

Galila Barzilai-Hollander at Galila's POC, her new contemporary art space housed in a 1950s industrial building in Brussels, sitting atop *Expanding Adulthood to Children*, by Danish artist Peter Holst Henckel



# HIGH LIVING

A born again Brussels-based collector thinks big for her new gallery space

Galila Barzilai-Hollander never entertains at home anymore, though not for lack of desire. 'People think I'm asocial,' she says. 'But my house is a storage facility - I have crates in the middle of every room.' A self-described 'artcoholic', she started collecting contemporary art at the age of 56, and has amassed works by more than 1,500 artists in less than 15 years. She may have more room for guests once her new 1,400 sq m exhibition space, Galila's POC (Passion Obsession Collection), opens in Brussels this autumn.

Galila (she likes to be referred to by her first name) was born in Tel Aviv to a family with no real interest in art or culture. At 20, she visited Brussels and stayed,»



Left, architect Bruno Corbier added a skylight to create an airy, open exhibition area. The two levels are connected by a stainless steel staircase designed by Xavier Lust, while Shivani Aggarwal's giant hammer sculpture, *Meant to be Bent?*, lies in the foreground. Below, *LC4 Le Corbusier*, paravent *LC4 en 3 panneaux*, by French artist Jean Denat

misappropriation and obsession. What unites the works in the collection is a sense of humour and playfulness. Some are by major artists, such as Louise Nevelson, but the majority are by young and emerging ones. She has no advisors, preferring to listen to her gut instinct and make purchases on the spot. 'I don't want to follow others,' she says. 'I'm not looking for security, I'm looking for adventure.'

Her instincts have paid off – artists such as Leandro Erlich or Joël Andrianomearisoa (representing Madagascar this year at the Venice Biennale) have soared in value since she bought their works. In 2016, she won an 'A' Award for Collecting from Spain's ARCO Foundation, which recognises the artistic value of a collection and its owner's efforts to disseminate contemporary art. When she received it, she made a speech explaining how she became a collector. Afterwards, she recalls, several women came up to her, all widows. 'They said, "You gave us a message of hope that there's a second life"'

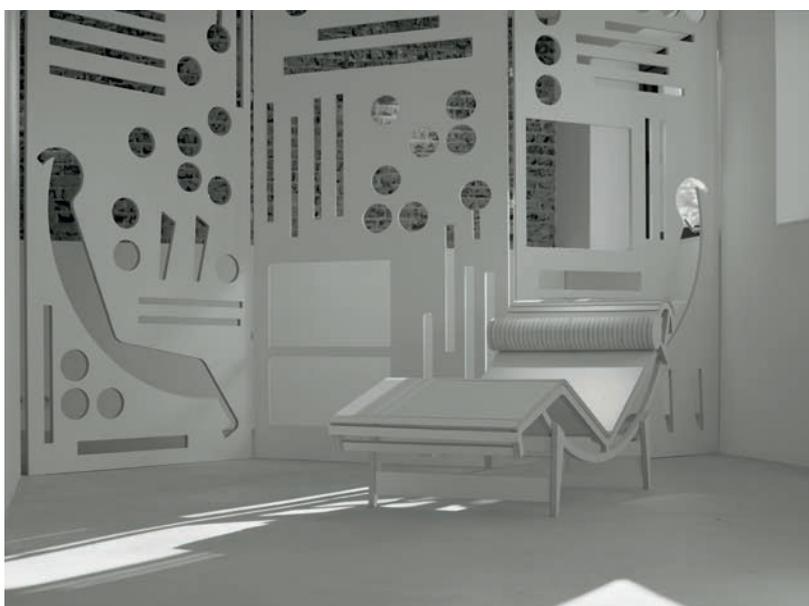
To support her art-buying habit, Galila still runs her real estate company and, 12 years ago, she bought a disused industrial building on Brussels' Avenue Van Volxem. She figured it would rise in value over time and she could resell it, especially since the brewery down the street was being transformed into the Wiels contemporary art centre.

For nearly a decade she let a curators' collective use it for studios, but as her own collection expanded she realised she needed the space. She had met the >>

meeting her future husband, Jacques Hollander, while apprenticing at his headhunting firm. Together they built up a real estate company dealing in corporate and investment properties, including two hotels in Brussels. Hollander was a respected and impassioned collector of antiques and his wife adapted her tastes to his. According to Galila, he was 'completely allergic' to contemporary art, and she was unfamiliar with it.

In 2004, Hollander died. The following year, Galila took a trip to New York where, she says, 'you are never alone'. While walking the streets, she noticed a sign for the Armory Show and went in, expecting to find armour. Within 15 minutes, she'd bought her first contemporary piece, an ink on paper work by San Francisco artist Tom Fowler featuring the word 'WHY?' written 11,522 times. It's still the first thing she sees on the wall outside her bedroom in the morning.

These days, Galila is constantly on the go, travelling the world to art fairs, never leaving without acquiring at least one work. Her collection spans all mediums, and is divided into themes, including eyes, money, chairs and books, and concepts, such as ready-made,





Clockwise from top left, a variation of Tejo Remy's 'Rag' chair, made from Galila's wedding dress, alongside clothes that she gave up after she started only wearing Issey Miyake two decades ago; *For Galila after la Femme au Chapeaux*, a variation on Belgian designer Maarten De Ceulaer's Suitcase series; *Table Destabilisation No.1*, by French abstract artist François Morellet

## 'Artwork gave me a new family when my husband passed away. It opened my mind to the world'

architect Bruno Corbisier at a party and now asked him to create a building that was practical and sober to offset her lively, colourful works.

The architect tore down everything but two outer walls, the concrete floor, and the attractive 1950s façade with its large windows. To create an airy, open exhibition area, he built an angled roof with a skylight that runs the length of the building, and a succession of metal beams that eliminate the need for columns. From the beams, he suspended a mezzanine, offering different views and more exhibition space.

Technical equipment is hidden against one wall behind 6m-high planks of cross-laminated timber, solid lumber glued together in layers. The material acts like concrete – Corbisier says you could hang a car on it – but is more sustainable. The architect and the collector agreed to leave the planks unpainted once they saw them installed. 'They inform the ambience and quality of the light,' Corbisier says.

Wanting a spectacular central element, Galila hired Belgian designer Xavier Lust (W\*226), whom she had known for a while, to create a stunning stainless steel staircase. The steps seem to ripple – a nod to her name ('gal' means 'wave' in Hebrew) – while the rails are a play of convex and concave. On top of the building there's a roof garden, for which the Israeli artist Ram Katzir created a work inspired by a tree that fell down in Galila's yard – bronze stumps with colourful ceramic tops like liquorice allsorts.

She has picked up more buildings on the same street, which she plans to gradually renovate and

turn into exhibition spaces, too. In one of them, 50 chairs from her extensive collection of artists' chairs are gathered, waiting to go to an exhibition at the Latvian National Museum of Art. There are chairs made from skis, and chairs made from printer cartridges, and even a chair made from the contents of her former wardrobe (she discovered Issey Miyake in the 1980s and eventually decided to wear nothing else).

Galila admits that she's very much on her own. She travels alone, buys art alone, and curates her own exhibitions. Ultimately, she says, that's not such a bad thing. 'Artwork gave me a new family when my husband passed away. It opened my mind to the world. I went out, was surrounded by young people, and that made me younger in spirit.'★

*Galila's POC will be at 295 Avenue Van Volxem, Brussels. For further information about its opening details, write to galilas poc@gmail.com from 15 April*