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His support of the arts at Harvard began in 1939, when he anonymously pledged \$6,000 for a fellowship program so that students could pursue modern art studies abroad. In 1958 he anonymously established a fund for the acquisition of modern art, which enabled the museum to buy a drawing by Piet Mondrian and a drip painting by Jackson Pollock. He also endowed a professorship in modern art that was activated with the appointment of Yve-Alain Bois in 1991.

Joseph Pulitzer was on the university's Board of Overseers from 1976 to 1982 and spent almost forty years—often in leadership roles—on the Art Museum's Visiting Committee and on various museum task forces.

Joe Pulitzer's Passion

Joe Pulitzer, heir to his grandfather's newspaper empire and fortune, was a handsome, charming, sometimes indifferent student when he arrived in Harvard Yard in 1932.

"The only good marks he got were in creative writing," Marjorie B. Cohn said in an interview. Cohn is writing a biography of Pulitzer as collector.

"But Joe discovered art and he loved the Fine Arts Department," she continued. "His grades went up. He wrote an honors thesis on Picasso that I suspect was the first one on a living artist."

The Fogg Museum had opened at the Quincy Street site in 1927, and Pulitzer spent a lot of time there, studying with associate director Paul J. Sachs. During his senior year, Pulitzer became enchanted with Modigliani's *Elvira Resting at a Table* in a gallery in New York, and he took a photo of it to Sachs. "Sachs said, 'Buy it if you can afford it,'" according to Cohn, who is the Art Museum's Carl A. Weyerhaeuser Curator of Prints Emerita. "Joe's serious collecting began with that purchase, which he installed in his room at Eliot House."

Buying Picasso

After graduating in 1936, Pulitzer went to Europe. That July he bought a 1918 cubist painting by Picasso that had recently been part of a comprehensive exhibition of the artist's works at the Zwemmer Gallery in London. The canvas, called *Harlequin*, had not sold, as Picasso's newly conservative style was then in favor. Pulitzer decided to buy it after encouragement from his good Harvard friend Henry McIlhenny (AB '33).

"It was an exceptional purchase at the time," said Cohn. "Picasso's cubist style was much too modern for the public, but it wasn't for Joe, though he may have flinched at the price."

When the painting was shown the next year in Philadelphia, Cohn writes in the biography, McIlhenny sent him a note: "Your Picasso is being



Pablo Picasso, *Harlequin*, 1918. Oil on canvas. © 2008 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York. Photo: Bob Kolbrenner.

enormously admired and it makes me furious every time I see it. If I hadn't been so persuasive in London you might never have bought it and I really want it very much myself."

Harlequin is now coming to Harvard as part of the collection donated this year by Emily Pulitzer, Joe's second wife and widow. "Joe never made any bones about the fact that his collection was destined for the institution [Harvard] and the city [St. Louis] that meant the most to him," Cohn said. "He was eternally grateful to Harvard and extremely loyal to St. Louis."

"Most courageous purchase"

In 1939, on honeymoon in Switzerland with his first wife, Louise Vauclain (who died in 1968), Pulitzer bought at auction one of the greatest works of the twentieth century: Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle*. In a 1988 article, *New York Times* critic John Russell called it "quite possibly the most courageous purchase ever made by an American collector only three years out of college."

Russell noted that it had taken "moral courage and ferocious discrimination" for a young man to buy a painting "that can still disconcert a lay observer." Pulitzer later gave the painting to the Saint Louis Art Museum, where he was a director and where Emily Rauh had been curator prior to their marriage in 1973.

As he aged, Pulitzer retained his passion for contemporary art; he never got stuck in a period. Even late in life, "he was still moving with the contemporary scene," Cohn said. He and Emily (Emmy) were good friends with the artists Ellsworth Kelly and Mark Di Suvero; they commissioned works from Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and Dan Flavin.

Changing lives

"He never thought about withdrawing or contracting," Cohn said. "He was never a collector who sat there and said, 'I remember when I bought Picassos for \$5,000.' Now he'd be paying eight figures for them. He did what he had to if he felt it was a picture he had to have. . . . The kind of art Joe bought was usually a major statement by the artist."

And once he bought something, he either kept it or donated it to a museum. "He felt that his time at Harvard had changed his life," said Cohn, "so making the kinds of donations that he and Emmy have made was simply a way of passing it along so that it can change other lives."

"Joe was always explicit about this," Cohn added. "He felt his experience at Harvard under professors like Paul Sachs, who taught from works of art, was tremendously important to his development as an art lover and as a man."

Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., undated photo. Harvard Art Museum Archives, Visual Resources Collection.

