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Gallerist Agnès Monplaisir and collector Peter Price in his Park Avenue apartment, with, clockwise from above: *Coloso III*, 2002, by Manolo Valdés; (on wall) *Montana 23*, 2005, by Olga de Amaral; elm and walnut armchair, c1915, by Prazské Umelecké Dílny; pre-Columbian gold ear loops from the north of Ecuador

A media entrepreneur's eclectic art collection is moving from antique to contemporary - with the help of a Parisian gallerist, says Vivienne Becker.
Portrait by Dorothy Hung

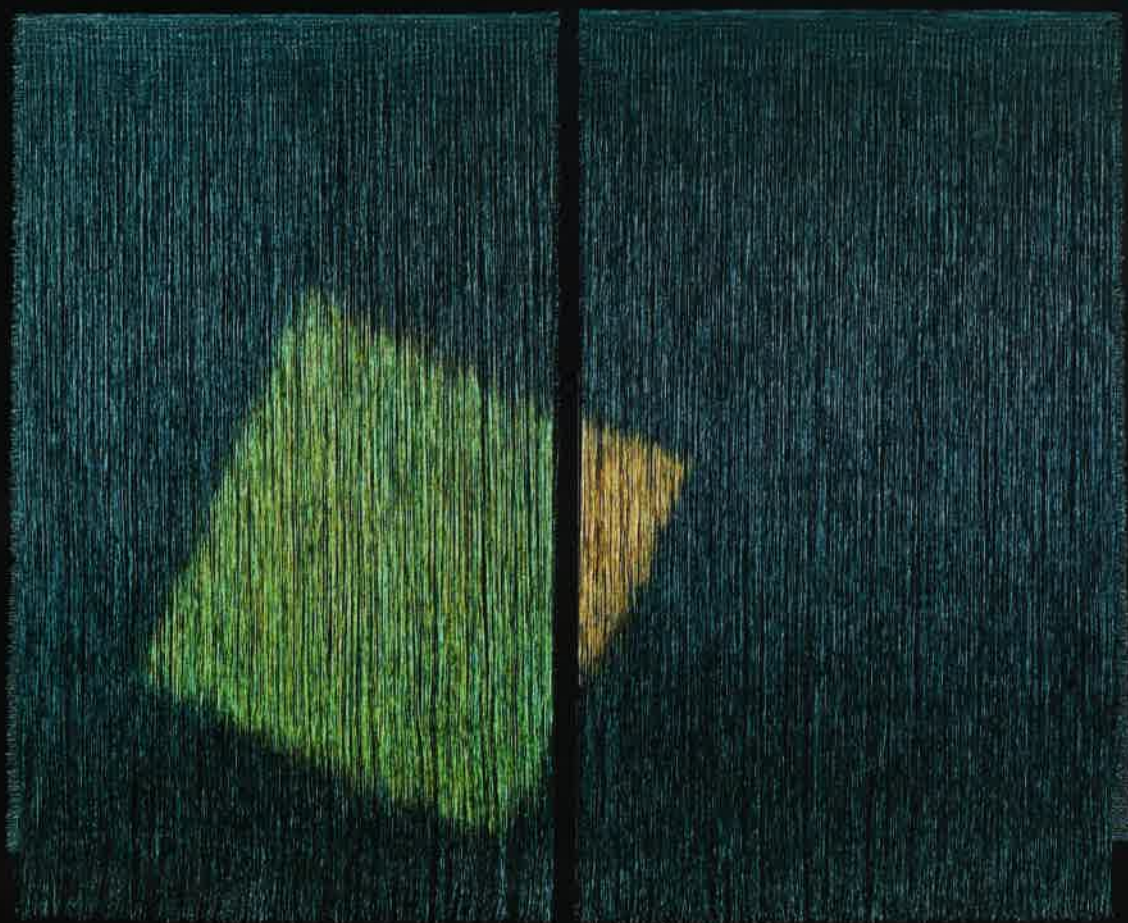
Peter Price, chairman of Premiere Previews, a Warner Brothers and *New York Times* joint venture to digitally restore classic films, doesn't think of himself as a collector in the usual sense of the word, meaning a connoisseur consumed with a particular artist, genre, medium or period. "I've always bought instinctively; what I like, what strikes me emotionally," says the entrepreneurial media executive. "I'm a dreamer."

Price started with African art, tribal objects and masks, after his honeymoon in Africa, then moved on to Asian art - for example, the Buddhist temple figure he spotted while sheltering from the Paris rain - and is now "more Latin", he says. The "connective tissue", as he

calls it, is his attraction to the mystical and powerful; the elemental and vital - and a certain haunting spirituality cuts across his eclectic collection.

He shares this non-academic, visceral response to art and objects with Parisian gallerist Agnès Monplaisir, from whom he has most recently bought a dramatic golden mixed-media wall hanging by the Colombian artist Olga de Amaral (pictured above). "Agnès has navigated me towards Latin art," says Price. She has also guided him from antique to contemporary, with a focus on sculpture in its broadest sense.

The pair met 10 years ago, when Price wandered into Monplaisir's Parisian gallery, which, at the time, sold mainly art-deco furniture and objects, mixed with contemporary art. He bought a 1932 desk by Eugene Printz, for €300,000, for his wife Judith and struck up



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her work [*Bosque I y II*, 1988, pictured left].” So smitten was Price that he went to visit the artist in her studio in Bogotá. “She’s smart and obsessive,” he says.

Price describes himself as an “inventor of businesses”, mainly media-oriented, and he has been travelling to Paris every other month for meetings to set up a new venture, with Time Warner, called Monarch, an association for young “millennial” professionals, to be launched later this year. The Prices have a home in Paris, but he decided to hang the de Amaral in their Park Avenue apartment, which has high ceilings, white walls and the volume of space needed to appreciate the work. It sits next to a sculpture, *Coloso III*, 2002, by Spanish artist Manolo Valdés (\$125,000 from Marlborough gallery, pictured on previous page), and near a pair of elm and walnut armchairs that have a primitive African flavour, but were made around 1915 in Prague (\$37,000 from Barry Friedman, pictured on previous page). The wall hanging, Price’s latest

From top: *Bosque I y II*, 1988, by Olga de Amaral, €65,000. *Sitting Bird*, *Glyfada*, 1985, bronze by Do König Vassilakis, €35,000. Both from Galerie Agnès Monplaisir

acquisition, is given pride of place a few feet away from his very first and most prized purchase: an early-20th-century African carved wood Chokwe chieftain’s staff.

Price tells how after his honeymoon, in 1968, he went to Paris in search of

African artefacts and asked the then-curator of the Musée de l’Homme, Jacqueline Delange, for advice. She directed him to Charles Raton, who was not a dealer but an independent academic expert. They talked for hours. Raton showed the young couple his private collection and, clearly appreciating Price’s enthusiasm and eye, sold him the chieftain’s staff he’d fallen in love with for \$1,000 – the sum the young newlywed had left over from his honeymoon budget. Today, it’s worth more than \$100,000.

Price’s collection numbers some 200 disparate pieces – African, Indian, Tibetan, Navajo (the Prices used to have a house in Santa Fe and spent time with the local native American tribes) – as well as vintage and contemporary photography, including two by Man Ray. He also has a steel sculpture by German-born, Italian-based artist Do König Vassilakis (bronze example of her work pictured left, €35,000), purchased from Monplaisir, that lives in his Paris apartment.

“It all hangs together beautifully,” says Monplaisir. “Peter’s collection may be eclectic, but his taste is very particular and the pieces very well chosen. He likes the human element in art.” And while Monplaisir helps to steer Price’s ventures towards contemporary art, Price insists that he continues to be guided by serendipity.

“I’m looking for nothing; there are no holes in my collection because it’s porous; it defines me as ‘not a collector’. It’s the oddest lot you’ll ever find.” ♦ Barry Friedman, 515 West 26th Street #2, New York, NY 10001 (+1212-239 8600; www.barryfriedmanltd.com). Galerie Agnès Monplaisir, 8 Rue Jacques Callot, 75006 Paris (+331-5681 8351; www.agnesmonplaisir.com). Marlborough, 40 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019 (+1212-541 4900; www.marlboroughgallery.com).

a friendship with the gallerist, admiring her style, her eye for quality and, most of all, her experimental, eclectic approach. “Most Parisian galleries specialise and dealers are usually very cool customers,” says Price. “Agnès is warm, enthusiastic and vivacious. She sparks energy.” She’s also glamorous and social, and enjoys bringing like-minded people together, so that her gallery has become a meeting place for collectors and artists; an experience. “She doesn’t sell, she inspires,” says Price.

This attitude means that she has assembled a diverse group of artists for her Saint-Germain-des-Prés Galerie Monplaisir. They include the Polish sculptor Igor Mitoraj, known for his massive renditions of classical figures, torsos and heads; the painter Hermann Albert, who works in the metaphysical style of Giorgio de Chirico; sculptors Manuela Zervudachi, Candida Romero and Do König Vassilakis, among others. Monplaisir works closely with them all and often commissions pieces especially for her gallery, urging artists to explore new territory, cross-fertilising artistic disciplines, so that sculptors such as Mitoraj, for example, create furniture (from €150,000).

She discovered Olga de Amaral through a friend, the curator of the Bogotá Biennale, who suggested Monplaisir represent the vibrant textile artist in Paris. Monplaisir (who has a house in Brazil) loved the work: the way in which de Amaral translates her cultural roots, the traditions and myths surrounding gold, the legend of El Dorado and the wild, sweeping beauty of Colombia into majestic wall hangings – and the way in which she has translated textiles into serious contemporary art. Her immense, multimedia pieces layered with subtle colour and gold leaf are distinctly jewel-like. Monplaisir felt sure that they would



provoke an immediate response in Price, fitting well with his ethnic sculptures. She was right: Price came to the opening of Galerie Monplaisir’s first exhibition of Olga de Amaral’s work last year, was bowled over and bought *Montana 23*, 2005 (\$160,000), a huge fringed square of linen, gesso, acrylic, parchment and gold. “The simplicity and power got me,” states Price. “It’s magnetic; monochrome gold, yet with multiple layers and textures, and glints of red. I’m thinking about acquiring more of