

ROY LICHTENSTEIN FOUNDATION & JACK COWART, Founding Executive Director

GERTRUDE VANDERBILT
WHITNEY AWARD
FOR OUTSTANDING
PATRONAGE OF THE ARTS



Essay by **LEAH LEVY**,
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I heard about Jack Cowart before I met him—first as the deeply respected and innovative art historian and curator, and then as the brilliant conduit for the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection landing at the National Gallery of Art. He was both elucidating the mysteries of Matisse and permanently preserving works of art that had long been kept in a tiny New York apartment. Along with his publicly presented projects, the breadth of his interests and accomplishments revealed Jack's intensely personal, vibrant and refreshing approach. Among the artists who was of great interest to him throughout his curatorial career was Roy Lichtenstein.

Several years later, rumor reached me in California that someone in New York was organizing informal collegial lunches to get into the details of managing artists endowed foundations (well before there was a concise and descriptive name for these entities). I was a novice, eager to connect and learn. It turned out the lunch

By the wishes of the artist and his family, the **ROY LICHTENSTEIN FOUNDATION** was chartered as a Private Operating Foundation in 1998, primarily to facilitate public access to the work of Roy Lichtenstein and the art and artists of his time; to create a catalogue raisonné of all known Lichtenstein works; and to share information which could assist the development and education of the next generations of curators, critics and scholars concerning the artist Roy Lichtenstein.

During the last fifteen years the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation has expanded its activities to include: the rescue, organization and donation of the enormous and historically consequential Shunk-Kender and Harry

Shunk Photography Collections to a consortium of five international museums/research centers; consistent support of the Aspen Institute National Study of Artist-Endowed Foundations; providing expertise to numerous Lichtenstein exhibitions; supporting numerous outreach and research topics, including artists' materials and postwar art and art history; building a Study Collection of early Lichtenstein and later generative sketches, models, maquettes and artifacts; functioning as an image and information database for a broad range of art, art history and oral histories; and working with museums to acquire notable Lichtenstein artworks from the Foundation's collections and the collections of others.

JACK COWART, founding Executive Director of the Foundation, was previously Deputy Director/Chief Curator of the Corcoran Gallery of Art (1992–99), Head of the Department of 20th-Century Art at the National Gallery of Art (1983–92), and held prior museum curatorial posts in St. Louis and Hartford. Dr. Cowart received his PhD in the history of art from the Johns Hopkins University

(1972), and is a widely published and recognized authority on Roy Lichtenstein and Henri Matisse as well as on other American and European twentieth-century modern and contemporary art and artists. He was made a Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication in 2001.



organizer was Jack Cowart, by then Founding Executive Director of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, who characteristically dubbed these local get-togethers as the “non-group group.” I reached out and was grateful to be included in the conversations exploring the intriguing world of philanthropy and artists’ legacies.

Jack’s consistent leadership and the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation’s early support of the Aspen Institute’s National Study of Artist-Endowed Foundations has been key to the transformation of artists’ foundations both in the U.S. and, grandiose as it sounds,

worldwide. His openness, generosity and determination to keep things fresh and moving and to work collaboratively have been a key model to the field—making the direction toward inventive ideas the point, and defining the unlikely as possible. Among a host of groundbreaking partnerships and donations are the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation’s stellar move to acquire and ultimately to place the Shunk-Kender Photo Archive in a consortium of museums; its endowing named faculty chairs in art and art history at Ohio State University, as well as a curatorial position at the Columbus, Ohio, Museum of Art; and its collaboration with the Whitney Museum of American Art after Dorothy Lichtenstein’s personal commitment to donate Lichtenstein’s Greenwich Village studio to that institution for use as the first permanent home of its Independent Study Program. All are the result of the brain trust Jack comprises with Dorothy Lichtenstein and the Foundation’s Board, led by Chairman Ruth E. Fine. Now that the Foundation is planning to sunset, it undoubtedly will offer exemplary ways in which this enormous move can be accomplished, based on Jack’s unwavering commitment to finding the best way for the Lichtenstein legacy to continue to be honored.

As a member of the Advisory Committee of The Jay DeFeo Foundation, Jack has provided hours of shared experience, wisdom and great stories in his candid, wry manner.

Jack Cowart is a tall muse. For myself and on others’ behalf, I offer my warmest congratulations to him as he and the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation are honored by Skowhegan with The Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Award.

