

# ARABIA <sup>Harpers</sup>BAZAAR

## A Conversation With UBS Art Collection's Global Head On The Importance Of Corporate Art Collecting

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Mary Rozell, Global Head of the UBS Art Collection

We speak with Mary Rozell about the multifaceted history behind the UBS Art Collection and its broader mission

Now decades old and continuously growing, the **UBS Art Collection** represents artists from the 1960s onward from over 70 countries around the world. It all started during the sixties following a series of mergers of major investment banks including PaineWebber, Union Bank of Switzerland and Swiss Bank Corporation into what is now known as UBS.

The firms' individual art acquisitions also merged, forming one of the world's most important corporate collections which, to this day, houses their shared histories. The collection comprises an impressive range of 30,000 works spanning photography, painting, sculpture, video art and drawings with the objective of not only nurturing the bond between art and business, but supporting artists all over the world from diverse backgrounds.



*Eva Rothschild. The Leanover. 2018. Painted steel, silicone, wood. 313.1x160x93cm.  
UBS Art Collection. © Eva Rothschild. Courtesy the artist and Modern Art, London*

“I think some of the corporate collections are among the best in the world,” says Mary Rozell, Global Head of the UBS Art Collection. “Our collection, for example, has existed for six decades and it’s something that our clients really appreciate. All of our art is displayed in client-facing and employee spaces; they’re not in private offices so they’re there for clients and for employees; and we also do hundreds of tours in our spaces each year.”

Housed globally with a team of ten members in **New York**, Zurich, London and Hong Kong, the collection has been under Rozell’s creative direction for the past four years. “The mission is to support the artists who are representing the culture of our times,” shares Rozell. “We collect a lot of work by women artists and artists of colour—many collections are striving for a more diverse collection given that the Western art market has dominated the art world for so many decades.”

## Discovering Talent

Previously the director of the Art Business master's programme at Sotheby's Institute of Art in New York, the writer-curator was not a foreigner to the art world. "Corporate collecting is just a different facet of collecting," shares Rozell. "But it was something I hadn't done before and it had always intrigued me. I certainly knew about the UBS Art Collection so I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work with it." During her time at Sotheby's, Rozell launched a course on art collecting and wrote a book entitled *The Art Collector's Handbook* which was released in 2014.

A big part of Rozell's position as Global Head of the collection is to highlight talented artists who are yet to catch the market's eye. "I think there are a number of overlooked artists," she says. "Artists who have been working for years and maybe the market hasn't caught up, I think that's an interesting area for the market to look at." American artist Sheila Hicks is an example.



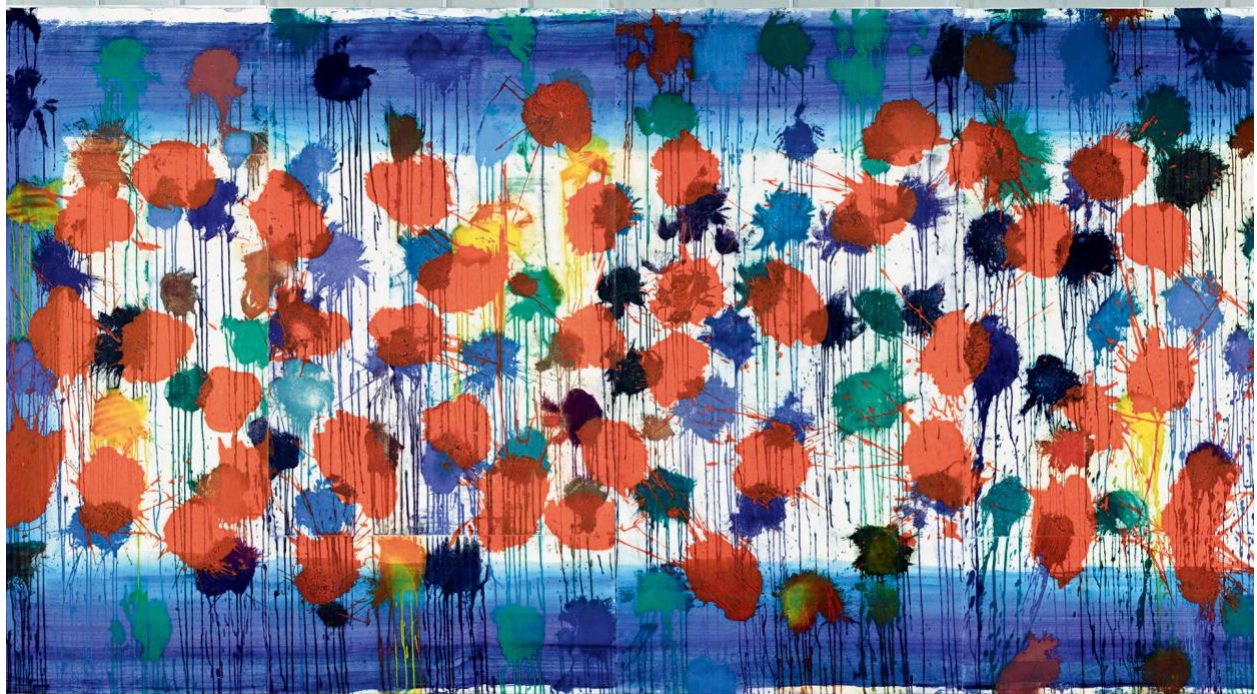
*Sarah Morris. UBS Wall Painting. 2001/2019. Household gloss paint on wall. 499.1x1361.4cm. UBS Art Collection. © Sarah Morris. Photo credit: Tom Powel Imaging*

"Sheila is an older artist who has been working for decades," says Rozell. "We bought a piece by her a few years ago and now her market is getting quite heated." The UBS

Art Collection also lends works to major museums around the world including San Francisco [Museum](#) of Modern Art and Leopold Museum Vienna.

Since joining the UBS Art Collection in 2015, Rozell was determined to explore the history behind the formation of the collection. “I wanted to get an idea of what this collection is really about,” she says. So in her first year, Rozell began industriously researching, which led to the publication of *UBS Art Collection: To Art its Freedom*, the first major book to be released since a decade on the evolution of the UBS Art Collection and the major artists who have shaped it over time.

Written by Rozell and Austrian art historian Dieter Buchhart, the 272-page spread features illustrations of masterpieces by [Italian](#) artist Alighiero Boetti, American artist Mary Heilmann and Ed Ruscha, to name a few, as well as the collection’s most recent acquisitions. “Obviously if you have 30,000 artworks, you can’t chronicle the whole collection but we wanted to create an impression,” she shares.

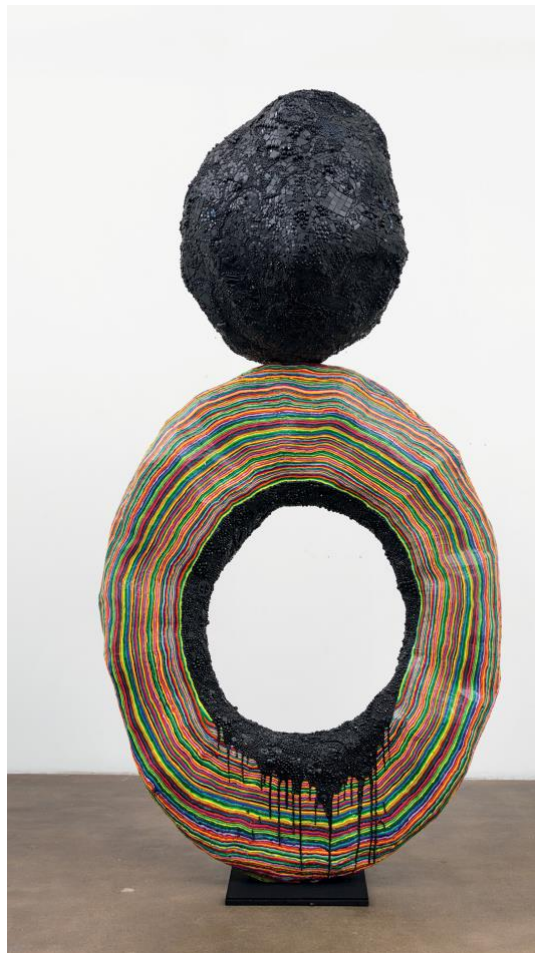


*Howard Hodgkin. As Time Goes By (blue). 2009. Sugar lift aquatint, carborundum and hand painting. 244x610cm. UBS Art Collection. Courtesy Howard Hodgkin Estate and Alan Cristea Gallery, London*



“And that meant not just exploring the top works by value but a selection of works from all different decades, all different regions and all different value points—works that really represent the collection to make connections from the decades through the various themes.”

One of the most recent acquisitions is a work by American visual artist Derrick Adams, an artist who is rapidly rising in America and a sculpture by London-based Irish artist Eva Rothschild, whose works were showcased at the Irish pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019. Middle Eastern artists supported by the collection include Egypt-born Ghada Amer, known for exploring female stereotypes and Beirut-born Etel Adnan, an acclaimed poet and painter.



*Mindy Shapero. Night Pieces, The lost unseeing eye. 2013 - 2018. Steel, plaster, acrylic paint, and found mosaic objects. 264.2x139.7x71.1cm. UBS Art Collection. ©*

*Mindy Shapero*

## The Birth of An Art Gallery

In May this year, the UBS Art Collection launched the UBS Art Gallery at 1285 Avenue of the Americas, featuring permanent artworks and a roster of rotating exhibitions in its Midtown New York headquarters.

“The response has been positive especially from our employees and others who pass through the building—it’s such a nice and inspiring way to start their day,” says Rozell. “There’s lots of people gathered around conversing about the art, having a look and just thinking. So it’s really nice to see that and have this interaction with the public.” Conveniently located between [Christie’s Auction House](#) and The Museum of Modern Art, the new gallery faces *Urban Plazas* (1984-1985) a permanent installation by renowned American sculptor Scott Burton which was designed over three decades ago.



*Mary Rozell and Ed Ruscha. Ed Ruscha VERY, 17.05. – 19.08.2018. Installation views. Courtesy: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, DK. Photo: David Parry*

“The plaza outside is actually an artwork that has created an important, rare gathering space in Midtown Manhattan,” says Rozell. “So you have all these people sitting out on their coffee breaks and lunch breaks having conversations and at the same time, they

can see all the art that we have placed in the gallery. It's a nice indoor-outdoor exchange and somewhat of an invitation to come and look closer at the work."

On show until September is the UBS Art Gallery's inaugural exhibition entitled *A History and a Moment*, spanning 60 years of artistic movements that have taken place since the collection was formed, highlighting the rich heritage of the **collection**. "We're looking back at the collection and questioning, where are we now and where are we going?" says Rozell.

"And the show also reflects that, so it's a selection of artworks from the 1960s to the present, representing each decade and each of the regions where we do business." The earliest work on display is an untitled work dated 1961 by abstract expressionist Helen Frankenthaler and the newest is *Sundown Number Nineteen* (2019), a photograph by American artist Xaviera Simmons.



*Fred Eversley. Untitled (parabolic lens), (1969). 2018. 2-color, 2-layer cast polyester. 48.9x48.9x15.2cm. UBS Art Collection. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. © Fred Eversley. Photo credit: Tom Powel Imaging*

Representing every decade in between, works by several iconic artists including Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Robert Longo, Carroll Dunham and Cecily Brown are also on display. Following the inaugural show, an exhibition devoted to works in the collection by American artist Ed Ruscha entitled Ed Ruscha VERY: Works from the UBS Art Collection, which has been on tour across the world including at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark and in the UBS Lounge at the Art Basel fair in Hong Kong, will travel to the UBS Art Gallery in [New York](#) for a last show. The exhibition will unite all of his art owned by UBS together for the last time.

After 60 years of perpetual growth, the purpose of the UBS Art Collection remains unchanged. “The mission of the art collection has been the same from the beginning,” shares Rozell. “And that is to collect the greatest art works of our time in the regions where we do business. We’re looking for artists that are breaking new ground and pushing the envelope in terms of practice, in terms of their ideas. It’s artists who are going to make a mark on the course of art history and on our present culture.”

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