



KING BAUDOIN  
FOUNDATION  
UNITED STATES

**KBFUS INSIGHT**  
**MAY 2018**

# **A PASSION FOR PHOTOGRAPHY – AND FOR SHARING IT WITH THE WORLD**

**FILMMAKER JAN DE BONT AND HIS WIFE TRISH GIFTED 14 ORIGINAL GELATIN SILVER PRINTS BY RENOWNED DUTCH PHOTOGRAPHER ED VAN DER ELSKEN TO KBFUS. THEY CAN NOW BE ADMIRIED AT THE RIJKSMUSEUM IN AMSTERDAM.**

Dutch-born cinematographer, director and producer Jan de Bont's passion for collecting photographs began when he moved to Los Angeles in 1976. "I had mostly been buying paintings when I was still in the Netherlands," he says. "But when I relocated to the United States to make movies, I found that there was a lot of attention given to photography. There were many galleries that had photographic exhibits, much more than you would see in Europe. I got excited right away."

His first photo purchase was one by Edward Weston, one of the most influential American photographers of the 20th century. "That photograph sparked a deep passion in me," he says. Today, de Bont and his wife Trish display more than 400 photographs, as well as many other artworks, in their Los Angeles County home. Curators from all over the world come to view their unique collection, which includes many rare pieces.



**TOP:** “Vali Meyers in front of the mirror, Saint Germain des Pres, 1951. Gift from Jan and Trish de Bont. © Ed van der Elsken”.

**COVER:** “Children in the streets of Paris, 1951. Gift from Jan and Trish de Bont. ©Ed van der Elsken”.

### COLLECTING WITH FOCUS

De Bont, who is known for his blockbuster movies such as *Speed* and *Twister*, quickly discovered that collecting photography had to have as clear an intent as did his films.

“When you start collecting photography you need to make a decision about what you’re going to collect,” he

says. “You can’t just buy anything and everything. Make a selection of the things you’re really interested in. What I learned from other collectors and from museums was that you should have a clear focus. Once you have that, acquire multiple works by artists you really love and by artists from different periods. I didn’t want our collection to become encyclopedic but rather to be a collection of various movements.”

### CAPTURING LIFE ON THE STREET

One of the movements he eventually began to acquire was that of ‘street photographer’ Ed van der Elsken (1925-1990), who was 31 years old when his iconic photobook *Love on the Left Bank* brought him international acclaim. In it, van der Elsken captured the lives and stories of a group of bohemians on the streets of Paris in the mid-1950s.

Recognized as the most important Dutch photographer of the 20th century, van der Elsken is known for his bold, unconventional and up-close-and-personal style and astute social commentary. His images depict the realms of love, sex, art, jazz and alternative culture from France, Japan, Africa and the Netherlands.

He described his camera as being ‘infatuated’, and is quoted as saying “I’m not a journalist or an objective reporter. I’m a man with likes and dislikes.”

De Bont met Ed van der Elsken in Amsterdam when they were both part of the same group of filmmakers and photographers who were exploring their art. But de Bont didn’t start to purchase the photographer’s work until several years after moving to the United States. “When I lived in Holland, nobody collected photography. And at that time van der Elsken only made photo books. That was his goal in the 1950s, much like many other



photographers. He wasn't the only one who did that because making photo books was the only way they could make money from their art. Photographs were not really considered something to hang on a wall or display in a gallery until years later."

#### **POWERFUL IMAGES TELL MOVING STORIES**

Several years ago, de Bont came across one of van der Elsken's images framed in a larger size. "I started to see how when you isolate his images from a book, and you have an opportunity to look at it carefully, you begin to understand how powerful his images are, and how incredibly emotional they are," says de Bont.

"There was an almost obsessive intensity and closeness with his subjects. The observer can see what van der Elsken was thinking when he took the photo. He wasn't just making portraits. It's as though he was partaking in the lives of the people he was photographing. He was also an amazing printer. In the darkroom, he played with light and dark in a brilliant way. The light tells you what

to look at. All these qualities really made me start to get excited about his work."

---

**"BEING ABLE TO SHARE HIS WORK WITH OTHERS IS VERY SATISFYING. GIVING BACK IS A GREAT THING. IT IS DEFINITELY SOMETHING THAT WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO." JAN DE BONT**

---

"Of course, his work is much more well-known and appreciated now, and has been shown in many galleries and museums," says de Bont. "Unfortunately, this happens a lot. When artists die, suddenly their work is rediscovered and seen for what it really is. And now, you don't have a great collection if it doesn't include his photos."

#### **FROM AMSTERDAM TO LA AND BACK AGAIN**

Jan de Bont and his wife Trish have donated 14 photos from their van der Elsken collection to KBFUS, for the

Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. They have kept a few of them for now, but ultimately will gift them to the museum as well.

---

**“I FEEL THAT IF ANY INSTITUTION DESERVES TO HAVE VAN DER ELSKEN’S WORKS, IT IS THE RIJKSMUSEUM. EVERYONE THERE IS SO DEDICATED AND ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE ART.”**

**JAN DE BONT**

---

De Bont says he is inspired by the Rijksmuseum for several reasons. “First of all, I had a great time living in Amsterdam. I love the museum. I lived right behind it and used to go to its library to study. I visited so often that I used to slip in the back door because the people who worked there got to know me well. I learned so much there. It gave me an incredible education. The way the Dutch masters played with light in their paintings was incredible. I really try to bring that into my own work in film.”

De Bont says he still visits the museum every time he is in Amsterdam. “I love the building and I love the art. My wife Trish and I have been supporting the photo department for some time. It’s just a natural thing to do. I feel that if any institution deserves to have van der Elsken’s works, it is the Rijksmuseum. Everyone there is so dedicated and enthusiastic about the art.”

De Bont says that showing the van der Elsken collection in the Rijksmuseum ensures that it will be appreciated by people from all over the world. “His original works need to be seen by more people,” says de Bont. “They look as modern today as when he first created them. Being able to share his work with others

is very satisfying. Giving back is a great thing. It is definitely something that we will continue to do. And it’s something that I always try to encourage other collectors to do.”

#### **CHOOSING THE BEST WAY TO DONATE**

A couple of years ago, KBFUS launched KBFUS ART to help U.S. donors navigate the cultural, legal and tax complexities involved in donating art overseas. “KBFUS has been very, very helpful. Giving overseas can be complex, especially with tax issues. In the United States, the government wants to know how you spend your money, why you are giving it away and to whom. And with gifts of artworks, things get even more complicated. But going through KBFUS removes those concerns. They take care of all the issues immediately in a very clear, efficient and transparent manner,” says de Bont.

To mark the donation by film director Jan de Bont and his wife Trish Reeves de Bont, the Rijksmuseum is planning an exhibition of 26 original prints by photographer Ed van der Elsken. ‘Ed van der Elsken through the Eyes of Jan de Bont’ (from March 8 to June 3, 2018) will include a selection of photographs from de Bont’s collection, alongside previously unseen photographs by van der Elsken from the Rijksmuseum collection.

**The King Baudouin Foundation United States (KBFUS) is the leading resource for philanthropic giving to Europe and Africa - a trusted advisor for U.S. donors seeking to support their favorite causes and nonprofits overseas. To learn more about our donor-advised funds, legacy funds and KBFUS ART, please visit [www.kbfus.org](http://www.kbfus.org). Or contact us at (212) 713-7660 or [info@kbfus.org](mailto:info@kbfus.org).**