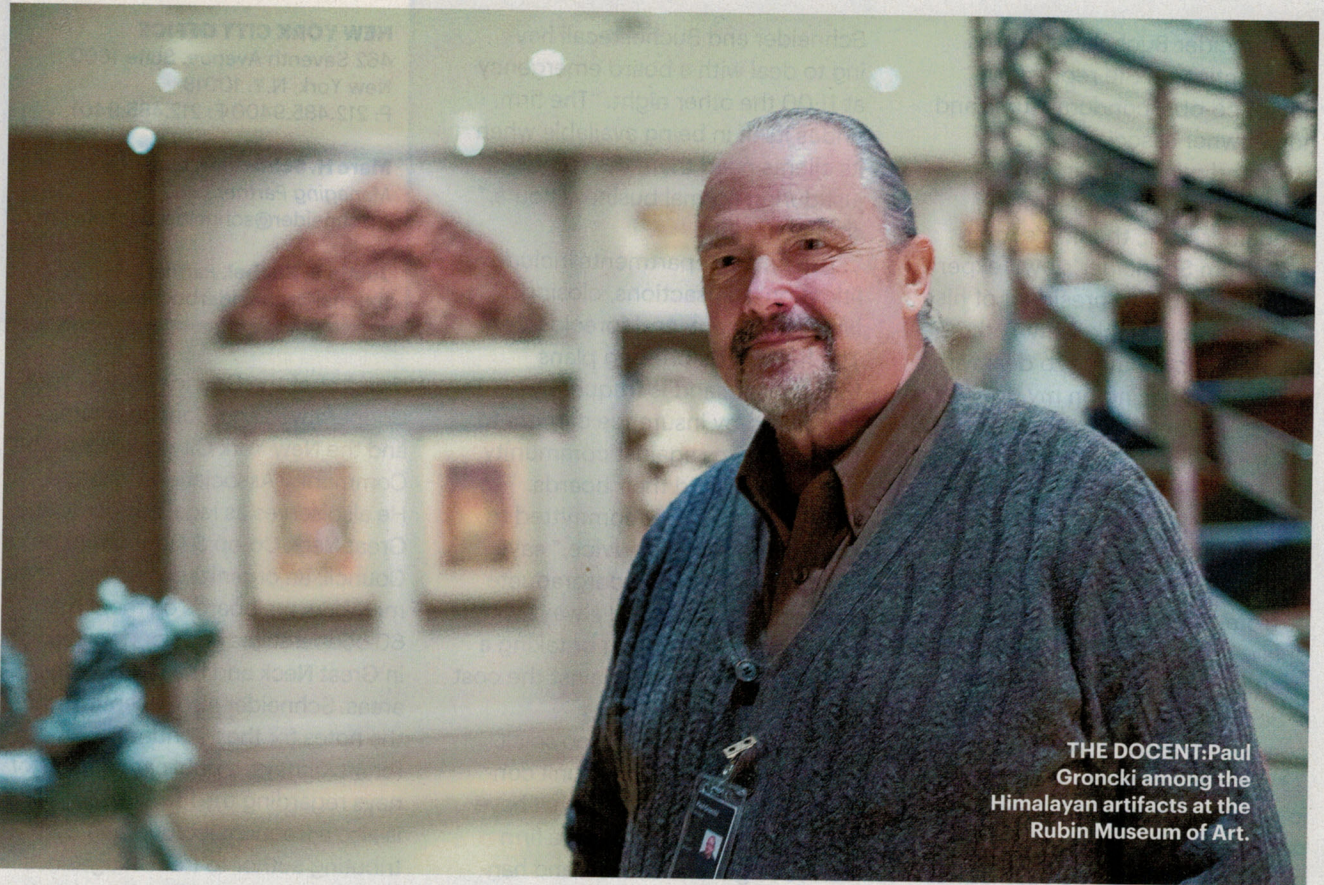


Community



THE DOCENT: Paul Groncki among the Himalayan artifacts at the Rubin Museum of Art.

JENNIFER WU

TAKING CHARGE

A Man of Many Parts

BY TOM SOTER

➤ **PAUL GRONCKI SAYS** it with a touch of pride. “I work at the Rubin Museum of Art as a docent.” That’s Latin for *teacher*. “I’m a guide, I show people around the museum. It’s a museum of Himalayan art. I do it in my spare time.”

Groncki, the board president of the 40-unit co-op at 130 West 16th Street in Manhattan, does a lot in his spare time. He’s also on the board of Hudson Guild, a settlement house that runs a senior center and a technology center to teach kids about computers and technology; preschool, after-school, and college prep programs;

a meals-on-wheels program; and a mental health clinic for the indigent. He’s also the president of his block association and, for the past 10 years, has been the treasurer of the local Democratic Club.

How does he do it? More to the point: *why* does he do it? He says that he’s just a curious man. Take his role as a docent. “I’ve been doing that since the museum opened a decade ago. I started out because I was more curious than interested. Over time, I’ve become interested in it.”

Taking an interest goes hand-in-hand with Groncki’s core beliefs. He calls himself an “old-line liberal Democrat” with an old-line liberal belief in doing good things for people. “That’s part of what the cooperative movement is about, isn’t it?” he says matter-of-factly.

Groncki learned the liberal line growing up in Schenectady, New York, where his grandparents met and married in the late 1800s. Groncki earned a Ph.D. in economics from SUNY Stony Brook and then became an economist and market researcher. Over the years, he has worked for Citibank, JPMorgan Chase, and HSBC.

Now officially retired, Groncki, 68, is still an imposing figure: six

PAUL GRONCKI

Board President

130 West
16th Street

RESIDENT SINCE:

1987

BOARD MEMBER:

30 years

HOMETOWN:

Schenectady, NY

feet tall, balding, and self-admittedly “overweight.” He and his wife, a college professor, moved into 130 West 16th Street in 1987, and he has served on the board for most of the ensuing 30 years, primarily as president. “It’s a co-op,” he says, explaining why he signed up for board service. “That means the residents are supposed to take a role in the management of the building. At least, that’s the way I interpret a co-op.”

The challenges Groncki and the four other board members have faced over the years are just what you’d expect in a small co-op built as a rental in 1925: heating and plumbing issues, and now the roof. “I don’t think it’s been replaced since I’ve been here,” he observes.

Less typical is a recent battle the board has undertaken. After the nearby French Evangelical Church sold its air rights, the two groups that Groncki heads – the co-op and the block association – joined forces to oppose the 11-story structure that developers planned to be erect right up against the six-story co-op. “Oh, man, it’s a pain” Groncki says. “It’s a pain in lots of ways. We’re fighting it, and we are hoping, in the best of cases, to shave a couple of stories off it.”

In this fight, as in most matters, Groncki’s fellow board members – a musician, a banker, an investor, and a real estate professional – work

well with him, according to Richard Dworkin, a 10-year veteran board member. “He’s very proactive, very on top of things, and has good communication with the board and with the shareholders,” Dworkin says. “If there are complaints, he

takes it upon himself to find out what’s going on.” He’s also savvy about dealing with people. When the lobby was redone recently, Dworkin says Groncki probably reduced the typical amount of criticism a lobby redesign gets by including non-board shareholders on the design committee.

“He looks at it as a partnership,” says Moshe Herman, the agent from J.C. Dwight who has managed the building for the last nine years. “He respects me, I respect him. We work very nicely together. We get things done without a lot of fanfare.”

Groncki “morphed” into his retirement a few years ago, but he sees no imminent retirement from the board. “My wife’s going to retire,” he says, “and we’re going to stay in this building. We have no intentions of leaving. This is our ‘retirement home.’ I’ll stay on the board as long as they want me.”

That could be for quite a while. “The general sense about Paul is that we’d be lost without him,” Dworkin notes. “I don’t know that anyone else could do what he does for the building.”

“It’s a co-op – the residents are supposed to take a role in the management of the building.”

Take 5

Paul Groncki picks his favorite pieces at the Rubin Museum of Art:

Green Tara,
Tibet;
13th century;
brass with
inlays of silver



1



Pilgrimage Map of Mount Wutai,
China; 1846;
painted
woodblock print

2

Buddha Shakyamuni,
Northwestern Nepal;
14th century;
gilt copper alloy



3



Mandala of Heruka Krishna Yamari,
Tibet; 15th century;
pigments on cloth

4

Bodhisattva,
Tibet;
12th century;
gilt copper alloy



5

JENNIFER WU (5)

