

In the eye of the beholder
The Raphy Star Collection





*I dedicate this publication to my children Arik and Yael
and my grandchildren Matthew, Allegra, Lochie, Ethan and Ava*

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Raphy Star

I believe we are drawn to certain works of art in a way that transcends aesthetics alone. In the moments of intimacy between the collector and the art, an appreciation of the role these objects play in a particular culture is also relevant. Asian art, particularly Asian ceramics, captured my interest over forty years ago and still holds a place in my heart. My collection can attest to the respect I have felt for their materiality but most importantly it reflects my interest in the many cultures to which they belong.

In 2022, I was fortunate enough to have a part of my Japanese ceramic collection exhibited at the Art Gallery of South Australia, in the exhibition *Pure form*, for which I would like to thank Russell Kelyt. While friends and family were aware of my interests in this area, I did not anticipate such an enthusiastic response from the public who viewed the exhibition to what I considered an expression of my passions. The exhibition itself prompted many people to enquire about other acquisitions I had made. And thus was born my desire to document the remainder of my collection. These pages encompass a comprehensive listing of the pieces I have obtained over the years and are witness to my all-consuming pursuit of beauty. The text has been kept to a minimum since I did not want this publication to be an academic document; the emphasis lies on the pieces themselves. I hope that readers can appreciate the works as they are displayed and experience some of the joy they have imparted to me. For those who require further information, details about individual works are located in the back pages of the book.

I began my collection in the mid-1970s, starting with Japanese lacquer, which I still consider to be one of the most beautiful of all artforms. Later in my collecting life, I moved on to Buddhist sculpture, which I found to be peaceful, serene and beautiful. I acquired Song Dynasty ceramics and Chinese Scholar's objects, and more recently began accumulating contemporary Japanese ceramics. For around the last 100 years, Japan has been pioneering one of the most innovative ceramic cultures in the world. It has been a pleasure to explore this culture through its art over the decades.

Over these years, my business interests have taken me to all corners of the globe and also enabled me to experience the art of the many places I visited. On these travels I was to meet prominent dealers, who provided me an insight into a rich and valuable world, sometimes beyond my purse but occasionally the source of true treasures.

Collecting is not only concerned with the objects, but also encompasses the places you visit, the people you meet and the stories you hear. Each piece carries with it a history rich and complex. I believe ceramics express the work of the soul: although at first glance the pieces can be defined as simply 'beautiful', in most cases they are also innately felt. This state of affectedness varies from person to person and is subject to interpretation. However, the profound affect art has on the individual spirit cannot be disputed. I have indulged in the aesthetics, appreciated the detail and form of each piece, and come to recognise that my time with them is merely borrowed.



The collection in Raphy's home



left to right: Mark Wolcott, Koichi Hara, Raphy Star and Ed Lewis



Raphy Star and Beatrice Chang in Adelaide 2022

With this exploration came connection, my interests shared amongst other collectors. Over the years I have made wonderful lifelong friends, some of whom have influenced and shaped my own practice.

My late friend Ed Lewis and his wife Julie immediately come to mind. They lived in Chicago and although they were doctors by profession they were amongst the foremost collectors of Japanese art in America, with an emphasis on collecting lacquer. Ed was somewhat of a soulmate to me and while we couldn't be any more different, our tastes were similar. We shared a passion, and together we wandered the world accumulating 'toys'. These are memories I will hold forever.

Koichi Hara, together with his partner Mark Wolcott, and their gallery, Japonesque, in San Francisco, have been inspirational. Koichi, a friend with strong opinions and taste, has had an enormous influence on me. We have enjoyed collecting pieces together and, most importantly, had a great deal of fun doing so. Purchases from his gallery have not only enriched my collection but broadened my understanding of art. He has been both the source and the influence that has enabled many of the works to enter my collection.

Beatrice Chang of Dai Ichi Gallery in New York is another dealer whose sourcing and provision of Japanese ceramics has been exemplary. She too remains a great friend.

Many of my Australian acquisitions were assisted by Lesley Kehoe and the late Ray Tregaskis and I appreciate their professionalism, dedication and courage for working in a country where the market is so challenging.

Danny McOwan has helped me a great deal in putting this book together and I appreciate his knowledge and dedication. Likewise, Russell Kelty, Curator of Asian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia, has been an invaluable friend and has pointed the way towards some truly avant-garde pieces for my collection. Finally, Antonietta Itropico has brought her genius into play with the design and production of this book. Without her skilful input, I would have ended up with a far less impressive record of my collection. Her expertise has been complemented by Grant Hancock, whose photographs enhance this publication.



left to right: Koichi Hara, Raphy Star, and Ed Lewis



A cabinet in Raphy's spare room

Many other dealers and collectors have contributed to my personal collection and it is impossible to name them all, but I'm sure they know who they are and that I appreciate their contribution.

Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge my family. If this book demonstrates my passion and dedication to Asian art to my children and grandchildren, then I will feel a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. I earnestly hope that they in turn will admire and appreciate my efforts. I trust that this book – an expression of my enduring interests – will serve as a memento, one that encapsulates my perpetual pursuit of beauty, a journey that has given me so much joy over the years. I hope that some of that joy also inspires and enriches them.

I have wished to immortalise my passions through these pages, recognising that my legacy will ultimately reside in the exquisite beauty of the works I have accumulated. But they are not mine to keep, merely a moment to enjoy. One day my life's collection will no longer be mine and will find itself in the hands of other devoted collectors. Art can never be owned; we are but its lifetime custodians.

My wish is to share with the world the art that has consumed me for the last few decades in the hope that others will find some personal and meaningful connection to the pieces. After all, beauty lies in the eye of the beholder.