

An Artistic Investment

SOCIETE GENERALE PRIVATE BANKING finds parallels between private banking and contemporary art in its pursuit of creativity, innovation and excellence

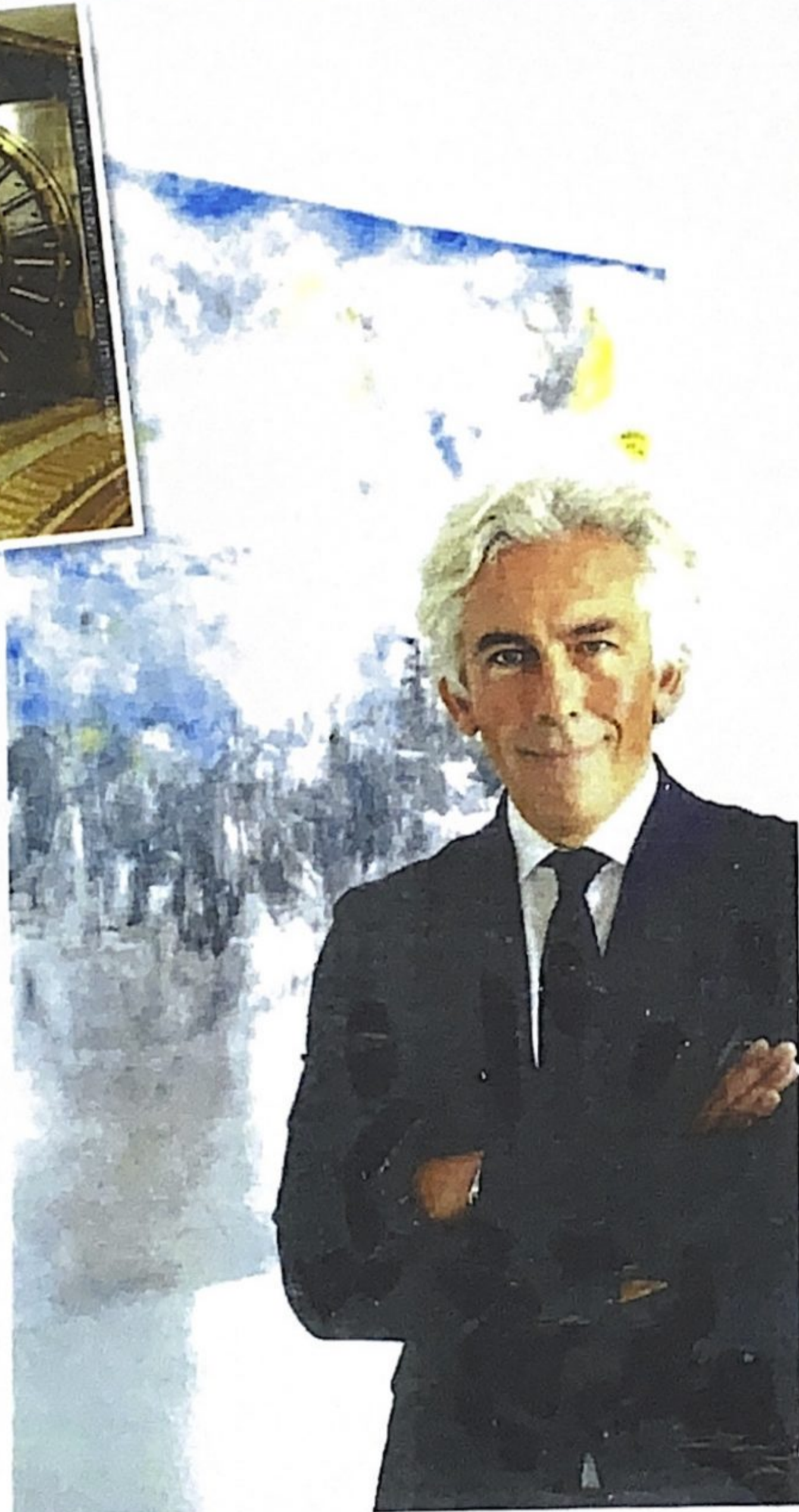
Societe Generale's commitment to the arts has created a platform for everyone to enjoy art in its various forms. At the bank's head office in Paris, over 700 lithographs, prints and silk screens, and 300 original works including sculptures, paintings and photographs from international artists such as Pierre Soulages, Pierre Alechinsky, Zao Wou-Ki, Antoni Tàpies, Wang Du and Thomas Ruff are displayed.

The bank shares its treasures – assembled since 1995 – through numerous public exhibitions in museums across Europe like the SMAK in Belgium, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest and the Sofia Art Gallery in Bulgaria.

In Asia, Societe Generale is always quick to recognise the cultural explosion in developing nations and the emergence of fresh talent.

The Societe Generale Chinese Art Award, for example, aims to nurture young artists from Greater China, in various art forms, including drawing, painting, photography and videography.

The bank also sponsored the *Photographers of Elegance* exhibition held in Hong Kong in April this year. The exhibition showcased some of the most iconic images of the 20th century by the Séeberger brothers, which defined French elegance as we know it today.



In Singapore, the bank is a long-time sponsor of the art gallery at Alliance Francaise. Showcasing art from both international and local artists, the gallery continues to be a meeting point for intercultural engagement.

Societe Generale Private Banking has also thrown its weight behind two of the most influential and exciting artists today. The first is photographer Françoise Huguier, winner of the Prix de la Photographie 2011. Her travelling exhibition, *Verticalité/Horizontalité - Intérieur/Extérieur* at Alliance Francaise in October this year featured 40 photographs on the middle class communities in Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.

Committed to the values of artistic creation, Societe Generale Private Banking is also a supporter of French painter Fabienne Verdier's work. Her exhibition, *The Spirit of Painting: A Tribute to the Flemish Renaissance*, was shown in August this year at the Groninger and Hans Memling museums in

Belgium. The work, which took Verdier over four years to complete, explores the early works of Flemish painters Van Eyck and Memling, and suggests new ways to appreciate these masterpieces.

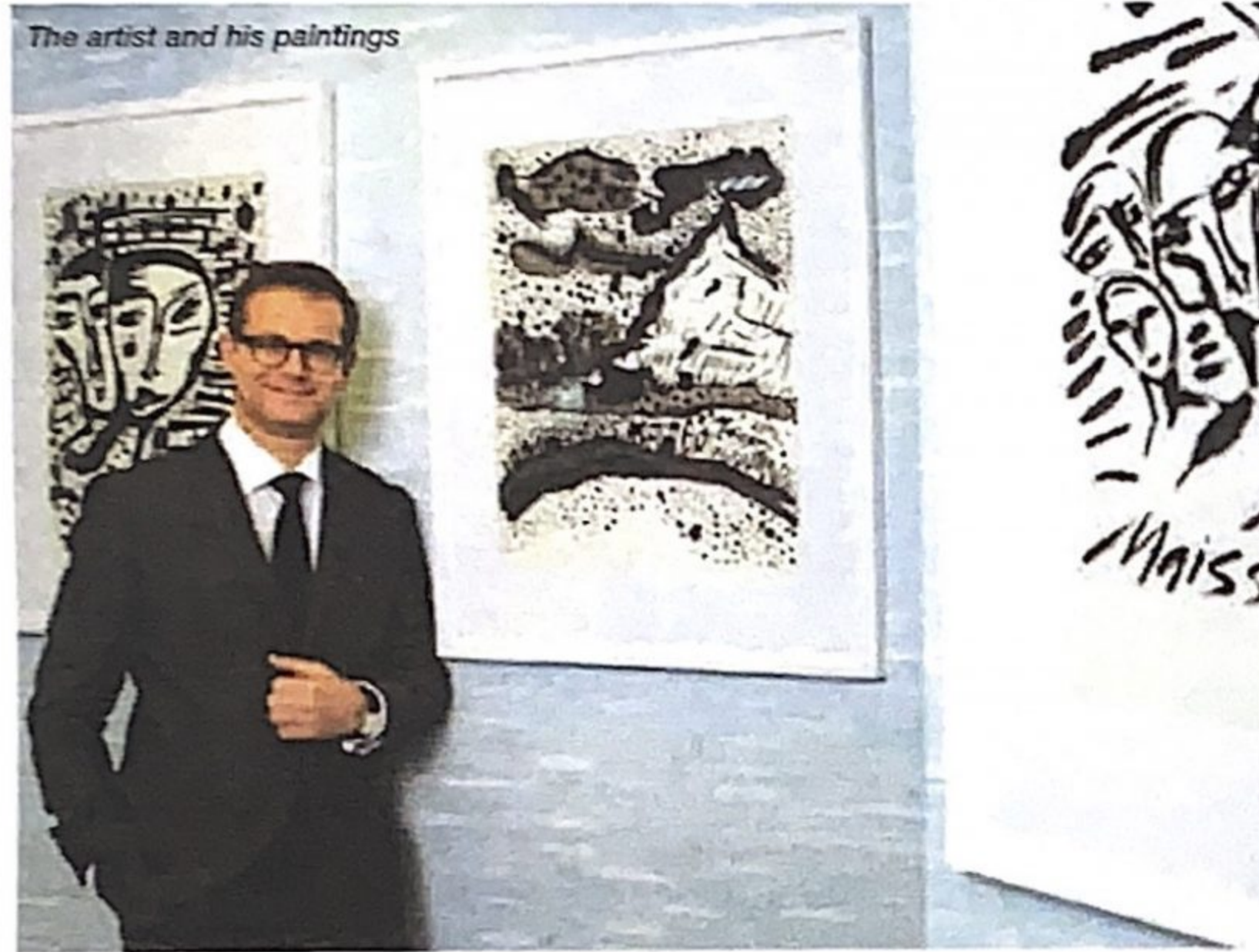
The bank's support of the arts has inspired its own staff. Benedikt Maissen, Societe Generale Private Banking's market head of global wealth management, has been passionate about art since young. Painting became a hobby and it was a medium for him to demonstrate what he holds dear today.

One of his paintings hangs in the office of Asia private bank CEO, Olivier Gougeon, while the Chinese painting in the meeting room of the bank's Singapore office reflects Maissen's views of life in Asia. ■

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From Far Left
Safe Door 2001, an artwork by Chinese artist Liu Bolin, which is part of the Societe Generale collection in Paris; Societe Generale Asia private bank CEO Olivier Gougeon; market head of global wealth management, Benedikt Maissen and his paintings

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INTERVIEW WITH
BENEDIKT MAISSEN
HEAD OF GLOBAL WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Many of you may have noticed several paintings by Benedikt Maissen, affectionately known as Beni to most of us, displayed in our office. So what is the story behind these works of art?

Our artist first picked up a brush when he was about four years old, perhaps through the influence of his mother's appreciation for art and exceptional musical talent. Having discovered the delight of expressing himself through painting, Beni took up art lessons at a young age. Unfortunately, his instructor was a little quick to judge and created a rather critical

and negative environment for our young artist. This promptly resulted in him quitting lessons.

Fortunately, Beni thrived on the support of his family who always encouraged him to expound his skill and grow as an artist.

In a conversation with us on his hobby in painting, Beni elaborated on how the environment really impacts individual behavior, perspective and ultimately, the things one does and creates. Beni shared that he feels that painting provides him with a medium



Beni's grandfather



Family Portrait



Family Portrait II



Olivier with Beni's painting

through which to freely express himself.

The time Beni has devoted to his art has fluctuated throughout his life. Perhaps it was working in the inspirational environment and culture of this French company that once again ignited his passion. The first of Beni's paintings to decorate our office in Singapore now hangs in Olivier Gougeon's office.

Beni recounted visiting Olivier's office one day and suggesting that he needed a new painting to embellish it. The ensuing conversation kick-started Beni's enthusiasm to paint again and since then, several other paintings has been added to the collection.

Beni enjoys observing his surroundings and people around him and that provides much

inspiration for him when he paints. To him, painting is not only an art but also a lifestyle.

At the beginning of our conversation, Beni showed us three of his Chinese paintings on rice paper and mentioned that he has been adding such paintings to his 30-50 piece collection here in Singapore. "Chinese paintings are particularly hard to create", he said. The graceful strokes, the way the black ink flows through the paper is truly captivating and therefore gives a particular value to such paintings. Living in Asia has enabled me to develop a taste for Oriental art, specifically that of the Chinese."

Beni is also fond of painting faces and people while listening to music to inspire him. When painting an eventful picture, he may listen to Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 or to a lighter

piece when he paints calmer sceneries. Beni also showed us a very detailed sketch he did of his grandfather. He described how he is intrigued by how body language can reveal so much about a person. To him, the way you hold your hands together, sit at your desk or even a shift of your gaze can each tell a story through an artist's eye.

It is plain to see that there is a story behind each of Beni's paintings. For example, the painting hanging in his office is an impression of his family and the Chinese paintings in the next meeting room reflect how living in Asia has touched his life. Beni feels that expressing our individual creativity and passion can have an extraordinary impact on our lives and those of the people around us.