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## Le Carnet de France: Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, Part II

By Martine P. Dulles

In January, I wrote about the history of the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud located in the Loire Valley between Tours and Saumur. Now, I would like to tell you about the newest development there: a unique museum of modern art inside the *abbaye* complex.

As you enter the abbaye premises, on your left is a building named the “Fannerie” that dates from 1786. The nuns used it as a stable, a place to store hay and a bakery. After the French Revolution, with the departure of the nuns and the monks, the abbaye was converted into a prison by Napoléon. The Fannerie building remained unused for almost 100 years until the beginning of the 21st century.

In 2018, Léon and Martine Cligman, avid collectors of art, gave 566 works to the French state, and the following year, they gave an additional 252 pieces to the region of the Pays de la Loire. It was then decided to restore the Fannerie to create the Musée d’Art Moderne de Fontevraud, where parts of their collection would be displayed and where temporary exhibits would be organized.

Who are Mr. and Mrs. Cligman? Léon Cligman was born in 1920 in Bender, Moldavia (the city was then called Tighina, at that time part of Romania). Eight years later, he and his family had to flee and came to France. In 1939 his father, Serge, created a textile factory in the Loire region, which Léon joined after the war. It grew into one of the most successful businesses of France, distributing products of major clothing companies such as Lacoste, New Man and Saint Laurent Rive Gauche. At one point, the group was named Indreco, and it had more than 40,000 employees.

In 1954, Léon married Martine Lévy, born in Troyes in 1932. She was the daughter of Pierre and Denise Lévy. Denise was the daughter of a textile manufacturer. Pierre started his professional career working for his father-in-law and ended up creating the largest textile factory in Troyes. Pierre and Denise Lévy were great art collectors, gathering more than 2000 works of art, which they gave to the city of Troyes. In 1982, President François Mitterrand inaugurated the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Troyes, and today it is one of the major provincial museums in France.

Léon and Martine started collecting

in 1960. She studied art at the Académie Julian in Paris and is now known as a painter and a sculptor (many of her works of art are in the *musée* in Fontevraud) under the name Martine Martine.

On September 18, 2021, the Musée d’Art Moderne de Fontevraud was inaugurated by the prime minister of France, Jean Castex, and the minister of culture, Roselyne Bachelot, in the presence of Léon and Martine Cligman and their family and many guests (including this writer). Léon Cligman remarked, “I find it normal to give back to France a little of what the country gave me.”

The scenography of the museum is excellent, the objects are well presented and the showcases well lit. Most of the art works are not huge in size. The selection covers a wide range of interests from different countries and different eras. There are many antique pieces of art from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Most paintings and drawings are from the 19th- and 20th-century by artists such as Robert Delaunay, Maurice Denis, André Derain, Albert Marquet, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and many others not as well-known. The museum displays a big canvas by Bernard Buffet: “View of Manhattan.” A large place is given to sculptors — antiques as well as more modern ones from Edgar Degas, Auguste Rodin and others. One of the most prominent is Germaine Richier’s last piece of art dated 1959 and entitled “*L’Échiquier, grand (le Roi, la Reine, le Cavalier, le Fou, la Tour)*.” It is made of bronze.

Growing up, Martine Lévy could admire in her home Rodin’s sculpture of “Balzac,” which her parents owned. It is not surprising that living in such an environment one would be interested in studying and collecting art. The painter



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Glass from Maurice Marinot (1882-1960) in the Musée d’Art Moderne de Fontevraud.

Maurice Marinot (1882-1960), born in Troyes and a friend of her parents, taught her how to draw. In 1911, the painter became fascinated by glass. He developed new techniques and created most beautiful vases, flasks and bowls. *Le musée* displays many of those magnificent pieces which they call *Flacons magiques* (magical bottles).

As is obvious, the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud has a lot to offer and is definitely worth a detour and a good visit.

*Martine P. Dulles lives in France. Martine was a docent at the MET in New York and later a licensed tour guide in Charleston for many years. She now organizes bespoke tours in France and is a translator for cultural material. You can reach her at [mpd@dullesdeleu.com](mailto:mpd@dullesdeleu.com).*