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Steve Goldman is one of two-dozen local art collectors lending pieces for an OMA exhibit.

Sharing their passions

LOCAL CONTEMPORARY-ART COLLECTORS LOAN PRIZED PIECES FOR OMA EXHIBIT

Steve Goldman was in a college chemistry lab when glass first caught his eye. "I always thought scientific glass was really beautiful. It had a unique, intrinsic beauty," the Winter Park philanthropist says.

Though he was intrigued, it was years before he began to collect true "art glass." Then, during an Orlando Museum of Art (OMA) tour to San Francisco in 2000, he saw the works of glass-artist icons such as Dale Chihuly.

"It was startling to actually realize it was something worth collecting," Goldman says. Now, a Medusa-like mass of Chihuly glass hangs in Goldman's soaring atrium, and more Chihuly glass covers a wall. In his living room, a series of "cocoon" stands near a piano. More than 100 pieces from various artists adorn the rest of the house, including a 600-pound "egg" by artist Christopher Ries.

Goldman is one of about two-dozen private Central Florida collectors who are lending pieces to OMA for its "Collector's Choice III" exhibit, on view Dec. 8-Feb. 3.

The exhibit showcases some of the best from the area's private, contemporary-art collections, from prints and glass to paintings, sculpture, and photography. It also reveals the growth of depth in local collections since a similar show in 2000, says Sue Scott, the "Collector's Choice III" curator.

Central Florida collections include some of the best-known names in contemporary art—April Cornik, Pat Steir, and Malcolm Morley, for instance—as well as the works of artists on the cusp of international discovery.

Though much of the art collected locally is certainly valuable, the pieces aren't merely investments, says Marena Grant Morrissy, OMA's executive director. "Most of the collectors I know have a personal identification with their collections. It's an expression of their own taste and pleasure, and that's really exciting."

Some art aficionados become intrigued with emerging artists, Scott adds. "They've become interested in collecting younger artists," she says, "and getting to know them as a patron."

Indeed, there's a certain satisfaction in helping a promising artisan, says Dr. Robert Feldman, a Central Florida ophthalmologist. "I'm not interested in loaning pieces by established artists ... they don't need a show at Orlando Museum of Art," he says. "But somebody starting out could really appreciate that."

Though Feldman knows the Old Masters well, he enjoys the "new creativity" of contemporary pieces—how today's artists experiment with media and flirt with new styles.

Feldman's "On Top," by New York artist Fritjof Cenger, features the legs of a mannequin dressed in jeans and sneakers and covered

with a blanket of fabric, cloth, ribbon, and rope. "This piece suggests that the pendulum has swung too far," says Feldman. "It's about the suffocating effects of feminism." Regardless of its message, "I think it's fun."

The exhibit also includes works from the collection of Sam and Eleanor Meiner, of Orlando. Their "Morningside Park," by Kristopher Benedict is a wonderful oil and enamel work. "We like it because it's just kind of wild and a little different from some of the other conservative pieces that we have," says Eleanor Meiner.

The couple's "Scenic Route Obstructed No. 10," a print by Tom McGrath, depicts an open road as seen through a windshield. "McGrath's work has a shock element that's very fascinating at the same time," Meiner says.

Education is key when enrolling a collection, Goldman notes. In fact, the trip that spurred his fascination with glass art was led by Scott in order to broaden the knowledge of the museum's Acquisition Trust members.

"Collectors at first weren't as involved in research and so forth," Morrissy says. "Now there's definitely more connoisseurship." ♦

If You Go "Collector's Choice III," Dec. 8, 2007-Feb. 3, 2008, Orlando Museum of Art, 2416 N. Mills Ave., Orlando, (407) 896-4231, www.omaart.org.