

IRON GAME HISTORY



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THE WEIDER ART COLLECTION

Over the past year, The Joe and Betty Weider Museum of Physical Culture has received eight significant pieces of art from the Weider's private collection related to the history of physical culture. Those items are now on display in and around the Weider Museum's galleries, and in the Stark Center's newly-named Teresa Lozano Long Art Gallery, which houses sculpture and paintings related to both sports and physical culture.

Three of the items are oil paintings, part of a seven-portrait Mr. Olympia series commissioned by Joe Weider, done by the late landscape artist Thomas Beecham, and given to the University of Texas by the Weiders; the other four paintings will arrive later. These three paintings, which are slightly larger than life-size portraits, feature Larry Scott, who in 1965 won the first Mr. Olympia event; Franco Columbu, who followed his great friend Arnold as a Mr. Olympia winner; and Lee Haney, who moved past Arnold by winning a record eight titles.

The Weider gift includes three other oil paintings—Betty Weider in a bikini, Joe Weider as imagined by Boris Vallejo, and a gym scene done by Lorenzo Ghiglieri in 1989 and based on a famous print made over a hundred years ago of the Hercules

Club in Vienna. In addition to these exceptional paintings, the Weiders also sent a wonderful bronze sculpture done in Germany in the early twentieth century of a man in the process of lifting a pair of kettlebells. And, this May, the Weiders donated a truly beautiful bronze bust of Betty Weider by sculptor Frederick Russell, atop a five-foot-tall marble base.

As can be imagined, we are very grateful to the Weiders for the gift of these marvelous artifacts and for the ones to follow. Their willingness to share with a wider world a private collection of paintings and sculptures they have spent the better part of a lifetime assembling speaks to their generosity as well as to their sense of history. They have made their lives in the field, as have we, and they have a deep understanding of the importance of sharing their good fortune with other lovers of physical culture and the art it has inspired over the centuries. These recent gifts from the Weiders are part of a long process.

I first began visiting Joe at his office back in the Sixties, and during those visits one of the most memorable things I saw there was his collection of visual artifacts related in one way or another to the iron



This lovely bronze bust of Betty Weider was made by sculptor Frederick Russell.

game. In the very early days, the "art" in question was usually photographic art—photos of human bodies either posed or in action that had somehow caught Joe's eye. Then, as now, Joe's "eye" is uncommonly perceptive, and many people have argued that his ability to "see" the difference between a good and a great photograph contributed significantly to his long success in the magazine business.

As the years passed and Joe had a bit more discretionary income, he began to collect and even commission paintings and sculptures that reflected his particular visual tastes. This collection has grown and expanded for decades and is one of the finest and most extensive in the world of strength sports. Almost twenty

years ago, I played a role in his acquisition of a small painting of *Sig Klein as Mercury*, done by C. Bosseron Chambers in 1926. (See the editorial in Volume 4, Number 1 of *Iron Game History*.) The painting had been inherited by Sig's family after his death and they had consigned it to Sotheby's for auction. Lacking the funds to participate in such a high octane auction and fearing that if I did take part my heart might write a check my bank couldn't cash, I contacted Joe in hopes that he might wish to acquire it for his own collection. I knew that he and Klein had been friends and that Joe had often visited Sig during the years Joe's home offices were in New Jersey not all that far from Sig's famous Manhattan gymnasium.

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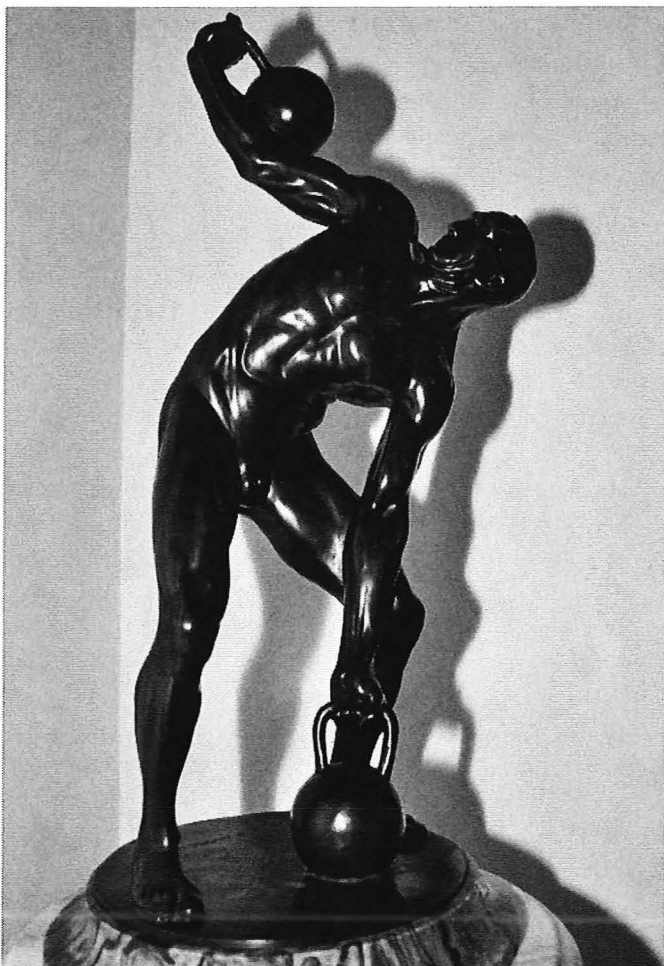
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As it happened, Joe was very interested, so he out-bid everyone else and acquired the painting—which oddly enough had no reference to the fact that the model was Klein. Several years later, on a trip to the West Coast I visited Joe at his office in Woodland Hills and, as I was leaving, he took me to one of the rooms in his office complex and showed me the painting, which I'd never seen. It was very beautiful, and as I was praising it he told me that since I liked it and had helped him get it he wanted me to take it back to Texas and add it to our collection. For me, the gift was absolutely unexpected, as it perhaps was even by Joe, but it signaled his growing understanding of the responsibility which came with his enormous success in the field. In the years since that time Joe has given us substantial sums of money to help us with our work and to help us honor the pioneers in the field we love. Without that financial support we might



This bronze statue shows a man lifting kettlebells, which were in common use one hundred years ago. By 1950 kettlebells were only rarely seen in the U.S. but they have recently made a remarkable comeback, particularly among athletes.



In 1989, Joe Weider commissioned Lorenzo Ghiglieri to produce this oil version of a print depicting a training session in a Viennese weightlifting club/beer hall. Close observers will see on the wall a picture of Hans Steyer, the Bavarian Hercules. The Warren Lincoln Travis Dumbbell on the floor below weighs 1560 pounds.

not have been able to get this library-museum project off the ground. Even so, as unendingly grateful as we are for the funding we have received from the Weider Foundation, the gift by Joe and Betty of their personal art collection seems to us to be even more meaningful. Each time I pass through our lobby areas and our Art Gallery and see the large portrait of Franco Columbu or the small painting of Sig Klein or the splendid bronze statue of a man lifting kettlebells I think of Joe and Betty and feel indebted to them for placing their very private collection in our very public space. I never tire of showing these things to visitors and I never tire of reminding those visitors that none of the art would be here were it not for the Weiders, who personify the truth of the old Jewish proverb,

"If charity cost nothing the world would be full of philanthropists."

—Terry Todd