

Herb & Dorothy

A film by Megumi Sasaki

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One Film Can

Heartland Truly Moving Pictures, a non-profit organization, recognizes and honors filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life. We believe that one film can move us to laughter, to tears, or to make a difference. *Herb & Dorothy* is a film that demonstrates that **One Film Can**.

Synopsis

Herb & Dorothy tells the extraordinary story of Herbert Vogel, a postal clerk, and Dorothy Vogel, a librarian, who managed to build one of the most important contemporary art collections in history with very modest means. In the early 1960s, when very little attention was paid to Minimalist and Conceptual Art, Herb and Dorothy Vogel quietly began purchasing the works of unknown artists. Devoting all of Herb's salary to purchase art they liked, and living on Dorothy's paycheck alone, they continued collecting artworks guided by two rules: the piece had to be affordable, and it had to be small enough to fit in their one-bedroom Manhattan apartment. Within these limitations, they proved themselves curatorial visionaries; most of those they supported and befriended went on to become world-renowned artists including Sol LeWitt, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Richard Tuttle, Chuck Close, Robert Mangold, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Lynda Benglis, Pat Steir, Robert Barry, Lucio Pozzi, and Lawrence Weiner.

After thirty years of meticulous collecting and buying, the Vogels managed to accumulate over 2,000 pieces, filling every corner of their tiny one bedroom apartment. "Not even a toothpick could be squeezed into the apartment," recalls Dorothy. In 1992, the Vogels decided to move their entire collection to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The vast majority of their collection was given as a gift to the institution. Many of the works they acquired appreciated so significantly over the years that their collection today is worth millions of dollars. Still, the Vogels never sold a single piece. Today Herb and Dorothy still live in the same apartment in New York with 19 turtles, lots of fish, and one cat. They've refilled it with piles of new art they've acquired.

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Art

Herb and Dorothy Vogel's art collection was made up of Minimalist and Conceptual pieces. Both art movements began in the 1950s, though earlier examples can be found. Both of these art movements were emerging as Herb and Dorothy began collecting, and because of this, their collection reflects the growth and expansion of these movements as well as the individual artist's growth.

Due to the relative recency of these art movements, you might have a lot to learn about them and the artists who helped define them. Use the section below to help further explore Conceptual and Minimalist art.

Discussion Points

- A Minimalist modular piece from Sol Lewitt set the stage for the Vogel collection. Later, the Vogel collection took on conceptual works as well. Take a look at each of the artists interviewed in the film to learn more about what each has contributed to culture and art.

Sol Lewitt, Donald Judd, Lucio Pozzi, Robert Mangold, Sylvia Plickitt Mangold, Pat Steir, Chuck Close, Lynda Benglis, James Sienna, Susana Singer, Will Barnett, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry

- Artist James Sienna states in the film that he appreciates the Vogel's appreciation of his overall body of work. That the Vogels are able to view each of Sienna's pieces as part of his progress is a remarkable thing to him, as an artist. Taking this into consideration, is there an artist you admire? If so, have you looked at his or her body of work as a whole and studied how it changed over a period of time? Did the overall study of the artists collection change your appreciation the artist?
- Mangold states that the "art world was their habitat." The Vogels lived in the arts culture of New York very completely, attending gallery shows, befriending artists and always staying informed. Can you think of other examples of individuals who helped cultivate art in the way the Vogels did, whether it be performing or visual art, literature or music? In what ways did these individuals impact art? Did they do this on a community level or on a level that impacted the entire arts movement? How?
- The way Herb and Dorothy collected art became as much an artform as the art they were collecting. How does the way they built their collection fit into the definition of Minimalist or Conceptual theory?
- Art collecting is something that people typically associate with wealth. Herb and Dorothy were not a wealthy couple, but still managed to build one of the largest collections of Modern Art throughout their life together. They did this by living a frugal life, but also by befriending several of the artists whose works they collected. Consider art and wealth. Did this movie change your perspective on what one means to the other? Did it change the value of art for you in any way?

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Appreciation

Early in the film, Herb says, “Beauty is enjoyable.” What is demonstrated in the movie is that what we find beautiful is subjective and changes from one person to the next. Even Dorothy says, “Beauty is different from person to person.”

With art, subjectivity is a very integral part of appreciating it. Nearly every person who sees a piece of art will appreciate it in a different way. Use the discussion points below to consider art, beauty and appreciation.

Discussion Points

- In the film, it is said that the Vogels chose to pursue a very hard-to-like type of art. What do you think of their passion for and appreciation of this particular artwork?
- Herb makes a comment about appreciating the art he was collecting, but not understanding it. How do you believe his collection ultimately helped him to understand the art?
- Part of Herb’s appreciation of the art he and Dorothy collected was that he liked the idea of something new, something that hadn’t been there before. Have you ever discovered something new? Do you get a different satisfaction from enjoying something that someone else has introduced you to or something you have found on your own? Why do you think this is the case?
- The Vogels not only appreciated the artists’ final product, but also saw value in the artists’ progress. How was this represented in the method of their collecting?
- Herb and Dorothy curated their art collection together throughout their marriage. In the film, Herb says, “I honestly do not think I could have built the collection without Dorothy.” How do you feel this movie explores not only their appreciation of art, but of people, particularly one another.
- Herb and Dorothy’s full appreciation of the art and artists who created it causes artist Richard Tuttle to state in the film that “Most of us go through the world with never seeing anything.” How do you feel about Tuttle’s statement? Are there things you feel you have overlooked — gone through life without seeing? What are they? What do you want to begin seeing in the world?
- The Vogels have been referred to as friend collectors, not traditional art collectors. How is this demonstrated throughout the movie? Have the Vogels inspired you to go about anything in your life differently in order to better appreciate it?

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Take Action

As made evident in the film, Herb and Dorothy were very passionate about collecting art, so much that art collecting was an integral part of their life together. The collection they built outlines the growth and development of hundreds of artists, some who had tremendous impact on Conceptual Art and Minimalism, and others who weren't as well known. The collection also outlines Herb and Dorothy's life together and their relationship.

Art, in all shapes and forms, can have a tremendous impact on a person's life and it is important to make sure that people who don't have access to the arts be exposed and benefit from them. Using the discussion points below, think about how arts have an impact in your life and how you can bring the arts to others.

Discussion Points

- In the film, it is said that the Vogels had the same level of passion for art that artists have for it. Did this make you consider the things for which you have passion? What are they? Why? What can you introduce others to this subject?
- Take time to introduce someone to art at any age. What can you teach someone about art? What can you learn from someone about art?
 - Experiment with art genres and forms. What fits you best?
 - Mentor and take youth to a museum or gallery and be an active part of an arts culture in your community.
- In *Herb & Dorothy*, Dorothy says, "I think the collection was built on the generosity of artists." Because the Vogel's collection was built on the generosity of artists, the Vogels have returned the generosity by donating their collection to the National Gallery of Art. Together, the National Gallery of Art and the Vogels are launching a national gift program, **The Herb and Dorothy Vogel Collection: 50 Works for 50 States**. Be sure to visit the National Gallery website to find a location near you where you can view a selection of the Vogel's collection.

Learn more: www.vogel50x50.org

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Moving Moments

Herb & Dorothy has been honored as a Heartland Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. This award was created to honor films released theatrically that align with Heartland's mission to recognize and honor filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by artistically expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life.

These award-winning movies are made up of moving and inspiring moments — those moments that cause you to think, see something in your life differently, be inspired to do something. It's what makes the movie and its message remain with you well after you've left the theater.

Think about *Herb & Dorothy*. What were the moments that stood out to you? How did they make you feel? How will they cause you to think about things differently in the future? Share those moving moments with others at TrulyMovingPictures.org. Simply login, or create an account if you don't already have one, and search the movie list for *Herb & Dorothy*. You can leave your review or comments about this film under the "Review" section.



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