

82-1131/4

19 NOV 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Protocol Branch, BSD/OP
THROUGH: Deputy Director for Administration
FROM: Bruce T. Johnson
Chairman, Fine Arts Commission
SUBJECT: Agency Medallion for Vincent Melzac

1. I appreciate your offer to act as broker for the proposal that the Director officiate at a ceremony honoring Vincent Melzac, the Agency's unofficial art patron. The ceremony, at which Mr. Melzac would receive the Agency Seal Medallion, would be attended by members of the Fine Arts Commission and possibly, though not by any means certainly, by members of Mr. Melzac's family.

2. You already have the memorandum which gives the rationale for affording this recognition to Mr. Melzac. I attach several other documents for your possible use in presenting the proposal to the DCI. The first provides a few general paragraphs on the Agency's relationship with Mr. Melzac. The second is the general biographic description which I had sent to the Director once before as part of my effort to introduce him to the work of the FAC. The third and fourth are copies of the Director's letter of 26 May 1982 to Mr. Melzac and the latter's response.

3. Please let me know if you need any other information.

/s/ Bruce T. Johnson

Bruce T. Johnson

Attachments

STAT

CH/FAC:BTJohnson:jtr/[](15 November 1982)

Distribution: (all w/atts)

Orig - Addressee

(1) - FAC Files

1 - DDA

let guide in copy

3 4 1985

13 November 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Vincent Melzac

1. During the late 1960's the then Chairman of the Fine Arts Commission developed a relationship with Mr. Vincent Melzac which led to the loan of a number of canvasses from the Melzac collection for display on the walls in the main concourse and the main reception area. Over the years we have been able to make periodic exchanges for other items from his collection; the most recent such exchange took place last spring. The statue standing opposite the main entrance also came from the collection, and in August we took delivery of two particularly important paintings by Morris Louis, certainly the most famous of the Washington Color School artists. All of these works are on indefinite loan. They are insured by the FAC for a total of \$895,000.

2. Mr. Melzac is well known in art circles for his early support for the artists who collectively made up the Washington Color School, and his personal collection has contained many important works by the artists of that School. Mr. Melzac has in recent years donated some of these paintings and sold others to local galleries, most notably the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art. The paintings from his collection which grace the walls of the Headquarters Building represent a unique form of tangible support by a private citizen for this Agency.

[Redacted Signature]

Bruce T. Johnson
Chairman, Fine Arts Commission

STAT

Dist:

Orig - FAC files
1 - C/PB/BSO/OP

CH/FAC:BTJohnson:jtr/[Redacted] (15 November 1982)

STAT

Vincent Melzac's interest in art began early in the 1930's. While attending high school in Cleveland, Ohio, he was invited by a friend to go sketching at the Brandywine farm of American Impressionist painter William Sommer. Melzac came away from that visit with his first art acquisition: a Sommer drawing which cost him one dollar.

Melzac had to put aside his interest in art during World War II. However, he was able to indulge this interest again after the war when he became an executive of the Wolf and Dessauer department store in Fort Wayne, Indiana. His broad-minded boss encouraged executives of the company to become involved in community activities, so he became a trustee of the Fort Wayne Art Museum and began arranging shows of American art there. Few people came to these shows at first, so Melzac began writing an art column for the Sunday Fort Wayne Journal to publicize them. The exhibits and attendance greatly increased.

In 1949 Melzac moved to Washington, D.C. Soon after arriving with his family, he decided to find out what was happening on the local art scene. He was attracted to The American University. William Calfee was head of the department there and, employing visiting professors, lectures, etc., Calfee had greatly increased the awareness, on the part of the A.U. faculty, of the significance of post-war New York painting.

On one of his trips to New York, Melzac was introduced to Willem de Kooning by Jack Tworkov. De Kooning was generous with his time and his talent and often asked Melzac to accompany him to the Cedar Street Tavern, on University Place off Eighth Street (the informal meeting spot for New York artists in the fifties). Melzac also went with de Kooning to several Friday night sessions of The Club, a more formalized group which had grown out of Subjects of the Artists School and Studio 35, congregating point for advanced artists during the 1940's.

Melzac became convinced in 1953 that paintings by some of the New York artists should be shown in the Washington area. However, he had no luck trying to convince the Washington museums. After several meetings with Director Adelyn Breeskin and her Curator, Gertrude Rosenthal, he persuaded the Baltimore Museum of Art to show the paintings of de Kooning, Tworkov, Guston, Vicente, and Pollock. Gertrude Rosenthal remembers being "absolutely floored" by the impact of "Blue Poles," which Melzac encouraged the museum to acquire. At the time they could not afford \$3,000 for a work now worth at least a hundred times that much.* They did buy a painting, "Landscape" by Jack Tworkov.

Around this time, Melzac toyed with the idea of becoming an art dealer. The combination of an excellent business sense, a strong acquisitive instinct, and an even stronger desire to help talented, but struggling, artists could have made a venture of this sort successful. De Kooning left the Egan Gallery at this point and encouraged Melzac to found a gallery

*This sketch was written several years ago. Since then "Blue Poles" has been sold to Australia for two million dollars.

BTJ, 8 Nov 82

by promising that the entire Egan stable would join, along with de Kooning himself. But Melzac was involved with other business considerations and thus let the opportunity slip by.

Four years later, the Watkins Gallery at A.U. mounted an exhibition of Melzac's collection which was held November 9 - December 7, 1957. Joe Summerford, Chairman of the Art Department, wrote the introduction to the small catalogue. In it he stated:

"Mr. Melzac has purchased unpretentiously, but with discrimination, preferring to buy a number of works by artists whose work has appealed to him rather than to attempt to form a collection representative of a particular period. He has, it seems to me, never purchased names. The support he has given artists wherever he has lived has been a service to art and a reflection of his own sincerity...."

The Melzac collection has gone through many changes over the years as works have been sold or given away and replaced by others. Mr. Melzac's policy of buying, in depth, works by artists he admires, has resulted in a collection comprising approximately 50 works by William Sommer (spanning the years 1904-1949), 55 by Norman Bluhm (1957-69), 32 by Jack Bush (1960-68), 68 by Tom Downing (1955-70), 22 by Gene Davis (1953-65), over 175 by Howard Mehring (1954-65), as well as seven Louis' (1954-61), 10 Nolands (1951-64), and many others, bringing the total to over 500 works.

Vincent Melzac has taken many risks, buying, according to his instinct artists to whose aims he was able, in some measure, to respond. He has rarely bought work by an artist he did not know personally. Kandinsky, the only European he ever bought (which he subsequently sold) is an exception; Morris Louis is another. In the case of Louis, however, although he did not know the artist, he was in touch with Louis' aims through Greenberg, their mutual friend.

In viewing the entire Melzac collection and its development, perhaps the achievements and sensibilities of two germinal artists, de Kooning and Noland, establish, in turn, two types or phases of emphasis. From the time of Melzac's commitment to Noland's work begins his passionate interest in what has come to be known as "Washington Color Painting." This phrase was coined by Gerald Nordland, Director of the former Washington Gallery of Modern Art, in 1965. Nordland presented for the first time together, in an exhibition called "The Washington Color Painters," the six key artists (Louis, Noland, Davis, Downing, Mehring, and Reed), whose achievements he identified as constituting a vital manifestation in the course of American art. This exhibition, held at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art in the summer of 1965, subsequently toured institutions in Texas, California, Massachusetts, and Minnesota.

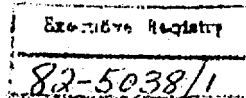
In the winter of 1970-71, this city finally had another opportunity to see together major examples of Washington Color Painting, when the exhibition, "The Vincent Melzac Collection" was presented at the Corcoran. This exhibition constituted an important event in the history of Washington art. It afforded the public an unparalleled opportunity to experience this work in the context of other important contemporary American paintings as well as making possible, for the first time, in-depth comparisons of the achievements of the respective artists. The Corcoran exhibition, however, merely scratched the surface of the Vincent Melzac Collection, the most comprehensive grouping anywhere of the works of the artists associated with the pioneering development of Washington color art.

The Vincent Melzac Collection, taken as a whole, is the unique achievement of a singularly dedicated and determined man. This collection stands as an invaluable body of material for scholars of contemporary art; the full range of its importance has only begun to be measured.

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505



26 MAY 1982

Mr. Vincent Melzac
Locust Hills Farm
Rt. 1, Box 188-C
Romney, West Virginia 26757

Dear Mr. Melzac:

Since becoming the Director of Central Intelligence, I have been made aware of your generous support to our Fine Arts program, in particular your loans of items from your extensive collection. The color school paintings which have graced the walls of the main concourse in our Headquarters Building have brought an added dimension to our environment. We are quite proud of our building, and your paintings are beautifully suited to display in the broad corridors that surround our central courtyard. We also appreciate your willingness to arrange, as you have just done, for exchanges of some of the works on loan with others from your collection, thus providing a welcome variety of color and form.

Now we have another benefaction to thank you for. The bronze sculpture by Georgio Spaventa was installed in the main concourse, and the enclosed employee bulletin has been published announcing this newest artistic enhancement of our building. The enclosed photographs will give you an idea of how it looks in its new location.

I know that our continuing appreciation for your interest in CIA and your support of our efforts to beautify our surroundings has been expressed to you by members of our Fine Arts Commission, but I wanted to use the occasion of these new acquisitions on indefinite loan from your collection to express to you personally my thanks for your generosity. The art works from your collection are important to us not only for their effect on our working environment, but also as an expression of support for what the CIA stands for. Please accept my genuine thanks.

Sincerely,

William J. Casey
William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence

Enclosures

LOCUST HILLS FARMS

82-5038/2

Polled Charolais
Purebred Arabians
Landrace Swine



Rt. # 1 — Box 188C
Romney, West Virginia 26757
304/822-5856

June 1, 1982

William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Mr. Casey:

This is to acknowledge your kind and thoughtful letter of 26 May 1982.

We have been loyal supporters of the Agency for many years during which time we have met each Director. We look forward to meeting you also.

Perhaps this Fall when our Farm demands subside and if your schedule permits we can get together for a brief visit.

We wish you continued success in your difficult but essential position.

All Best

Vincent Melzac

Vincent Melzac

VM/pls

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|
| TRANSMITTAL SLIP | | DATE |
| TO: <i>D/ODP</i> | | |
| ROOM NO. <i>2000</i> | BUILDING <i>Hqs.</i> | |
| REMARKS: <i>Cy for FAC files</i> | | |
| FROM: | | |
| ROOM-NO. | BUILDING | EXTENSION |

FORM NO. 241
1 FEB 55

REPLACES FORM 36-8
WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)