the transitional Greek torso which represents the dawn of Classicism and is, he believes, the most artistically significant object he owns.

Ortiz is conscious of his responsibility to such objects but has never felt guilty about owning them. He believes they are destined to come to him, citing the extraordinary chain of coincidences that have led him to certain objects. He



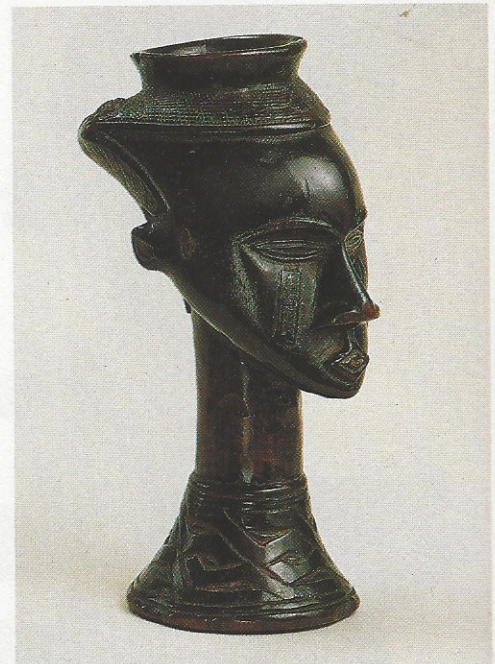
Above: Byzantine head of Valentinian II or Gratian, c.AD375, swaddled in its protective wrapping



Left: a pre-Columbian toucan. Right: an African ritual cup which shows the type of features that artists like Modigliani drew on so heavily

has been prepared to wait years and years for pieces like the alabaster Bull Man he first saw in 1950, or the pre-Columbian toucan which belonged to Epstein, confident that one day they would be his. On gently pointing out that the life of one man is scarcely a pinprick on the time scale of an object 4,000 years old, he counters with the argument that for most of those 4,000 years the objects have been invisible, hidden in the ground. By bringing the objects together he has given them back their identity. A museum would also do that, Ortiz admits, but in an 'inhuman, anonymous, intellectual way, not through love'. He points to two little votive figures joined by a root that has grown through them, locking them together, or a pair of gold earrings embedded in an oxidised silver necklace. 'No museum would be likely to leave them like that,' he says.

Some Roman frescoes are hanging on the walls of the room in which we sit. 'Yes,' agrees Ortiz, Roman paintings are very nasty, they come off the walls of buildings which means the

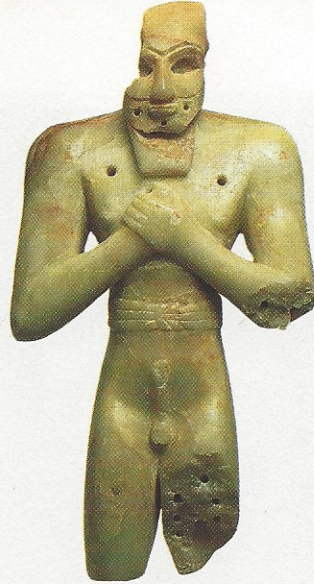


desecration of ancient monuments. But he defends adamantly his right to own them. 'The market for antiquities is the only thing that saves them from destruction,' he almost shouts. 'If you are a developer building an apartment block in the Bay of Naples, for instance, and you come across a Roman villa, of course you bulldoze it before anyone finds out. At least if the paintings have a market value they will be removed and sold. Remember, 85 per cent of fresh things that come on to the market are chance finds, not illicit digs. If there wasn't a market, scandals like the Sevso treasure [offered for sale with false Lebanese export documents and impounded] would never have happened because it would have been melted for bullion.' Ortiz adamantly defends the free traffic of works of art. 'Why should a country that has no ancient art not be allowed any, particularly when the country of origin has no resources to conserve and document it?'

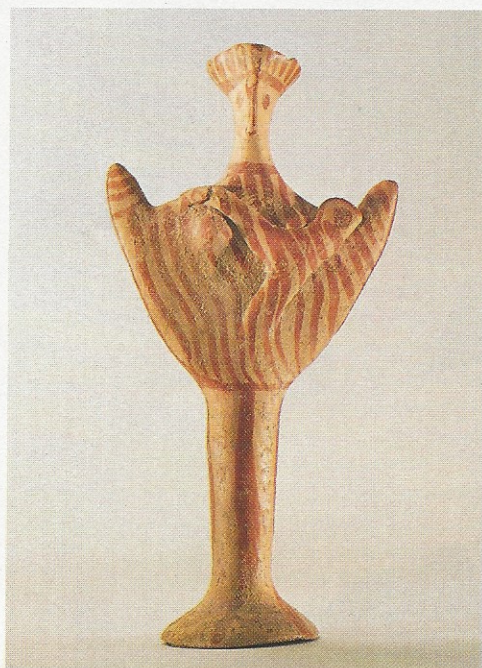
And what of the future of the collection? He reflects long and hard before answering. 'My



Above: this bust of Amenemhat III, an Egyptian Pharaoh of the 12th dynasty, is over 4,000 years old. Ortiz believes it to be one of the greatest works Egypt has produced and a piece which emanates an overwhelming presence of power



Above: the Sumerian alabaster Bull Man; art historically, it is among the most important pieces in the Ortiz Collection



Above: the spontaneity of the modelling of this Mycenaean terracotta figure speaks to us directly even though it is more than 3,000 years old

dream would be to build the most marvellous, the most modern museum, whitewashed walls like Greece, state-of-the-art lighting... but I don't have the means to do it. Rightly or wrongly, I believe in passing on my wealth to my children, even if that means them selling the collection. I don't have this wish to be immortal that all men have. When you run on the beach you leave footprints in the sand and a second later a wave washes them away. All of the past is in each of us and the future will have me in it.

'My collection is one man's response to the ancient world, one man's feeling. I want people to come to the exhibition to marvel, to dream, to wonder, and to take away from it whatever they choose. That is why I have ended it on Polynesia – it's a breath of fresh air in the winter gloom, a sun-washed paradise untainted by European contact.'

In Pursuit of the Absolute: Art of the Ancient World from the Collection of George Ortiz is at the Royal Academy from 20 January until 6 April. (The Academy's flights were courtesy of Swissair.)

The grand acquirer

The oil tycoon John Paul Getty stunned the art world when he left an endowment of \$1.2 billion (now worth \$4.1 billion) to the small museum he had built on the Pacific coast highway outside Los Angeles. Getty had collected antiquities, second-rate Old Masters and French decorative arts, but the purchasing power of the museum was so enormous (estimated at \$60 million last year) that in 1981 George Goldner, then Curator of Photography, persuaded the trustees that the museum should form a collection of Old Master drawings. The RA's show, which has been seen also at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, is the first major exhibition of this collection.

'There was no collection of drawings west of Chicago,' explains Goldner, 'and unlike paintings, it was an area where there were still works by most of the major artists in private hands.' Goldner, who retires from the Getty Museum this month to take up a post at the Metropolitan Museum, has been nicknamed 'The Grand Acquisitor' for the rate at which the collection has grown – over 400 drawings have been acquired in 12 years.

Goldner concentrated his fire power initially on the great Old Masters, principally of the Italian School, knowing they would become increasingly impossible to find. With a roll call that included Raphael, Leonardo, Mantegna, Titian and Bellini already under his belt, Goldner added the Michelangelo, 'Rest on the Flight to Egypt', for £4.1 million last year. 'Michelangelo was the one great artist of the Renaissance we lacked.'

The Getty took full advantage of the debacle surrounding the 1984 Chatsworth sale to carry off a Raphael, a Titian, three Rembrandts, two Rubens, a major Holbein, a Mantegna and a Van Dyck. At the second Chatsworth sale in 1987, the Getty acquired just four works – by Coreggio, Pordenone, Peruzzi and Veronese. 'That sale was not nearly so important,' explains Goldner. 'We already had the Rembrandts, the Van Dyck and the Raphael so didn't want another' – a comment which belies the accusation that the museum acquires names indiscriminately.

Lee Hendrix, who became Associate Curator in 1985, has been responsible for the extensive collection of Northern

European drawings, which is now among the top five in America. Today it would be impossible to put together a collection of this depth and quality with works by Dürer, Cranach and Holbein and a large number of designs by Renaissance draughtsmen such as Hans Baldung Grien and Jörg Breu. The Getty's biggest coup was the discovery of the Altdorfer 'Christ Carrying the Cross' catalogued as school of Wolf Huber in a 1985 Christie's sale.

Friend and patron

In 1906, Modigliani arrived unknown and penniless in Paris. Until the outbreak of war in 1914 he was sustained and patronised almost entirely by one man, a young Parisian doctor, Paul Alexandre. From the moment they met, Alexandre was convinced of Modigliani's genius; he provided him with a studio and numerous commissions, and scrupulously collected all the sketches and drawings the artist executed during this period. He begged Modigliani to throw nothing away, and several drawings may even have been saved from the wastepaper basket, as their crumpled nature suggests.

This entire archive of over 400 drawings has never before been exhibited or published. After Modigliani died tragically young of tuberculosis in 1920, Alexandre guarded his collection of drawings jealously, always intending to publish them together with an account of the artist's life during the years they had been close friends. The project never came to fruition however, and the drawings remained unknown to all but a handful of researchers.

The collection's reappearance today is thanks to Noel Alexandre who has carried out his father's wishes, producing documentary evidence to tell the real story of Modigliani's life and work in Paris before 1914. Many of the drawings reveal Modigliani's debt to the art of primitive cultures, in particular those of Africa and Cambodia. Like the artists of the ancient world, he thought nothing of distorting reality to express a greater truth, and visitors to the RA will see striking similarities between his drawings and some of the objects in the Ortiz Collection. Archaic heads from Ancient Greece smile knowingly in the Ortiz Collection, perhaps because the abstraction of their features preceded Modigliani's experiments by over 2,000 years.