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William Jamieson

By Wilbur Norman and Michel Grandsard

The tribal art world lost one of its endearing originals this last July 3 with the passing of William Jamieson, on his fifty-seventh birthday. Though he may be remembered as an engaging and enthusiastic collector of shrunken heads and other oddities, Bill was a serious art dealer, at times obtaining record prices for his objects.

Never one to shy away from publicity, he was in the process of completing the first season of a new series for television's History Channel.

In an example of the business acumen that made him successful, Jamieson bought the Niagara Falls Museum in 1999. Among its riches were nine Egyptian mummies that he sold to Emory University's Michael C. Carlos Museum, one of which turned out to be that of Pharaoh Rameses I. It was eventually repatriated to Egypt with a PBS TV special covering the whole story. The balance of the museum's contents ended up in his 800-square-meter loft in downtown Toronto—a huge display of tribal artifacts, war clubs, shields, stuffed animals, natural history, oddities, and much more that he made available to everyone from Hells Angels to members of the police department and the rest of his eclectic circle of friends.

This deal turned him from a building contractor and private collector into one of the most important and surely the most colorful dealers in

the tribal art world. Although he was a serious businessman, he was, above all, a collector of emotions who was thrilled by finding treasures, and his incredible and sometimes hilarious stories about the latest relics he had hunted down were always beyond imaging.

In one of his many interviews, Bill is described as a “modern-day treasure hunter, an ancient and tribal arts collector and dealer ... part P. T. Barnum, part Indiana Jones ... with a rock and roll sensibility.” Since 1997 he had been a member (and vice chairman) of the Canadian chapter of the New York Explorers Club, based in large part on his interest in and travels to the Amazon (five times between 1995 and 2001) focusing on the Jivaro's Shuar people. Nowhere was the diversity of his interests more in evidence than at his legendary Halloween parties, which immediately followed the club's annual meeting, both held in his Toronto home.

Bill was a remarkably enthusiastic, energetic, and non-judgmental individual. His companionship was always a source of enchantment, whether being by his side on his fiftieth birthday as he was busy selling a whale skeleton over the phone to an Arabian sheikh (who was going to put it above his aquarium of living sharks) or riding with him on a train from Antwerp to Paris with a large metal box containing an Egyptian mummy. Our condolences go out to his fiancée Jessica Phillips, his mother Barbara Halligan, his sister Wendy, and his son Jordan.

As a final coda, Billy would give a long, hearty laugh to know that the office of the Chief Coroner of the City of Toronto telephoned the studio of artist Mark Prent to determine if the white box they had found in Billy's loft contained a “real body.” In fact, it is actually a 1972 Prent sculpture made of polyester resin and fiberglass. As the Prents write, we “are confident that Billy would have approved.”

Norman Hurst

By Jacques Germain

Located in the heart of the Harvard University campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Hurst Gallery has long been a visible landmark within a stimulating academic world whose reputation is firmly rooted in cultural institutions such as the venerable Peabody, Fogg, and Arthur Sackler Museums.

Born in 1944, Norman Hurst was to embark on a lifelong study of the traditional arts of China, Japan, India, the Greco-Roman world, Egyptian antiquity, and the Middle East. He was able to integrate the tribal art heritages of the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, and Oceania into this inclusive vision. In addition to running his retail gallery for more than thirty years, Norman was a respected appraiser and art consultant who aided innumerable museums, historical societies, and individual collectors. When he was abroad, he never missed an opportunity to visit a mu-

seum or institution that was off the beaten path, or an archaeological site that he had not yet had occasion to explore.

I often spent time with this affable man over the course of my visits to Boston and I admired him as a dealer who was cautious about his assertions, especially with respect to the age of objects. Over the course of his career, his ongoing research allowed him to present a series of interesting and original thematic exhibitions, each accompanied by an informative and well-researched catalog.

A true gentleman, Norman left us on July 27 after a long battle with illness. New England and the world at large has lost an art dealer recognized and appreciated for his eclectic approach. As for myself, I have lost a friend and a colleague, but cherish fond memories of our times together.

Until we meet again, Norman.

