

Coincidences with Arthur Pinajian

Lawrence E. Joseph

Call it dumb luck.

A tipsy conversation with an old friend led to our coincidentally acquiring what we now believe, and what at least one esteemed scholar certifies, to be one of the most massive and impressive overlooked art collections of the past half-century.

It all started at the wedding of Mary Long and Thomas Schultz, in Bellport, New York, a dreamy village on Long Island's South Shore, on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, 2006. The day before the ceremony, Tropical Storm Ernesto had pummeled the area, knocking out electricity and pretty much blowing down the reception tent erected in the field behind Immaculate Heart of Mary Roman Catholic Church. A half keg of Spaten German dark was spilled into the good earth.

My daughter and I had flown in from Los Angeles, and we were among the guests who got up early Sunday morning, then fresh and sunny after the storm, to pitch in and resurrect the tent, retrieve all that was scattered and chop bamboo to make decorative screens. It seemed like an old-fashioned barn-raising. Phoebe, 5, and her new best friend Kimberly, 8, armed with Formula 409 spray bottles and rolls of paper towels, cleaned each and every one of the mud-spattered tables and chairs that would seat the hundred or so guests later that day. Someone got hold of a generator, so there could be lights, music, a live microphone for all the toasts. It was vintage Thomas and Mary, nowhere near perfect but better than perfect.

In her burgundy bridal gown, slender Mary was an exquisite rose. After the spectacular wedding tango that the couple had been rehearsing for years, Thomas, tall, broad, and white-suited, drifted over to the bar, and a few drinks later we were shaking hands on a new business venture. Thomas would find a low budget, rundown beach house; I would buy it, he would fix it up, and we would sell it and split the profits. Outside the tent, in the late summer darkness, the kids flew balsa wood gliders, until one of them got the bright idea to ignite his glider with a citronella mosquito torch and then toss it for a fiery loop-the-loop. Just like a dollar sign, I fancied.

A few weeks later, Thomas called me from 30 Country Club Lane, a half acre of underbrush on which sat a bungalow built after World War II to house military families. It hadn't been renovated in thirty years, and looked it, judging from the j-pegs. But less than two hours from Manhattan by car or rail, this two-bedroom, one bath plus studio/garage had very low property taxes and was an easy walk to cute shops and restaurants and then down to the Bellport dock, where in the summer a little ferry will take you to Ho-Hum Beach on Fire Island's east end, with its miles of deep, duney oceanfront forever protected as National Seashore.

"The garage floor is all dirt, at least, I think it's all dirt, but I can't tell because most of it is stacked with paintings. There's got to be a couple thousand of them. And there's at least a thousand more in the attic," said Thomas.

You are invited to continue reading by ordering this limited edition book. See contact page