

LUX

RESPONSIBLE LUXURY



BREAKFAST WITH THE KOOKY COLBERTS

MARY KATRANTZOU ◊ OLAFUR ELIASSON ◊ FRIEZE NEW YORK ◊ BACK TO 198

10th- to 13th-century
Khmer deities, and a
Han dynasty Chinese
platform, or seat



GOING UNDERGROUND

By the side of a dual carriageway in Berlin, a vast concrete bunker hides one of the world's most captivating and innovative art experiences, the Feuerle Collection. Darius Sanai meets its creator

The door of the huge, grey concrete bunker by the side of a dual carriageway in east Berlin swings shut behind me. Inside, there is silence, and faint lighting, leading to an opening – everything is concrete. A nicely dressed, intellectual-looking gentleman (glasses, slightly mad-professor hair, high-collared shirt, black jacket, no tie) greets me and leads me, with few words, down a concrete staircase, through a door and into a pitch black room.

The door closes behind us, and we are standing (presumably) side by side in utter blackness – I have only experienced such a lack of anything visual in a laboratory darkroom. But in a darkroom, you have spectrum lights to work with, and you don't have to walk around. "Walk forwards", he instructs, quietly. It is hard to know where forwards is, but I do so, arms in front of me, fearful of colliding or falling. In the distance, a tiny, dim light appears. As we walk, it becomes nearer and brighter. It is the light of a

room around the corner at the end of a corridor, reflecting off the concrete wall.

We reach the light, and turn right into the room. It is a vast concrete hangar, mainly empty, dotted with perfectly lit artworks, with a lake at one side, held back by a glass wall.

Welcome to the world of Désiré Feuerle and his Berlin art bunker, the Feuerle Collection. A stroll through reveals astonishing Khmer sculptures from Cambodia, 13 centuries old, juxtaposed with highly contemporary (and often highly sexualised) photography, or with antique Chinese furniture. It is an engrossing and memorable experience with a fascinating message: the ancient was contemporary once, and the world that art lives in does not need to be either white-cube gallery space, overstuffed museum or home. Feuerle, one of Germany's most celebrated collectors and former gallerist, has created a world for his art which is as engaging and sensory as any museum.



THE ANCIENT WAS
CONTEMPORARY ONCE



The Feuerle Incense Room surrounded by Khmer sculptures (above), and collector Désiré Feuerle in front of Anish Kapoor's steel sculpture, *Torus*

“ I always thought it's better to show fewer pieces, to be very selective about what you show and light them very well. Visitors to a museum normally cannot describe more than three things from all that they have seen. The quantity is really not so important.

I started juxtaposing ancient and modern as a child. I did it in every museum I went to. When I was in Italy and saw Giotto for the first time, I bought a postcard of a Giotto fresco. Then I saw a piece by Picasso, so I bought a Picasso postcard. I wanted to have it around me. And then I had them at home and I looked at them and I could feel similar feelings coming out of most different cultures and epochs, pieces that have been done today or hundreds or thousands of years ago. And then I tried to put them together, and I found it very intriguing.

So, I started very early and then later on I opened a gallery; in fact, I opened one with Gilbert & George and antique clocks. I always



“IT’S SO REVEALING TO HAVE SUCH PIECES NEAR EACH OTHER – IT CREATES SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR THE VISITOR”

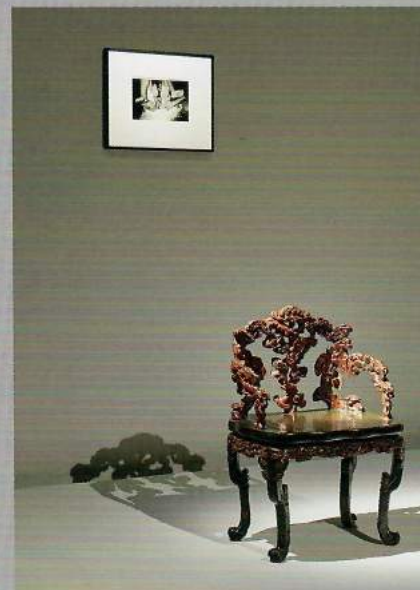
made juxtapositions with their work, and then I did the same with Richard Deacon, with silver tea and coffee pots. But always minimal installations: Richard Tuttle with oboes and clarinets; Rosemarie Trockel with scientific instruments; Anish Kapoor with objects from north-east Thailand; Julian Schnabel with early tapestries; and Yves Klein with early Madonnas from the Gothic to the baroque. With these exhibitions, I could really feel the pieces had something in common, but it’s also interesting when they have nothing in common. It’s so revealing to have such pieces near each other – it creates something different for the visitor.

I think it’s important to pay attention to old things. I have some ancient vessels, and when I install them, people say, “Wow, this is like a [Lucio] Fontana!” And when they want to know why the pieces are attractive, I tell them, “This is an early Fontana – four thousand years old!” Or they exclaim about a ritual vessel, “This is

so powerful!” And they feel like that because it was done for a special moment thousands of years ago. It has that purity that artists try to achieve. This attracts me very much; it’s much more exciting than seeing contemporary art, which is good, but there is so much attention paid to it that I think it’s essential to look at the other end, and to treat it like contemporary art.

I don’t know whether appreciation for ancient art will come back, but I hear from really significant collectors that they skip the contemporary art fairs because they think they’re too mass orientated, and they don’t need that. This doesn’t mean you stop collecting, but sometimes you don’t have to go to all these events worldwide. For some, to be at the party is more important than the artwork. You know, it’s fun to go to the parties, but for a real collector this should not matter.”

”





Opposite, clockwise
from top left: 11th-
century Khmer female
divinity and Han
dynasty platform; Qing
dynasty scholar's Lohan
Bed, with Nobuyoshi
Araki's photograph
Mythology (2001/2015);
Ming dynasty garden
stone bench; Imperial
Chinese carved chair
with *Diary Tokyo*
1981-1995 (1985/2015)
by Araki. This page:
Untitled (2009) by
Zeng Fanzhi