

Buying Art, 101



Collect what you love

STORY BY KATHLEEN WERESZYNSKI MURRAY

Art collectors who make investment- or status-driven purchases surround themselves with a coterie of dealers, consultants and advisers. Together they have created a white-hot art market that has seen record-setting prices at the big auction houses in recent years.

But art enthusiasts who are interested in starting a personal collection do not need to play the competitive market to have a satisfying art-buying experience.

"There's no need to be intimidated by the art world; it's about what you like," said John Frazee, director of Arlington Art Gallery in Poughkeepsie. The gallery represents contemporary artists who paint in the tradition of the 19th century Hudson River School.

"You are the one who should be catered to," Frazee said about visitors to his gallery. "I feel privileged to have people come in and consider buying art."

Aspiring collectors should visit galleries and museums to cultivate personal tastes, learn about particular artists and movements through conversations with dealers and docents, read art history books and trade magazines and, above all, trust their instincts, say regional gallery owners, collectors and non-profit art experts.

"If you're not buying the blue-chip-stock kind of painting then you really should buy it because you love it," said Carrie Haddad, director of Carrie Haddad in Hudson. "The artwork has to do something for you."

Haddad represents painters, sculptors and photographers, most of whom

live and work in the Hudson Valley, a source of their inspiration.

“Art is very subjective,” Haddad said. “You and I can be standing in front of the same thing; I’m looking at it and it resonates something sad, while you could look at it and find it uplifting. Either way, you have to allow yourself to feel.”

The nonprofit Dutchess County Arts Council, which aims to provide the leadership, funding, encouragement and services necessary for the highest quality of art to thrive in Dutchess County and the Hudson Valley region, features an art buying guide on its Web site, www.artsmidbudson.org.

“People know how to buy television sets, jewelry, expensive cars, but not art,” said council President Benjamin Krevolin. “We want to start to encourage a culture of art buying. People should feel as comfortable walking into a gallery as they do a car showroom, jewelry store or Circuit City.”

Barbara Esmark approaches her BeGallery in High Falls like a museum. Her no-pressure-to-buy atmosphere encourages visitors to spend time with the work.

“It’s a way to look at as much art as possible and get information about the artist,” she said. “You have to experience it enough to get a sense of what you really like.”

Haddad often arranges studio visits for her clients. “It’s very fun to see where artists live and work,” she said.

She also seeks to build long-term relationships with buyers. “We send them e-mails and tell them, ‘There’s a new artist whose work that we’re showing and we think you might like it,’” Haddad said.

Esmark said a piece should resonate with the buyer. It can be an emotional response. But it also can be an interest in a particular technique or place in art history.

“You’re not going to want to have art in your home that you don’t like or just take somebody else’s word for it,” Esmark said. “You should love it or respond to it in some way. You should have a reason to want the piece that isn’t purely dollar.”

Part-time Accord resident Tracey Dewart, a client of BeGallery, has been collecting the art of friends whose work she believes in since college. Her Hudson Valley home and Chelsea loft are filled with artworks



she has inherited from family members, received as gifts and purchased from artist-friends. She also occasionally buys work from galleries and antique shops.

“Often the pieces that I like are not dictated by trends,” Dewart said. “It’s more of aesthetic value rather than what’s hot at the moment.”

Dewart’s diverse collection includes photographic prints, fine-detailed oil paintings and landscapes as well as works in the abstract expressionist and conceptual styles.

The art enthusiast has bought several pieces from BeGallery, including two by Esmark, one by New Paltz-based artist Judith Hoyt and two pieces — one commissioned — by High Falls artist Kristin Flynn. She has also purchased a decorative piece made by a Mexican artist.

“Bobbi knows my style and we’re close friends, so it’s an informal (gallerist-buyer) relationship,” Dewart said. “But I’m always asking her what’s new.”

Esmark regularly updates her clients about artists whose work they have purchased.

“When somebody has bought something from me I’ll keep them informed of what that artist is doing, if they won an award, got a residency,” Esmark said. “When you buy a piece of art you really have a lifelong relationship with that artist.”

Basic art vocabulary

Medium: The material an artist uses to convey his or her vision. The medium can be paint, glass, bronze, clay, paper, canvas, sound, words or light.

Gallerist: Gallery owner.

Hudson River School: 19th-century art movement that focused on the beauty of the landscape and dramatic use of light.

Composition: The plan, placement or arrangement of the elements of art in a work.

Provenance: Research on the history of ownership of works of art.

Print: Copy of the original work usually reproduced mechanically through techniques that include ink-jet printing — called giclee prints — lithography and archival processing.

Limited Edition: The practice of limiting the number of impressions of a print or photograph. The works are numbered to denote the run of the reproduction.

Artist’s Proof: A single print used by the artist to test the quality of the print itself.

Some information courtesy of the Dutchess County Arts Council.

TIPS FOR NEW COLLECTORS

Start with what you know. “You might like Monet or Picasso or Singer Sargent or Lichtenstein,” says BeGallery owner Barbara Esmark. “Then start finding out what those artists did and who was in their circle. As you educate yourself and become more familiar you may move into more experimental art or emerging artists.”

Purchase an art magazine like *Art News*. “Read about it a little,” Esmark says. “It’s always good to be informed.”

Talk to gallerists. “I really think we can be helpful in terms of talking about art, who are the young artists working in a particular style,” Esmark says.

Go online. “Visit the Web sites of artists and galleries,” Esmark says.

Learn about the work before you buy. “Learn the provenance of the art, who is the artist, where did this piece come in their

career,” Esmark says.

Attend gallery openings. “It’s an open forum to meet the artists, to talk to the artists about what inspired them,” says John Frazee of Arlington Art Gallery.

But to really spend time with the work arrive at the gallery on a different day. “Go the day before the opening, and if you like something, you can buy it before it’s sold,” says Carrie Haddad of Carrie Haddad Gallery.

Don’t forget the student work at local colleges. “Check out the BFA and MFA shows at (State University of New York at) New Paltz, Marist, Bard, even some of the community colleges,” Haddad says. “It’s a great way to discover emerging artists.”

Use local colleges and universities as a resource. “They often have courses you can take, plus their museums usually have

docents you can talk to,” Esmark says. “And always get the headphones; really, you’ll learn a lot.”

Ask the gallery owner to see more. “Most gallery owners have more work in the back room,” says Dutchess County Arts Council President Benjamin Krevolin. “If they are not too busy they can take you back there and introduce you to more work by the artist or work by similar artists. Maybe instead of a 30-by 60-inch oil painting that’s hanging in the gallery you can start off collecting a drawing by the artist that may be in the back.”

Negotiate with the dealer. “Many galleries will let you test-drive a piece of art,” Krevolin says. “They’ll let you take it home for a couple of days and put it on your wall.”

Celebrate your purchase. “When you get a new work of art, have a dinner party to introduce it,” Krevolin says.

Visit galleries often. “People should make a monthly pilgrimage to the galleries to wander through just to see what’s out there,” Krevolin says.

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