The Treasures Amassed By an Alumnus of Hell

By NICHOLAS FOX WEBER

PARIS

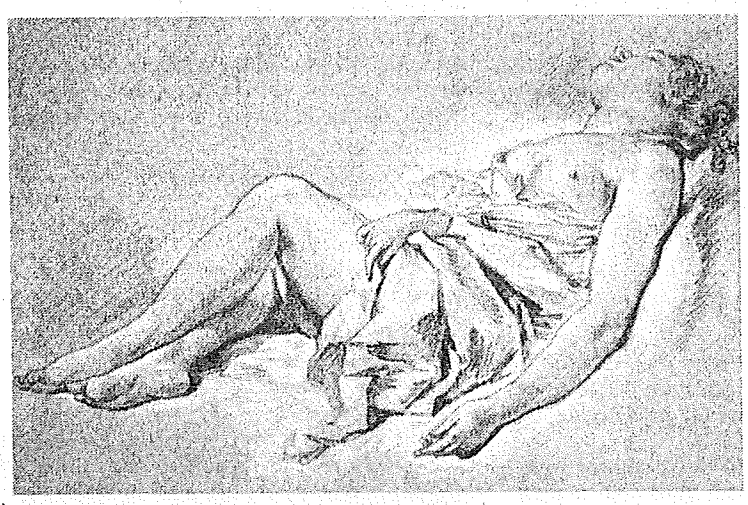
THOUGH nearly 60 years have passed since Jan Krugier was pushed out of a train at Birkenau, he still has nightmares about his first night in the concentration camp. At 3 a.m., engines roared and lights from large trucks pierced the wooden walls of the barracks. "Suddenly we heard terrible cries," he recalled. "They killed about 8,000 people to make room for the Hungarian Jews. They needed space. Then, at 5:30, we marched in columns to the selection." He was 16 years old.

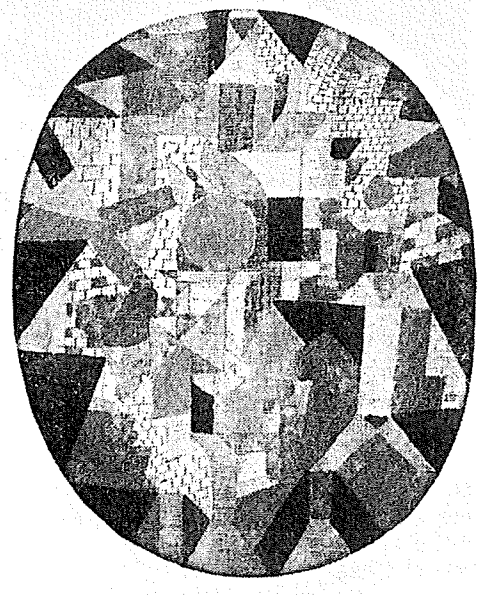
Mr. Krugier, now a distinguished art dealer with galleries in New York and Geneva, told this story as he sat puffing a Cuban cigar in his spacious flower-filled apartment on the Left Bank. He pointed to numbers tattooed on his left arm. They meant he had been assigned (he used the word "allowed," forced labor being better than death) to work at the I. G. Farben chemical factory near the camp. There, he said, he "had another chance," one of many that allowed him, a Jewish boy from Poland, to escape death again and again.

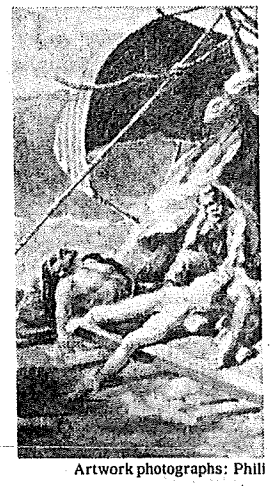
At the Farben factory, one of the supervisors was from Mr. Krugier's hometown, Radom, near Warsaw, and had been given a music scholarship by Mr. Krugier's father before the war. Still grateful, he made Jan a courier. "I met German people," Mr. Krugier said. "I learned Goethe and Heine. Now you see why the show opened at the Staatliche Museum in Berlin."

The show, "A Passion for Design," subsequently traveled to Venice and Madrid and is now on view at the palatial Jacquemart-André Museum on the Boulevard Haussmann. Several elegant rooms there have been turned over to nearly 200 drawings belonging to Mr. Krugier and his wife, Marie-Anne Krugier-Poniatowski.

Virtually every sheet in this remarkable collection, which represents about one-quarter of the Krugier's holdings in the medium, offers insights into each artist's interests and sensibilities. Two female profiles on blue paper by Vittore Carpaccio reveal the quiet sensitivity of the Venetian artist better known for complex group scenes. There are experimental sketches by Fra Bartolommeo, an amazingly free sanguine — red chalk — by Pontormo and vivid images by Parmigianino.



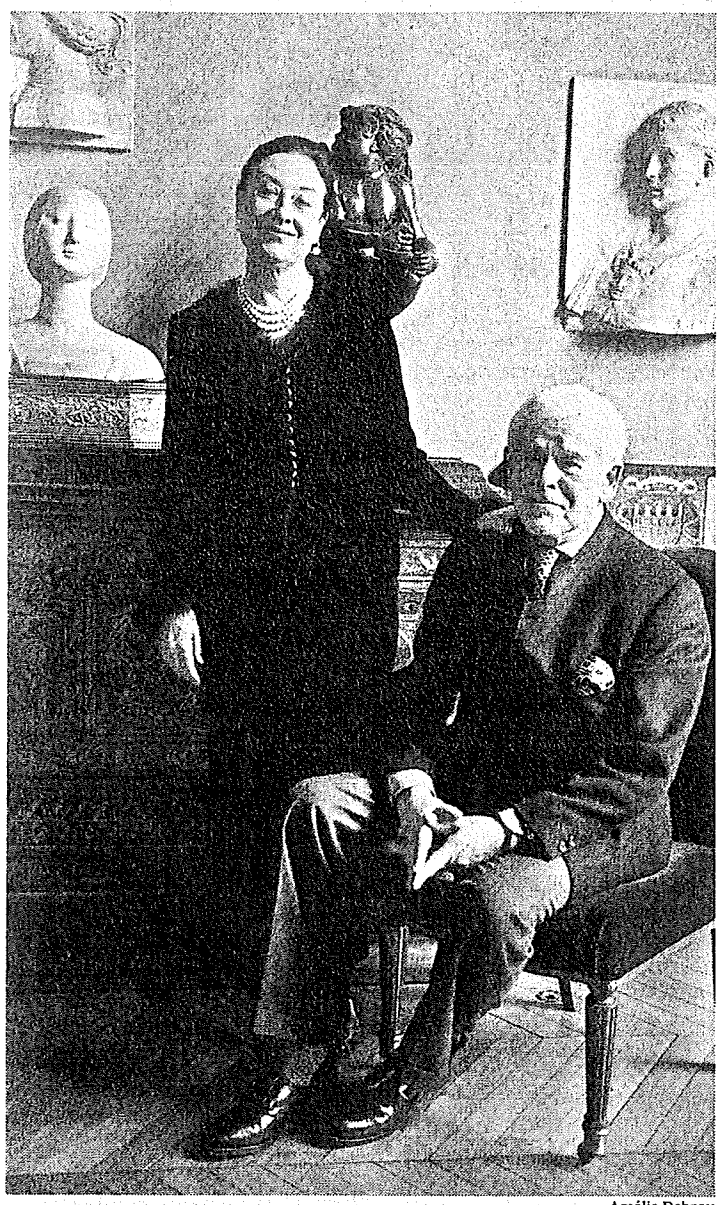




Collected: "Young Girl Sleeping," 1745, above, by François Boucher; "Vollmond in Mauern," 1919, left, by Paul Klee; "The Raft of the Medusa," 1820, by Théodore Géricault.

Two Tintoretto charcoals evoke the artist's initial reaction to the human nude. Add to these a lyrical Brueghel landscape, two fluid Veroneses, a powerful galley slave by Annibale Carracci, a studious anatomical study by Rubens, three images by the free-spirited Jacques Callot and two rich studies each by Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lor-

Artwork photographs: Phili



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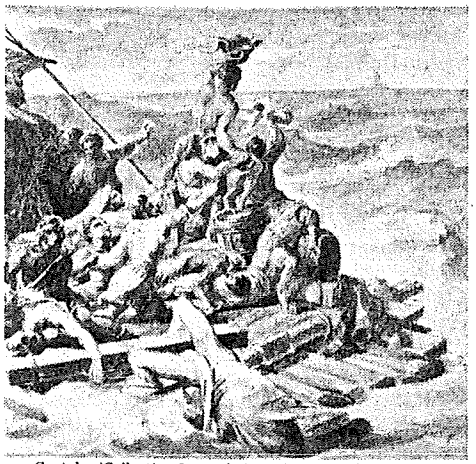

ppe Goetelen/Collection Jan and Marie-Anne Krugier-Poniatowski

The gallery owner Jan Krugier and his wife, Marie-Anne Krugier-Poniatowski, at the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris, where nearly 200 drawings from their collection are on view, ranging from old masters to Impressionists.

A Passion for Design

Jacquemart-André Museum, 158 Boulevard Haussmann, Paris. Through June.

rain. Three Rembrandts reveal the force with which he applied pen and ink to paper; two Watteaus show great vivacity. Boucher — whom Madame de Pompadour assigned to put Louis XV in an amorous mood — is represented at his most erotic.

The exhibition is also showing five haunting Goyas, three Turner watercolors and six Ingres. There are seven Gericaults, six Delacroixs and three Victor Hugos, all sublimely Romantic. The Impressionist period is represented by seven Degas drawings and pastels, seven Cézannes, four Seurats, three Gauguins and three van Goghs, all first-rate.

Given that Mr. Krugier's galleries specialize in modernism, it's no surprise that he has had access to the finest examples of 20th-century work, but what stands out are the unerring choices he and his wife have made in images by Matisse (three ravishing large drawings), Klee (four enchanting dreamlike watercolors), Picasso (10 substantial pieces), as well as works by Bonnard, Giacometti, Kandinsky and Balthus.

After surviving the Nazi camps as a youth, Jan Krugier grew up to become a force in art.

In Radom, Janick Krygier's father, Alfred Adam Krygier, a moderately religious Jew who spoke Hebrew but snubbed Yiddish, had a holding company that worked extensively with Swiss manufacturers. His son recalls him as "a small collector, very French minded, who went twice a year to Paris and bought Soutine and Chagall."

Sitting on his father's knees, the boy pored over art books. When Jan was 5, his mother died in childbirth, after which he was brought up, he said, "by mademoiselles" but was "such an arrogant, spoiled child" that one after another quit.

In September 1939, friends in Zurich urged Jan's father to get his family out of Poland. "But my father said no," Mr. Krugier recalled. "He was quite a patriot. This was very rare for a Jew, but he was in the Polish army and believed they would defeat the Germans. So naïve. Terrible." The father was soon killed in battle. His second wife, along with Jan's younger brother,

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were sent to Treblinka and never heard of again. But Jan, who turned 12 in 1940, worked for the Resistance, which is where he learned to be a courier.

"I delivered my first bomb in a backpack to the Hotel Bristol in Warsaw, where I used to go with my parents for the opera," Mr. Krugier said. "I asked an SS man the way to the hotel and was very proud of that until my chief slapped me for being so stupid."

He traveled for the Resistance until 1943. "Then I was trapped," he said. But he escaped from a train to Treblinka and spent about eight months in the woods, where his biggest enemy was the snow, which showed his footprints. "Then, at the end of 1943, they found me."

What followed was bloodcurdling, but some of Mr. Krugier's most vivid memories concern his miraculous escapes. A friend had slipped him a suicide pill before an interrogation by an Obersturmführer (First Lieutenant), coincidentally named Krugier, so he could avoid torture and would not reveal Resistance secrets. "This horrible man tried to have his enormous dog kill me," Mr. Krugier said. "But the dog stopped, sniffed and was nice to me because he smelled another dog that had been at my side the previous two days. I was sent back to prison and returned the pill. It was a miracle."

After a revolt at Treblinka, the Wehrmacht put Jan on another train. He asked a Polish boy where they were going. The boy made a spiraling hand gesture, which meant gas chambers.

Yet even at Auschwitz-Birkenau Jan survived, as he did when the Farben factory was bombed by the Allies. He endured, he recalled, "a death march where if you fell, you were killed." He survived on one potato a day at Dora-Nordhausen and evaded bombs that hit but didn't destroy his train to Bergen-Belsen. There, on April 15, 1945, the British liberated him and his fellow prisoners.

At 17, Jan was sent to the luxurious household of family friends in Zurich. But things did not go well. "I hated art; I hated everything," he said. "I was a terrible case." Fortunately, he was taken first to a sympathetic doctor and then to the theologian Martin Buber in Lucarno, Switzerland. One Friday night, he recalled, when Buber's secretary brought flowers for the Sabbath, memories began to flow and he began to cry. Buber embraced him and said, "You've discovered your identity."

Philippe Goetelen/Collection Jan and Marie-Anne Krugier Poniatowski

Parmigianino's "Woman Seated and Asleep" (1524-27), part of the Krugier collection, is at the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris.

Mr. Krugier studied painting with the former Bauhaus instructor Johannes Itten and in 1947 moved to Paris, where he rented Soutine's studio. A few years later, his friend Alberto Giacometti advised him to become an art consultant and, in 1962, he opened his first gallery in Geneva.

Success upon success followed. The gallery became a significant force in the modern- and contemporary-art markets, selling work by Morandi, Balthus, Giacometti and especially Picasso. Mr. Krugier became one of the major dealers of modern art worldwide.

In the mid-60's, Mr. Krugier's life took a new turn. He saw a contemporary drawing that he liked and asked to meet the artist. A few months later, his assistant in Geneva announced the arrival of Princess Poniatowska.

At this moment in her husband's recollections, the tall, black-haired Marie-Anne Poniatowska — a descendant of the last king of Poland — interrupted to say she would never use her title. Mr. Krugier petitioned her father to marry Marie-Anne, and explained that he was Jewish — and, because of a previous short-lived marriage, divorced. Her father answered: "Jan, I am very honored to have a Jewish son-in-law. To be an aristocrat, you must simply act like an aristocrat every day. The title is nothing."

In spite of his marriage, Mr. Krugier said, he remained "very negative, disconnected, from one depression to another."

"I opened the Pandora's box to Marie-Anne," he said. "She convinced me that the best solution was to collect. I understood that a human being has two faces — one an angel, the other a devil. For anxiety, I look at drawings. It's like a self-defense, but it's working." □