

Sarah Greenberg talks to the Duke of Devonshire and Frank Cohen about their artistic collaboration, as Chatsworth prepares to show Frank and Cherryl Cohen's collection, while installing Caro sculptures in the garden and launching a new drawing gallery

A tale of two collectors



Chatsworth belongs to a group of stately homes known as the Treasure Houses of England and, true to that name, it houses artistic gems of every description from every age. In the past few years the Duke of Devonshire has been restoring this historic palace in the Peak District in order to show more of its collections to the public and create new gallery space for special temporary exhibitions. This spring and summer a trio of shows, indoors and out, promises to surprise and delight audiences, with art ranging from paintings by Edward Burra (above left) and Stanley Spencer (above right), to a survey of sculptures by Anthony Caro RA (top) and a precious Leonardo drawing (opposite left).

THE FRANK AND CHERRYL COHEN COLLECTION OF MODERN BRITISH ART

'I first met Frank at a dinner we were hosting for Château Pétrus,' explains the Duke of Devonshire. 'We started talking about Edward Burra and I said that I had some of his watercolours, and he insisted on going to look at them. I quickly discovered that Frank was knowledgeable about, and fascinated and excited by, modern British painters. That was a bond because this art is more interesting to me than his main collecting field of contemporary art. So I got to know him well over a period of time.

'Then he kindly invited me to his house to see his private collection,' the Duke continues

enthusiastically. 'Over a nice pub lunch I asked if he might ever think of putting his modern British picture collection in our new gallery so people in the North of England could see it. I'm pleased he said yes. This is the first loan exhibition that we have done – it's entirely selected by Frank and Cherryl with the curator Robert Upstone.'

Cohen likes to joke that the show of his collection could be called 'From Cheetham Hill to Chatsworth' in reference to the working-class Jewish immigrant neighbourhood in Manchester where he grew up and worked as a market trader before making his fortune by founding a chain of DIY stores. 'I grew up in a very ethnic area – not



Far left *Striptease, Harlem, c.1934*, by Edward Burra
Above *Cliff Song, 1976*, by Anthony Caro RA, installed at Chatsworth
Left *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta: Conversation between Punts, 1955*, by Stanley Spencer

Courtesy of the Frank and Cherryl Cohen Collection. © Barford Sculptures Ltd, courtesy Chatsworth and the New Art Centre, Roche Court Sculpture Park. Courtesy of the Frank and Cherryl Cohen Collection



Far left *Leda and the Swan, 1503-04*, by Leonardo da Vinci
Left *Seated Woman Reading with Child, c.1512-14*, by Raphael

many people from my background ever collected art. My pal, the writer Howard Jacobson, grew up there with me and writes about what it was like in the exhibition catalogue.'

Although Cohen is now known as the 'Saatchi of the North' for his vast collection of contemporary art housed in a warehouse gallery in Wolverhampton, his first love was modern British art. He discovered it when he met his wife-to-be, Cherryl Garson, whose father Jack was a Manchester art dealer and introduced him to the work of Lowry. 'He used to sell me signed limited-edition Lowry prints for about 15 quid and every time I picked up Cherryl I bought another one. He must have thought, "I've got a real schmuck here to sell all these prints to!"

'I got to the point where I didn't want any more and realized I could actually buy a painting. It was a postcard-size Lowry, *The Family* (1961) that I bought for £1,100. And it went from there. I became interested in Edward Burra and William Roberts, then I started buying Elizabeth Frink and looked at artists such as Armitage and Paolozzi. I just went mad, looking. And whenever I had any money, I would buy these things.

'It was the early 1970s and there was no contemporary British art market then. So if I liked art, it made sense for me to collect modern British – European art was too expensive. At that time museums in England often showed modern British work so you could train your eye.'

Did the earthiness and humour of modern British art appeal to him, given his experience working in markets? 'I'm very interested in figurative art. Lowry painted people on the street, industrial scenes, I know all of the places that he painted, all the mills, the railway stations, the churches – I recognized them because it was the North. I also looked at Burra very early on – I thought he was wonderful.

There was a connection with people in his art – he painted market stalls, he went into all sorts of seedy clubs at night. What I liked about him was that he was never part of a school, like the London School or the Camden Town School, he was an individual. And William Roberts – I didn't even realize he did all this work. They were all in private collections and people never sold them. Finally, I bought one off Anthony d'Offay in the mid-1970s.'

William Roberts' *Masks* (1932) is one of the Duke's favourite pieces in the Cohen collection, and he is looking forward to seeing it on his walls and bringing new audiences to Chatsworth to view this work. 'I think people will be impressed by what Frank and Cherryl have put together over a fairly short time,' says the Duke. 'You could put their pictures in any room and they would give enormous pleasure every time you walked through the door. That's really the point of collecting, to have things that you find beautiful – they may be paintings, sculpture, all sorts of things, which reassure and please you. Like the collection at Chatsworth, this show is not academic – it's stuff that people have bumped into and liked.'

ANTHONY CARO RA IN THE GARDEN

Speaking of bumping into things, 15 monumental sculptures by Sir Anthony Caro RA will be growing in the garden this spring as part of the artist's 88th birthday celebrations (see interview with Caro, page 87). This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the large-scale work of one of Britain's greatest living sculptors in an historic setting. 'We've never had a one-man show in the garden and we couldn't be more lucky than to start with Caro because he has been so influential for 50 years or so,' says the Duke. All the sculptures, spanning the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, have been lent by

the artist. 'Caro is curating the show with Stephen Feeke of the New Art Centre at Roche Court. This has all come about thanks to Madeleine Bessborough, who runs Roche Court – she proposed the idea to us and to Caro. I can't get over our good fortune, because for him to want to bring his works here is a great compliment to Chatsworth.'

A NEW OLD MASTER DRAWINGS GALLERY

The Chatsworth collection of Old Master drawings is legendary and ranks with the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle as the finest privately owned drawing collection in Britain. Yet until now, it has been largely invisible. 'About three years ago we had a group of scholars here,' said the Duke, 'and one of them said, "I believe you have a collection of Old Master drawings which is quite well known but you don't share it with anyone". It reminded me of how wrong it was that we didn't have anywhere to show them, so we have restored one of the rooms to its seventeenth-century origins – it will be a little jewel-box gallery where we will display about 12-20 drawings at a time.'

This new space opens in July with a small group of world-class drawings by Leonardo and Raphael (above), Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyck and others, with exhibitions changing at least twice yearly: 'To start with, we'll show the Old Masters but then I hope we can show contemporary works on paper along with some older works, perhaps link a drawing show to another exhibition in the house, or possibly ask an artist to curate a show. We've got a lot of ideas.'

Frank and Cherryl Cohen at Chatsworth
Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, 01246 565300,
www.chatsworth.org, 19 March–10 June
Caro at Chatsworth 28 March–1 July **Old Master Drawings Closet** opens in July