COLLECTING CULTURE AND THE NEW ART MUSEUM



Saturday – a fine afternoon at the Cantor Arts Center, celebrating 50 years of membership (currently at 3500). [Link]

A tent on the lawn by the Rodins and the Oldenberg pink thing (which I far prefer to the Rodins – never mind the lovely chilled sherry and Sam Smith's in the "Cool Cafe").

It is an impressive part of Stanford. The current exhibition of modernist pieces – "From Picasso to Thiebaud", drawn from the Center's own collections and those of Stanford alumni, is beautifully curated and full of wonderful juxtapositions. Tom Seligman is a phenomenal director.

I talked about a favorite topic of mine – collecting. A celebration of collecting (done right – I made an appropriate attack on the trade in illicit antiquities – see my remarks last year on the looting of the Baghdad Museum [Link]).



Ron O’Donnell

Main point – collecting things blows history apart and enhances our humanity, not least beacuse we are so bound up with the world of things.



Porte de Clignancourt, Paris 1992

Real collecting that is. When the connections between the things that fascinate the collector take over, when the organization of the collection runs off in all sorts of unexpected directions, when it gets quirky and weird, surreal (the surrealists' favorite experience of the flea market or of the shopping mall). Dreamwork – traumwerk [Link]

Irony – the passion of collecion subverts all systems of classification, collection itself, because the intimate knowledge of the collector of the things collected overruns all attempts at containing them within a coherent system. When you know your collection, the stories – about it, its origins, the things and their qualities, where they came from and were associated with – the stories proliferate. The stories engendered in collection fascinate. Of course, a true collection is never simply this came first then this then this then this. There is always more to find out and say.

And we are all collectors. Even if we only collect memories.

And this is what museums should be doing – subverting their own collections with a proliferation of different stories. [Link to the importance of stories]