

CULTURE



Art Collecting 101

BUYING ART should be exhilarating, not intimidating. You just have to keep a few things in mind.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE RICH, famous or an art-school grad to collect fabulous art. So, rather than limit yourself to reproductions (or to curating virtual collections on Pinterest), grace the walls of your home or office with original artwork that showcases all the details, textures and colors the artist envisioned when creating it. Worried you might not know the first thing about art?

Don't be, because the first step to starting your collection is learning it's OK to admit that you aren't well versed in the language, history and subtleties of art. Most gallery owners, art-fair organizers and artists are eager to help new collectors — they want buying art to be fun and fulfilling, not intimidating. Keeping that in mind, here are a few important tenets about collecting art: **BUY ART THAT YOU LOVE.** "This seems like

a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised how many people buy something just because they think other people will like it or because they think it's what they are 'supposed' to buy," says Lauren Pazzaneze, a collector from Boston who blogs about art for the masses on JunkyardArts.com. After all, you are the one who will look at the work day in and day out.

Dennis Ammann, whose online gallery 5PiecesGallery.com sells original works by established young artists from around the world, agrees. "Collecting is a very personal experience," he advises. "What's most important is that you find artists whose work speaks to you in a unique way." When you buy art for enjoyment, any investment potential simply becomes a bonus.

"Start with one artwork for one space in your home," suggests Fleur Allen, owner of the online Interactive Arts Gallery, based in Fremantle, Australia. In addition to the dimensions of the space, think about the mood, feeling or impression you want to express. And don't worry about whether the art matches your sofa. The originality gets lost if you choose a piece simply because it repeats the theme, patterns or coloring in a room, says interior designer Patty Schimberg of The Schimberg Group architecture firm in Sarasota, Fla. Instead of enhancing your space, the matching art looks like part of a furniture store's window display. When you own art you love, it becomes the focal point of the room.

FIND WHAT YOU LIKE. Browse online or visit brick-and-mortar galleries, art fairs and exhibitions hosted by colleges and arts organizations. One group that makes buying art a more welcoming experience is The Affordable Art Fair, which hosts art fairs in 17 cities worldwide including New York, Los Angeles and Seattle. At each Affordable Art Fair, you'll find 50 to 80 galleries selling contemporary art priced from \$100 to \$10,000 (with at least half of the works selling for less than \$5,000). Each fair features family-friendly activities, engaging educational talks and art-making demonstrations.

As you browse, figure out why you like certain works of art more than others. After purchasing several pieces, you may find yourself gravitating toward certain themes, subjects, styles or processes. Once you understand what your selections have in common, you can seek additional works that will



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help build meaningful groupings. Great collections can help advance our understanding of the evolution of art.

“A fine line exists between good and great – decorative and collectible art,” notes Peter Johnson from Portland, Ore., who collects a variety of art including paintings, sculptures and photographs. “As you become more informed, you will develop an eye for defining that line.”

Johnson recently combined his art-collecting insights with his passion for photography and opened CapturedGlobal.com, an online gallery that offers affordable works

In a Nutshell

Consider art a luxury, not an investment. Buy what you love and enjoy it for years.

Don't limit your search to big-city galleries. Talented artists are everywhere, and many are not in galleries.

Learn the story behind the art. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Keep records about the artist, the process used and your purchase of the art.

Display the work proudly, but care for it properly.

Have fun! Enjoy learning, visiting shows, traveling around and meeting interesting people.

by renowned international photographers. Collecting contemporary photography is hot right now because so many serious hobbyists appreciate the art.

LEARN ABOUT THE ARTIST AND THE PROCESS. Part of the joy of owning original art is telling others the story behind it. Get to know the medium in which you are interested. Visit bookstores, galleries and studios, and talk to other collectors. “Ask questions. Don't be afraid to talk to the artist or the gallery,” says Jennifer Jacobs, director of the Seattle Affordable Art Fair. When buying photographic or art prints on paper, she suggests learning about the different printmaking processes used: “It's all about turning insecurity into knowledge.”

UNDERSTAND HOW TO BUILD VALUE. Knowing what future collectors will want is impossible, so you can't assume that you will be able to resell your art at a higher price later. The best way to start a collection that might appreciate in value over a long period of time is to work with reputable, knowledgeable dealers who will help you buy quality art at fair prices.

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“Buy the best artwork you can afford,” advises Rebekah Jacob of the Rebekah Jacob Gallery in Charleston, S.C. “Look at the artist’s credentials, publications, exhibitions, gallery representation and collector base. The more dense the artist’s résumé, often the more solid the investment.

“Owning fine art is different than owning gold, stocks or bonds,” Jacob also emphasizes. “Art isn’t a commodity that can be liquidated quickly, and it must be cared for and displayed properly. Expenses such as storage, insurance, climate control and framing come into play.” Some gallery clients never intend to sell the pieces they buy. Instead, they plan to pass their art down to the next generation or donate it to museums.

Also, documenting details about the art can make it more attractive to potential buyers. Save all receipts, certificates of authenticity, artist statements, gallery brochures and exhibit catalogs.

COLLECT WITH CONVICTION. Whether you look for art online or in the physical world, approach the collecting process with passion. Your quest to discover art you love gives you fresh reasons to explore new cities, as well as opportunities to talk with artists and other creative people.

Today, the art world feels much less elitist than it has in the past, observes Ammann. “The Internet has opened doors for thousands of potential art enthusiasts. People who never felt comfortable walking into an art gallery and asking about art now can do it online.”

And once people realize original art is within their reach, it’s like a bridge, says Jacob. “Once you cross over, there’s no going back.”



Calling all American Way readers: Visit CapturedGlobal.com and subscribe to its newsletter, and you’ll be entered into a drawing to win Lisa Gizara’s iconic image, “La Tour Eiffel,” valued at \$750.

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