

Collecting Art

An Artist's Perspective

By John Bishop & Bogdan Mihai



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There are stacks of guides out there that instruct people as to how to acquire and build art collections, but very few from the point of view of artists. I don't mean to suggest that I know more than the curators of museum collections, art critics, art historians and academics, of historically significant art auction houses, or even of seasoned investment brokers... but I do believe I have a perspective that is different, if only tangentially, to that of these impressive art world leaders.

The world of art can seem confusing, intimidating, and at times overwhelming. Let me just point out that there is nothing that says any of us has to understand and appreciate everything about this international market. Don't allow the vast history, snooty experts, and insane prices scare you away. You are welcome. You have as much right as anyone to be here, and you probably already know more than the vast amount of art collectors anyway.

I went to college, twice, and worked hard to get all the certificates and diplomas needed to start my career, first as a teacher, then as a librarian. So you can tell by my resume that I'm a high achiever with a burning drive to make lots of money and earn recognition as a mover and a shaker. I am often amazed that all anyone has to do to become an artist is say; "I'm an artist." That's it. Sure you can go to school and get diplomas and certificates, but all of that preparation is optional. All you are required to do is want to do it... and you've done it. It's that easy. Now that doesn't mean that you're the best artist, or even a good artist, but you are an artist. The same holds true for art collectors. Have you purchased a piece of art? Congratulations, you're a collector. Now, there are as many winding roads as you would care to explore within that designation, which is true for me as an artist as well.

But if you are waiting for some sort of official recognition, why? Maybe you're different from me and need that process to feel legitimate. Well, if that's true, and you really need to feel validated and recognized, please find the identification card on the last page of this book. Sign it, cut along the dotted line, and you are an official card carrying art collector. So that's all sorted, and my audience is clearly defined.



John Bishop, Cloudburst, Private Collection

I don't mean to appear disrespectful, but so much of the art world appears to me to be about giving yourself the permission to do or to be whatever you want. If I claim to be a fine art painter, then I am. If some highly trained and certificated expert says that I'm not... who cares? I disagree. There is so much to learn about art, art collecting, art appreciation, art history, and the art market, that the real distinction is in the degrees of knowledge and the levels of experience. The best way to gain knowledge and experience is just to start, from wherever you may be along that spectrum. That is precisely where I hope this book will take you. You have your official art collector card all signed, so let's take the next step on this journey.



John Bishop, Intention, Private Collection, from Panca Marga Series

What is Art?

I guess we should start with the most basic of questions. What is art anyway? If you ask 10 different people to define art, you'll likely get 11 different answers. My favorite quote is one that I believe came from a Woody Allen movie, when a character mused: "I know a whole lot about art, but I just don't know what I like."

There are the visual arts of painting, sculpting, drawing, etching, photography, glass work, digital art, graphic design, textiles, jewelry, printmaking, writing, and the like, but there are also performance arts like music, dance, theater, story telling, or even comedy... All of those creative endeavors are wonderful and amazing, but are they all art? If you give an elephant a paintbrush, is there really a difference between what it creates and an abstract, nonrepresentational painting? Can a three year old really paint as well as I do? I have seen splatters of paint on a canvas that if I saw the same stain on my shirt, I would throw the garment in the trash as ruined. Yet people hang that splatter painting on the wall with pride. Is modern art just a joke? If a classical musician bangs pots and pans while screaming... is it progressive and a breakthrough performance, or a tantrum? What makes art, art? And how do you know the difference?

Academically, the definitions I have seen all tend to place art squarely within intention. Something is art if it was created as art. The quilts my grandmother made were frugal attempts to keep her family warm, and not at all meant to be beautiful or inspirational. There are other quilts that I've seen that are truly extraordinary and beautiful. But I know people who say that textile is craft, not art... though I'm not certain I see much difference. Is something art just because someone intended it as such?

If art can be defined by intention, then what can we make of the bowerbird. These birds gather colored stones and debris and arrange them aesthetically with the intention of impressing a potential mate. I bring this up simply because, if we cannot all agree that art is a practice restricted to human beings, how can we be so certain that woodworking is craft, and oil painting is art? And even if we can all agree as to the definition of art, is all art worthy of being collected? The art world may seem complicated, inaccessible, and elitist. So my advice is ignore the parts you don't like. Collect the art that speaks to you, that meets your reasons for building a collection, and only do the fun bits.



Bogdan Mihal, Look Past, Private Collection

Why Collect Art?

People collect for various reasons, and there's no right or wrong way to collect art. Some people are just looking for decorative pieces to beautify their home or office, perhaps matching their art selections to the decor of the room. Others may collect mementos of their holiday destinations, to remind them of vacations with loved ones. Others still may collect art from artists they know, as a means of supporting the creative careers of those they have some connection with. Still others may collect solely for investment purposes, hoping the artwork they acquire will appreciate in value over time. Some wish only to support the arts generally through their generosity. All of these reasons are valid, as well as are any reasons I may have forgotten to list.

Collecting art is as subjective as liking art, but therein lies the creativity. Let that sink in for a moment. There is an art to collecting art. It is a very creative endeavor.

John Bishop, Borderlands, Private Collection





Bogdan Mihai, Rubia, Acrylic on Cardboard

What you chose to collect is a testament as to who you are, not as a creator, but as a collector. As many of you may be, I am old enough to remember books. There was a time when you could tell a lot about people by the books on their bookshelves. People would curate book collections within their homes or offices to reflect a kind of intellectual resume of sorts. One of the first things I do when entering a home is to see if they have a book collection, and then get a sense of what they have chosen to read, and to display. I have to admit that it can be a bit creepy to have someone start scanning your living room shelves, but I've always been totally unapologetic when doing so. I understand that to have a book doesn't mean you espouse the content, or in fact that you have actually read the thing, but it does say something about you as a person. Wasn't it in the Great Gatsby where Nick realizes that none of the books on Gatsby's shelves had had the pages cut? He'd never read any of them. We learned a lot about Gatsby's character with that revelation. The same is true of an art collection. Whatever the lesson to be learned, the type of art someone displays can say a lot about that person. With art, a collector can easily try to impress others with an array of blue chip artworks. I have to admit, that would be a collection that would impress me. But that's not the only way to create a breathtaking display. Sometimes the art collections that most impress me are the artworks assembled with no consideration of me at all. They are curated for some very personal reason that may only make sense to the collector. While you can certainly spend a ton of money on buying art, and building an amazing collection, you don't have to.

Legendary art collectors Herb and Dorothy Vogel were civil servants working in New York, where they lived in a modest one bedroom apartment for 50 years. They had no art training. Herb tried his hand at painting, but gave up and decided to collect art instead. They had no aspirations of opening a gallery or a museum, but the couple did have a plan. At some point they decided that they would live off Dorothy's salary, and spend Herb's income on art. They scoured the city's artist studios, purchased what they liked, what they could afford, and only bought art that they could carry home on the subway. If they found a piece they couldn't afford, they would make a deal, or spend money previously earmarked for a vacation. If they simply had to have a piece of art, they tried to find a way to obtain it. The couple developed relationships with the artists, and the artists loved them in return. When Herb and Dorothy showed up at the studio, it meant good things were about to happen. The Vogels not only were there to support the artists emotionally, but they also paid cash.

The couple eventually amassed a priceless collection of approximately 4,000 works of the most important art of the 1960s and 70s. They were famous, at least in the New York art scene, and were even included in that rarified, snooty, exclusive world traditionally associated with fine art.

Folks like Herb and Dorothy in a sense are the product of their era. A hundred years ago, I'm not sure that amassing an art collection on a middle class salary would have been possible. Historically, it was only the very wealthy who could afford to collect art. And those collections were one path the richest members of the society had to show their status to others. But I don't want to give the wrong impression here either. There is absolutely nothing wrong with people enjoying their wealth by surrounding themselves with the fineries of life. One of the reasons people spend more on luxury is because those items tend to be better. I think it is a remarkable thing to realize that all of us, no matter where we land on the economic spectrum, have an appreciation for art. And thanks to our political and social surroundings, collecting art is now approachable for almost anyone.



John Bishop, Hope, Mixed Media on Canvas

So let's turn now to you. Assuming that you've not already started in earnest, what will your art collecting experience be like? Will you set aside a budget like the Vogels did? How will you spend it? What will guide your selections? Will you allow yourself to make exceptions to your rules? It truly is up to you to decide. And it may be that your tastes change as the years go by. I know one collector who has filled his apartment with cheap prints of famous artworks. The living room is filled with Impressionists, the bedroom with abstracts, etc. He allows himself to purchase only one original painting per year, and his budget for that purchase fluctuates based on his finances. His goal is to gradually replace

all of the prints with originals, but he doesn't want to have to wait years to surround himself with art that inspires him. He researches and shops all year to make the best purchase he can in that cycle, then he moves on to the next. He told me that the style, genre and artist he selects changes year to year as his tastes evolve and develop. If he can't afford the classic painting he loves, he tries to identify the elements or feelings that he likes about that famous work. He then looks for those same elements and feelings in the painting of an emerging artist. One that he can afford. In that way, he is able to articulate precisely what he sees in the piece he buys, using the inspirational, classical work of art as his reference.

I was very impressed with his approach, though I can honestly say I've never bought a piece of art with that much thought. I just buy what I like, when I can afford it. But what amazed me about his process was that he could dedicate a full year to research and reflect before rewarding himself with a painting he really loved... and he could tell you why he loved it. He seemed to me to be creating more than a collection of beautiful paintings, but a graduated system of learning that rewarded him along the way. It struck me as his own interpretation of an art degree, where each purchase moved him further along in his studies. I also realized that this was to be a lifelong passion, not a decorating project. Whether you can appreciate his reasoning, or you think he's mad, he is a collector, and will likely be one for the rest of his life.

Another of our collectors uses art to build the overall mood of a room. The colors, movement, and subject matter can add to the reaction anyone has entering the space to make them feel more comfortable, peaceful, or animated. The furnishings, wall colors, and art all work together to create an experience. He curates his artwork carefully to construct his vision for a space. And having seen his collection, it is a very effective strategy indeed.

What do you collect? Experts suggest that quality is better than quantity, particularly when looking at the archival properties of an artwork. And quality does not necessarily mean price. A more expensive piece of art does not make it a better piece of art. Buy what you love, because at the end of the day, you have to live with it. Your budget will likely evolve over time, but your criteria

may stay the same. Be mindful of the archival properties of a piece. Paper can last for thousands of years, but only if the paper is archival to start with. Sometimes artists try to make a statement by working with fugitive materials, but those materials may not be the best selections for a permanent art collection. I know a printer who prints her art on ice, just to watch it melt away to nothing. Others may paint on leaves, or non traditional media like cardboard. I saw an amazing collection in Malta of the life of Jesus depicted in pasta art. Realize the responsibility you take on when trying to preserve these fugitive pieces of art. Sculptures made with Spam are not always the best art to pass on to your kids. I myself started to sketch and paint on old pages from books that had been destroyed. I loved the look of the paintings, and how the ink and paint responded to the dry paper. It never occurred to me that the actual pages, already slightly brown around the edges after 50 years, may turn completely dark in 50 more. I've started printing those images on archival paper, and I've tried to spray the originals with products to retard the aging process. The truth is, I have no idea what that paper will do over time. As a collector, it's best to ask those questions up front, as artists may not be thinking of the long term life of their work. They may be caught up in a whirl of creative impulse. Hold them to account, and know what media they are using.

Be sure to define your goals. That will impact what you purchase and determine the kind of collection you end up creating. A plan may also help you to be more deliberate in how you grow a collection. The Vogels eventually had to start donating their artwork to galleries and museums because they could no longer fit inside their apartment. How large will your collection grow, and what is the plan for a collection that exceeds the room you have to display it? Consider that collectors at certain stages in their growth may need to hire a professional to help them recalibrate along the way.

If you're buying art as an investment, know that art investing is very speculative. A safer bet may be to collect mid-career over established artists, whose prices may be at a premium. Lately, even well known artists have proven to be no guarantee. You need to purchase the right pieces, from the right artists.

A simple search on Ebay can reveal an original Picasso sketch on sale for a few hundred dollars, but not all Picasso's are created equal. By all accounts I've seen, art appears to be a fairly sound investment, but it's not like buying precious metals. There is a lot of risk involved. Then there are those stories of people who do invest in a blue chip painting only to find out later that it was stolen, or a forgery. I personally can't imagine ever buying a piece of art simply as an investment, but for those who do, always be aware of the risks involved, and seek out the professional advice commensurate with the money involved.

My assumption is that you've already started collecting art, but have reached an inflection point in the process of becoming a serious collector. I'm guessing you already have purchased some pieces, and you find joy in surrounding yourself with art. I'm hoping that you are feeling the tug toward diving deeper into this new pursuit, and don't know if you should start fresh, or build on what you already have. Remember when you realized that it was time to get rid of that college furniture because it looked horrible in your new home? There was a real emotional attachment you had to that moosehead, or that wagon-wheel coffee table, but you knew it didn't quite go with the mid-century split level you just bought. I imagine you standing in front of the moving van, and questioning if you really want to pay someone to unload that yellow sectional sofa you bought at an estate sale during your sophomore year at university?

John Bishop, Cubist Dream, Private Collection



My advice would always be to look both ways to see if neighbors are watching, then unload the sofa. You can always dump it later. I try never to create an excuse for not moving forward. Unless you hung a picture on the wall as the song lyric says, "to hide a nasty stain that's lying there", you doubtless purchased the painting for some other reason. Understand that reason before you jettison art from your life. Add to what you've started, and let your collection development plan determine where your collection will grow over time. There's no hurry.

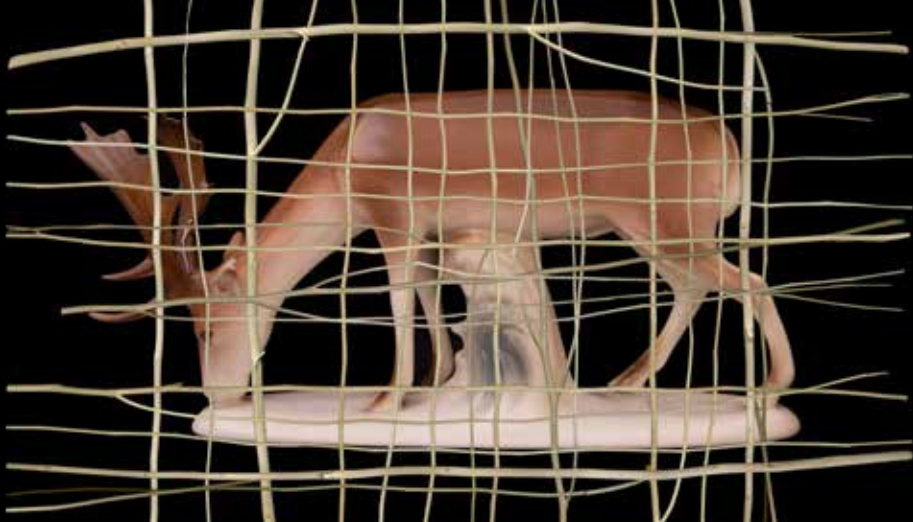
Where does one go to find art? Well that may depend on what you've decided your collection development goals will be. If you decide to collect only what you love, then you'll need to look everywhere. You will need to expose yourself to as much art as possible so as to grab a piece when you see it. It's a lot like scouring antique shops. I don't have anything in particular in mind when rummaging through stand after stand, but when I spot something I like, I buy it. If you're limiting yourself to buying mementos of holidays, schedule time during your vacation to visit local galleries and art studios. It can be an exciting excursion that gets you out of the sun for a few hours, as well as taking you away from the tourist traps adjacent to your hotel.

Another filter may be price. If you decide to limit yourself to art that costs less than \$500, you will need to stick to resale shops, artist studios, and estate sales. Check your local art society or art school, often students and society members will have periodic sales. If you are interested in collecting more expensive pieces, your time may be better spent in galleries, artist studios, or at auctions. If you find artists you like, check out their websites. Most will have their art for sale online. There are also internet platforms that sell art. Artsy.net, Saatchi.com are a couple, but even Ebay and Amazon may have art for sale. I mentioned visiting artist studios. That is a great way to shop for art, with the added benefit of getting to meet the artist in person. Then there are art fairs, and some of those are huge. The benefit of an art fair is that not only do you get to chat about the work with the artist or gallerist, but also get to enjoy the whole exciting experience surrounding the art fair itself. It's fun to hang with your tribe.

Remember that there are no rules. Don't get me wrong, it's super important to have a plan, but at the end of the day, it's your plan, and you can change it. You might look to others to help you avoid some pitfalls or difficulties, but this is all about you. So if you bought and framed a velvet painting of dogs playing poker, that's great... for now anyway.

Speaking of dogs playing poker, at some point when developing your collection criteria, you'll end up asking a couple of questions. One is whether or not all art is worthy of collecting, and the other is whether or not a particular piece of art fits into your collection plan. Taking the first question, I think we've already established that collections are very personal, and that each of us should collect what we love. That said, I should confess that I have a fairly robust collection of ceramic pixies. You know, those ghastly little porcelain statues of green elves that were created in the 1950s. Sometimes they sit on a shelf, play musical instruments, or serve as planters for ivy cuttings? Yes, those pixies. I inherited a box of these creatures when my grandmother died. Oddly enough none of the other relatives seemed to want them. I scoured the shops and ebay auctions for pixies for years until I met my husband. Apparently, just because I liked them, and had a bunch of them, that didn't seem to make them interesting to anyone else. We've all seen those people who have private museums filled with rocks, beer cans, Barbie dolls, or arrow heads... and none of us wants to ask any of these people about their collections for fear of having to listen to their answers. So the same question can be asked of art collectors as well. What keeps the art collector from seeming like the creepy shell enthusiast who has a warehouse filled with dead mollusks? Why are some collections housed in esteemed museums while others are roadside attractions?

I think most of us can instantly tell the difference between a collector, and a hoarder, but granting that you plan to be the former, how can you know what art is collectable, and what is not? Unfortunately, the answer to that question is subjective, but there are some serious things to consider.



Bogdan Mihai, Reindeer, Photography, from the Nature Remembered series

While I cannot be certain that the art I collect will appreciate in value over time, I can include parameters around my collection that strengthen that possibility. Generally, I want the artwork that I collect to be of archival quality. I'm thrilled that someone purchased a banana taped to a wall at a prestigious art fair, but that purchase won't seem as impressive in a week or two. I already mentioned the artist who does printmaking on ice. The work is amazing, but it is designed to disappear. It is important to me that the artwork that I create will be something that will last well past my lifetime. There are issues with fugitive materials, poor qualities in art supplies and strata, substandard glues, high acid content, and sensitivity to light, heat, and humidity. As was mentioned before, be sure to ask artists about those materials, as well as their inspiration.

Do you want to collect original art rather than reproductions? Most fine art prints, or giclées, are certainly wonderful, still very collectable, and tend to be far more accessible to most budgets. A fine art print is still fine art. Remember too that some works are only available as prints. Photography is a printed medium, as are many printmaking pieces. Prints of artwork are more collectable in editions or series. Having a signed and numbered piece is most important when collecting this type of art. The fewer copies that are created, the more collectable these editions become.



Bogdan Mihai, Autumn Sunset, Photography, from the Melancholia series

There's another conversation to have with an artist when buying prints. How does the artist handle editions of the work? As a general rule, an artist will create a finite number of prints of any given piece, then each piece in that series is signed and numbered until the print run has been exhausted. No further prints are created. So if you find a photographer who has an edition of five, that means no more than five prints will ever be made of that photo. That severely limits the ability of the artists to earn from that run, and the price goes up as the number of prints goes down. It is possible too that the price of the first two in the series are lower than the remaining three. The artist will make no further money once the edition has sold out.

As a byproduct of the printing process, artists may also create a few extra copies in a print series as artist proofs. The printing company would supply the artist with a few sample copies that would be approved by the artist, before the rest of the print job was run. They are a way for the printer to allow the artist to check a print for errors. Imagine having to throw away an entire print run due to a glitch in the printing process. These copies will be signed and instead of carrying a number in the edition series, they will be marked AP (Artist Proof). These prints are often held by artists until after the original edition has been exhausted, and may be sold as well. There are usually very few artist proofs printed. You may want to ask the artist how many artist proofs were created, just to understand exactly how many copies of the image may be out there on the market. Scarcity improves price, and value over time.

But not all prints are in a limited edition. Some are open editions, where artists may print many, many copies over the span of their career. Those prints are of less value, since they're much easier to get.

A word of warning though. I have noticed that not all artists treat their prints in the same way. Firstly, ensure that the paper used for printing is of an archival quality. Cheap paper could yellow or deteriorate over time. Also, ask about the ink used in printing. Most current inks are made from soy, which is used for mass production and is not archival. The inks that last are pigmented inks, meaning they are made from paint pigments instead of plant based inks. They are permanent, and archival. You may notice some artists will mention that their prints are archival pigment prints. That's what they're telling you. Be sure to ask if they don't say so.

Another discrepancy I've noticed is that some artists will define an edition differently. For example, when we sell an editioned print of five, that means there will never be more than five copies of that work printed. If we print a copy that measures 12 inches by 12 inches, that is one copy of the total five copies in the edition. If we print another piece measuring 36 x 36 inches, that will be the second print out of the five total prints. Does that make sense? Having said that, there are some artists who claim they are creating an edition of five, but they count each printed size as a separate edition. In their system, they can print five 12x12 inch copies, five 16x16 inch copies, five 36x36 inch copies, and so on. In reality, there can be a huge number of copies printed in their limited editions. This practice seems dishonest to me, but it would serve you well to have that discussion with the artist or gallerist before you buy. It's best to know all of that beforehand. If you find an artist who seems to be charging very little for a small limited edition print, be certain you understand what they mean by a limited edition.

Bogdan Mihai, Journey, Photography, from the Inheritance series



Where Do I Start?



Bogdan Mihai, Equinox, Photography, from the Synapses series

It's tricky to know where to begin, even if you've already started collecting art. To a certain extent, when you buy your first piece of art, you've become an art collector. You're not a truck driver just because you drive a truck, and you're not a baker just because you pull a pie out of the oven, or a drunk because you have a beer. But if you fall in love with a piece of art, and buy it to keep, you really are an art collector. If you're still in doubt, don't forget your official membership card can still be found on the last page of this book. But you may not feel like a collector, and want some advice at the start.

I don't know about you, but there are times it seems like the very last person you should ask for advice is an expert. Joseph Campbell, the celebrated writer and educator of comparative religion recounted in an interview that he was once approached by someone while waiting for a public bus. The man asked him in a confident voice, "Do you believe in God?" Campbell said he furtively looked at his watch, and then responded; "Well, um, I'm not sure you have time for my answer."

I worked for many years as a librarian. In the olden days, before the internet, people would get in the car and drive to the library to find answers to their questions. Librarians would stand behind

the desk, and provide people with a path to finding the answers they sought. Sounds simple, but it was never simple. What we learned as librarians is that people almost never asked the question that they wanted answered. No one wants to look dumb. To walk up to a complete stranger, often in a line of people where others could overhear your question, and admit that you don't know anything, was really awkward. People would try to formulate sophisticated questions based on their very limited knowledge of a subject that often didn't make much sense. The librarian's job was to find a way to ask them questions, without making them feel dumb, so as to determine the real information they were looking for.

I have to say, I think the art world is very similar. People will come into the studio and try to impress us with their knowledge of art, and not really know how to ask the question they're trying to ask. The most common question I get in the studio in that genre is about photography. Probably once a week someone will come in and look at one of Bogdan's fine art photos and ask, "Is that a print?" Well, all photos are prints right? Often what they're asking is if that is an image that has been printed on a printer, or by means of a photographic emulsion process, or some liquid developing system... like we used to do with film in the darkroom. Still others may be asking a question about an edition, or the size of a print run. The point is, they don't always ask the right question, and the wrong answer can turn a potential collector off forever.

I recently went to visit art galleries in Arizona, and the number of gallery personnel who either ignored me, or let me know I was not welcome, was shocking to me. One even had a rope just inside the door barring entry. "We're only open to appointments." he informed me. So why was his door unlocked with a lighted open sign? He invited me in from the sidewalk, then told me I was not welcome. Was it me he was rejecting? Did I not look serious enough? Not wealthy enough? Guess who'll never go to that gallery again? But other galleries welcomed me, offered me a drink, and engaged with me in conversation about the art I seemed to respond to. I wrote the names of those galleries down to research, and possibly to visit again.

So where do you go as a collector if you want to know more, but are either blown away by people who are too expert in their responses, or who treat you as inferior for not asking questions the right way? While you don't want to let others sway you too much, it is super important that you start to find an art community. They may seem snooty at first, and they may make you question your knowledge, and doubt your collection's worth, but don't let them. You've already accepted that your collection plan is as valid as any other, so their inadequacies needn't sway you excessively. Finding an art community is not intended to judge you and your collection, but to inspire you, and to identify a tribe where you belong. Toy train enthusiasts have few people they can share their passions with, so finding a group of like minded geeks can be truly helpful. An art collector group can introduce you to artists you don't know, share experience others in the group have gained over time, help to problem-solve issues peculiar to art collectors, and share the joys unique to art enthusiasts. I would caution that it's important not to hang out with people who make you feel dumb, or who appear judgemental, arrogant, or dishonest. We all learned that in high school. Not all friends are created equal. But when you find that right group of like-minded, inspirational, inclusive, and supportive enthusiasts, it can change the whole trajectory of your art collecting journey. So start to attend art openings, gallery events, open studio days, galas, museum lectures, and art fairs. Start to recognize people, learn about what goes on in your arts community, and eventually start to mingle with the people that seem simpatico. These relationships can last a lifetime, and can be of immeasurable help as you and your collection grow.

Educate yourself about the styles of art, media, and artists. Visit museums, galleries, and artist studios. Do research online and keep a journal. Join groups of other interested collectors, both in person and online. Figure out what you like, and then start to investigate why you like it. Is it abstraction, realism, photography, sculpture, mid-century modern, Russian avant-garde? The more you can familiarize yourself with art, the clearer you will become about your personal preferences, and therefore clearer about what you want to collect.

As your collection development plan becomes clearer, it may become important to know where to find the particular artworks you want to collect. When I was collecting ceramic pixies, I only wanted to purchase figurines that were created in the 1950s or 1960s. None of those new fangled pixies for me. If you decide that you are only going to collect realistic depictions of landscapes done in oil, you can scour the internet, antique shops, art auctions, and artist studios looking for those pieces. If you decide that you will only collect mid-century Spanish surrealists, you will doubtless spend much more time at specialty auctions, galleries, and making trips abroad. It wouldn't make any sense at all to come to my art studio in search of realism or Spanish art.

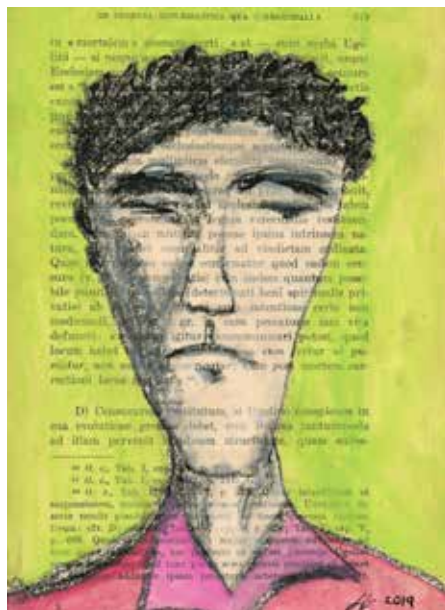
If on the other hand, you chose to collect art exclusively from artists you've met in person, that's going to rule out many auctions and gallery purchases. Spending days wandering through art fairs and artist studios will be far more fruitful. It also allows you to build those personal anecdotes and stories that often enrich private art collections. By the way, if you haven't run into this yet, very often the story about a piece of art in your collection is as important as the piece of art itself. I can't tell you how often telling the story of a painting has clinched a sale. I find that collectors want more than just decoration for their homes. They are looking for a connection with a piece, with an artist, and the story of what inspired me to paint a particular image. The message I had in mind when I painted it, only enhances their experience of the purchase. Don't believe me? Ask an art collector about a painting or sculpture in their home. There will be an amazing story associated with most everything they have on display. Meeting the artist, remembering rummaging through the boxes of art in her studio, noticing the spark in her voice when she told you the inspiration of the piece, all feed into the story of your art collection. Take a photo with the artist, sign up for her newsletter, write down your memories of the experience. Don't ever underestimate the importance of the story of an art collection. It's a huge part of the process, and will greatly enhance your overall enjoyment of collecting art.

Where you look for art may depend a lot on your level of comfort with risk. If you are collecting blue chip art as an investment, it's probably best to buy from a reputable auction house or gallery. These folks have done work to authenticate artworks against forgery, damage, and know the market value of the works in question. Don't ever forget that you can build great relationships with gallerists, curators, and art experts just as much as you can with individual artists. Nurture relationships with the kinds of people who can help you build the art collection you desire. If these professionals know what you collect, they can also let you know when pieces surface that match your interests and criteria.

The secondary art market is just such an environment. The primary market refers to the act of buying a work directly from an artist, or a gallery, where you are the first owner of that piece of art. There is a direct link between you and the artist. The secondary market refers to art that is resold. That could be at an estate sale, an auction, a gallery, or someone clearing out grandma's house. It is the secondary market that can get tricky. While often the market value of a piece is determined, based on prior sales of a particular artist's work or the art movement represented, or even when the piece was created. Every piece is unique. It is always best to approach the secondary market through experts, even if the prices are elevated. We've all heard of people finding masterpieces at garage sales, but we've also heard of people unknowingly purchasing fakes or stolen artwork. What's vital in the secondary market is to be as clear as possible on the provenance of a work. How can that particular artwork be traced back to as close to the artist as possible? Obviously that becomes more difficult the older a piece is, but a clear provenance, and a sound market valuation is key when purchasing in the secondary art market. It's one thing to risk ten bucks on a possible Rembrandt, quite another to risk thousands on a possible fake.

That's why purchasing from a reputable gallery or art auction becomes so important. They clearly will charge a percentage for the artwork sold, but realize their business model. They have invested a whole lot to get that piece of art in front of you.

They not only have to provide the brick and mortar venue, but also pay the bills, employ personnel, insure themselves, contract relationships with living artists, pay those commissions, and buy the champagne you sip while shopping. They also have had to verify all of that provenance, and do all of the associated homework to guarantee that they've not been fooled by a forgery or stolen work. Their business is their reputation, so they have a great deal at stake in the transaction. Their expertise is also very helpful in knowing which pieces are valuable, and the price points each demands. Picasso brings a high price, but not everything Picasso created is equally valuable.



John Bishop, Johnny, Private Collection

Working with an Artist



John Bishop, Rekindle, Mixed Media on Canvas

Now as an artist, I would like to make the case for purchasing art directly from art studios. Depending on your collection goals, don't forget that the best provenance is having a direct connection with the artist. Hopefully you are surrounding yourself with artwork that you enjoy, and I always say the time to buy a piece of art is when you fall in love with it. If you come into my studio, and see a painting you simply must have, then you not only have the story to tell about meeting the artist, but you can dialog with me about the piece, why I created it, and what I was trying to say when painting it. Unlike a gallery sale, the money you pay me I get to keep, without having to share that income with anyone else. You also begin a relationship with me that means I can let you know when I have created new work, or you can visit again and again to see what I'm up to. You can support my career, either because you like me, or because my success means your investment appreciates over time. Both or either help me as an artist.

There are some things that you need to require of me as an artist though. First of all you need to ensure that I give you a certificate of authenticity. (If you've bought my work and I haven't given you this certificate, let me know and I'll print one for you.)

This certificate should have all of the information about that piece of art, my name, a date, a price, a picture of the art, titles, sizes, materials, and anything else that creates the provenance that will follow that painting. It, along with the signed artwork, will prove a direct relationship between you and the artist. Many people who support emerging artists think it unlikely to become a necessary document, given that the artist is unknown and the work isn't likely to become an appreciably valuable asset over time. To be honest, I realize that my art won't likely be fought over at a Christie's auction after my death. I do however have a responsibility to be professional in my art career. The certificate of authenticity might be something you will one day need if you decide to sell the artwork, want to have it appraised for value, insure it, or pass it on to a relative or museum collection. It is standard in the art world, so require that we artists do our job as well.

Which brings up the issue of buying art online. This may be a generational issue, but I know artists who have sold significantly expensive artworks over the internet. Some artists sell most of their inventory online. So even though I may be a bit too old to appreciate it, online art sales are a thing. As risky as it may seem to you to buy artwork you've not seen in person, know too that there are a steady stream of scammers who try to take advantage of artists selling art online. I hazard to say that I easily get a couple of bogus requests a month. The most common is an interested buyer who is looking to purchase a piece of my art for a spouse's birthday, or anniversary. The pitch varies a bit, but ends up with a sketchy payment procedure that will cost an artist the money and the painting. It makes us all a bit spooked.

Please don't be surprised if you do try to purchase something directly from an artist's webpage, and they are a bit cautious at the start. Having said that, I had a similar request from a gentleman who contacted me to buy his wife a piece for her birthday. I almost deleted the request, but he knew the specific piece, and the price of the piece when he saw it two years prior. That seemed odd to me, but although I thought he was still trying to scam me, I kept the conversation going. As it turned out, he was legitimate.

He and he and his wife had seen the painting two years earlier when visiting my studio, and she had loved the painting... he bought it, I shipped it out of state, they verified receipt, and hopefully they enjoy the art in their home. I think I've only had a handful of online sales over the years, but I list everything on my website, and on third party online art platforms just in case. The research says that most who purchase art online skew younger, and it seems like the price is the determining factor in most sales. If a piece is relatively inexpensive, people are more likely to take the risk of buying artwork sight unseen. The beauty for artists is that we can actually reach a global market without having to contract our work out to galleries. Know that it is an option as you build your ideal collection.

If you are collecting living artists, let's talk more about working directly with an artist when building your collection. As I mentioned, it can be so helpful to nurture a relationship directly with an artist. You not only get some insight into the inspirations and process of the creation of a piece, but you also gain a better understanding of where a piece of art falls in the overall production of that artist. Is it a new piece? Is the work representative of the artist's style, or is it something new, different, out of the ordinary? You can also get a sense of where artists are going in their careers. Art is a business, and it seems that so few artists understand that. When following the personal and professional trajectory of artists, you can start to understand how their work is priced, how it is being received, how it is moving, and how the art is being promoted. So often artists who are wonderfully talented go unnoticed, while others with far less talent seem to soar to fame and success. Are the artists you collect good at promoting themselves? Is there anything you can do to help?

Now, you may buy only pieces of art that you love, and have no real interest in collecting as an investment. I understand that completely, but at the same time, I know that I would love to see the artists I support thrive and succeed. It may not be important to me right now, but I would like for the art I collect to appreciate in value over time. As a collector, part of my investment in artists may be to promote those artists' careers. The greater their success, the more valuable and interesting my art collection becomes. It also makes showing off my collection a lot more fun.

Do your homework on an artist. New artists can be less expensive, but are they any good? Check their CVs. Have they done solo shows? Have they been written about in the press? What is their history of exhibitions, both solo and group shows? Have they been selected into juried shows? Are they participating in thriving art communities? Are they represented by galleries? Are they active on social media? See how others are reacting to their content on social media.

Start a file on the artists you collect. Gather notes, articles, gallery invitations, and photos chronicling their art careers. If the artists don't have much of a presence, promote them on your social media. Subscribe to their newsletters, frequent their studios, or write them letters if they live far away. Build your own dossier on the artists you follow, and imagine how you can be a part of their success. Artists can be very private and solitary creatures, but I don't know of any artists who would not be thrilled to know that a collector was supporting and promoting them. If you are worried about overstepping, develop the relationship with the artist until those boundaries become clearer.

There is always the possibility that you love the work of a particular artist, but you can't stand to be in the same room together. Being a collector does not require that you become best friends with an artist. All I am suggesting is that being an art collector can entail more than just buying art. Building as much of a relationship as possible with an artist can greatly enhance the enjoyment of collecting, and can have a real and direct effect on the overall success of that artist's career. If you cannot stand an artist's personality, hygiene, or politics, you're not obliged to do more than buy the art you love. It may be that an artist makes you angry, does something unethical, or lacks the talent and growth needed to succeed. We're all human, and do dumb things. You will ultimately have to decide which artists warrant your support, and the level to which that support may rise.

I love telling this story. There is an artist here in town who was discovered by a group of successful women. They liked him, enjoyed his work, and purchased paintings from him. As a group, they decided to support him by taking charge of his promotion.

The group meet regularly with him, offer coaching and mentorship, write press releases, handle his PR, take care of his marketing, website, event bookings, social media posts, get articles written about him, and write his newsletters for him. He has a volunteer marketing team whose only interest is his success. What a sweet deal! He enjoys the benefit of their expert knowledge, workload sharing, and mentorship, while they get to be part of something they all love and support. You can imagine how grateful he is, and how deep that relationship bond is between them. Let's be honest, as a collector, there are only so many paintings one can buy. At some point, we all run out of wall space. Collectors are sometimes at a loss as to how they can still show support, when they simply can't buy another piece of art. Find creative ways to show your patronage, even if it doesn't involve giving cash.

I don't know if you've noticed this, but many of us artists aren't all that good at running a business. Many artists I've met bemoan the fact that they must be business people at all, but we are all small business owners... like it or not. Often the support we need comes from finding others who can help in some of the areas where we lack knowledge or skill. The problem is of course we tend not to have the money to pay for that level of expertise. I recently heard someone proposing that an artist collaborate with business people for a percentage of the artist's business revenue. What an amazing approach! The idea was that professional business people would invest their time and expertise into building a business model for an artist's career. Maybe something like the Sharks. They would meet regularly, evaluate finances and expenses, project manage as needed, and strategically plan with the artist a business plan that met its goals and ROI. Again, this sort of arrangement would only make sense if there were the appropriate relationship between the parties involved, but it does seem to be a creative approach to supporting artists where the support is most needed.

It's important here to remember that artists are human, and may not be clear about their own goals or business plan. As you develop the relationship with the artists you collect, evaluate where they fall on that continuum. It's important here to remember that artists are human, and may not be clear about their own goals or business plan. As you develop the relationship with the artists

you collect, evaluate where they fall on that continuum. What they're ready for and how much risk they can take? I know for myself that I would welcome support, but I also know that I have been burned in the past. My art career is sacred to me, and I would be terrified by the notion that someone could come in and take advantage of my lack of knowledge and business acumen. It has happened before. I have paid people to help me with web design, only to be left with no website and less cash. I sought coaching advice that turned out to be formulaic and nonspecific to my needs. I have participated in networking opportunities that turned out to be virtually useless to a career in art. I have had people offer to help with marketing, social media growth, graphic design, and editing who ended up not offering a professional quality of work. As a small business owner, I often feel like I can't afford to make yet another mistake. So when you are imagining how you can help an artist, don't be surprised if your excellent ideas are not instantly embraced. That's where the importance of the relationship kicks in. The singer Prince lost the right to use his own name due to a business contract, so don't blame us if we seem a bit cautious when opening the door to our most valued and personal business enterprise. Taking baby steps seems to be the wisest course.

More traditional ways of helping artists, especially when you have already purchased a few of their works, is to commission artwork. That allows you to pay the artist to do a particular creative job, but in return get something that you specifically want or need. So let's talk a bit about commissions.

Some artists love commission work, while others run from those projects. Most of us fall somewhere in between. Let's go back to the issue of having been burned in the past. I don't know a single artist who has not been approached by a client, who is very excited and sincere in ordering a particular commission project, and then never being heard from again. It has certainly happened to me. As a result, most artists will not undertake any commission work without half of the money down, and a signed contract.



John Bishop, Champagne, Private Collection

The problem comes when the person requesting the commission is a current collector, and the artist doesn't want to appear suspicious or ungrateful. I had one client come in and request a large painting, exactly like the one in the studio, but only in red rather than blue. I didn't want to put her through the contract negotiations, because I thought it might seem aggressive, so I created a series of four smaller pieces on paper for her to review. I did the four paintings, and she never responded and never returned. They're still for sale if anyone is interested. Don't be discouraged or surprised if artists are less than enthusiastic about commission projects, and be open enough to show good faith when protecting their rights. The abstracts I did for the client mentioned above I can always sell to other customers. If I paint a portrait of your mom, there's far less market for that painting. No one else is going to buy a picture of your dog, or of your beach house.

The other issue with commissions is that many artists don't want to be limited in their expression. If you come to me and ask me to paint a still life of fruit on a plate, and when I'm finished, you come back and say that you want a pear instead of a fig, because you don't like figs, and it should be on this type of plate, because your grandmother left you this specific pattern of china when she died... You've contracted the wrong artist. Some artists are excellent in that sort of painting, and I can give you some names, but don't expect that all artists are interested in relinquishing that level of control. The ideal commission for me is someone who allows me to interpret a subject, or even a portrait, in my own way, in my own style, as I see fit. I feel like a patron is purchasing my art, not the art they would paint.

I remember a collector who asked Bogdan to create a photograph of Madrid, where she was from. That was the only directive, and Bogdan created an amazing composite image of the reflections of the city lights in a downtown cafe on the streets of Madrid. The client was totally surprised. I think she was expecting some sort of tourist photo of an iconic building in the city. What she got was a glimpse into something recognizable to anyone who has ever experienced nightlife in Madrid. An image that evoked the pulse of the city, the excitement of countless tapas bars and urban cafes frequented by those meeting friends, gathering after the theater, or having a nightcap before returning home.

She loved the piece, and it surprised her. I think that is the hallmark of good art. Had she dictated precisely what she wanted to see, it would have been less exciting to look at, and a whole lot less interesting for the artist who created it.

There are another couple of things that collectors should always consider when working with artists, and both are about money. Can we all agree that there is no such thing as the benefit of exposure? Artists hear this all the time, and it is so hard to talk about. There is doubtless a benefit for many people to see my work, and when I am recognized, I may stand a better chance of making a sale. Ok, I understand that. I do. But if you had as many people as we do ask us for donations of our art, to host pop up shows, perform live painting sessions, teach classes, and decorate party venues, you'd understand the other side of that argument. Loading artwork into a van, unloading and displaying the work, spending time at an event, loading it all back into the van, and bringing it all back to the studio does remarkably little for my business. Exposure may have some value, but it won't pay the bills. Exposure most often costs me money, and takes me away from selling to clients in my studio, or keeps me away from creating new work. When working with artists, please promote the idea of exposure as little as possible. We are under so much pressure to give our time and art away for free that it is often not something most of us want to consider.

The other issue is pricing. While most artists will be able to be somewhat flexible in pricing, it is a very slippery slope. As you work with an artist, find out how they approach pricing.

I know many artists who price a work based on how much they like it. They know how much work went into a piece, and may charge more for work that was more difficult, or work they consider to be “better”. Still others may charge more for pieces that are more expensive to create. I know an artist who uses gold leaf in her paintings. I use gold paint. She invests a whole lot more into a 16x20 inch painting than I do. Her expenses are higher, and she needs to make more on a piece of art. Personally, I charge based on a price per square inch... regardless of the cost of materials or my attachment to a painting. I charge less for works on paper, and when I raise my prices, all of my work becomes more expensive, not just the new work.

Now I do sometimes offer deals to my collectors, or to those who buy multiple pieces, but I am somewhat cautious in doing so. You see, I look at my art business as a lifetime enterprise. When I sell my work to a collector, the assumption we both make is that the artwork purchased is worth a certain amount. The collector would like to think that if she sold the painting on the secondary market, she could get at least what she paid for the artwork. I believe I have a responsibility to my collectors to not undercut what they paid for a piece of art by selling a similar piece to someone else for less. That may sound silly for an artist like me, who is not commanding high prices, but it is something I take seriously.

Artists who are represented by galleries are often required to raise prices back in their studios. For the gallery to make any profit, it must sell artwork for a good deal more than artists would in their own studios. Gallerists have many expenses that require that markup, and everyone can understand that. They must pay for a brick and mortar venue, receptions, marketing, insurance, shipping, art fair booths, etc... But if a gallery is selling my art for \$2,000, and I am only charging \$800 for similar work in my studio, there is a problem. The same dynamic occurs at art fairs, and on some online platforms. We artists may not be able to be as flexible as some might think in our pricing, and clients who try to haggle can often walk away disgusted at an artist's perceived arrogance and inflexibility.



Bogdan Mihai, Madrid de Noche, Photography, Private Collection

Buying Art as an Investment



John Bishop, Refuge, Acrylic on Canvas, from the Earthen Series

After record highs, the art market seems to be cooling. Luxury goods are still doing quite well, but art purchases seem to be leveling out. That could be a sign of a declining market, but it also may just be fluctuations tied with the economic times. Now that the economy seems to be strengthening, we should know soon if the prior years' successes were a trend or an exception. As far as I can tell, there doesn't seem to be any sort of crash on the horizon. Art sales may have dipped of late, but it's important to remember that there is not just one art market, there are many. Remember too that people do not tend to sell art when the economy is low. Like houses, sellers are reluctant to list their home when they may get less money for a sale. What we may be experiencing now could be simply that there are fewer artworks on the market, which in turn would deflate the sales figures cited. Even though general sales may be lower overall, there have still been individual sales that are record breakingly high. It is always complicated to try to guess how any market will behave, and art is no exception. My sincere belief though is that most of the folks reading this booklet are not purchasing art at that level. It's good to keep an eye on the overall art market, with its drama and flare. As art collectors, it's exciting to follow the high end of that market. It's what we do, and what we love.

But is buying art from local art studios a good investment? You bet it is. Even if we can exclude the possibility that the art we purchase will sell at international art sales for hundreds of millions of dollars, that doesn't imply that the art we collect is worthless. Supporting the career of an artist whose work you admire is vital. Creating an income that can support artists, and the growth and development of their art over time is what art collectors do. If you really want to invest in art in such a way that your collection appreciates in value, then buy an artist's work, and promote that artist in any way you can. The collectors that excite me are not just the ones who flash a credit card, but rather those who stay in contact with me, who ask about my new work, who recommend my art to their friends, and possibly open doors for my advancement. That is a relationship that will support me throughout my career, keep me focused and positive about my work, and add value to my creations over time. Most art investors start out as art collectors, so the love of art seems to trump the collection of art as an investment.

It's important to remember that art is one of those investments that is meant to be long-term. Art is fairly easy to acquire, but less easy to sell. Just because you own a painting worth several million doesn't mean someone is out there ready to buy it. Traditionally though, art has appreciated in value, even when other sectors did not. So the prospect is positive overall. The issues arise in that the art market is totally unregulated, and seems therefore to be much riskier. I guess it's best to only consider investing money you can stand to lose. On the flip side, art's value is not tied to the fluctuations of the stock market, and therefore may make an interesting part of a diversified portfolio. As an investor, you can either buy your own individual pieces of art, which sounds like a whole lot more fun, or invest more generally in an art fund. Buyer beware though, there are all sorts of horror stories out there about seasoned professionals who are duped by fakes, forgeries and stolen art. My guess is that one should always consult a professional when investing large sums of money. When buying directly from an artist, the authenticity and provenance is clear. But when buying expensive pieces as an investment, it pays to be certain.

So what is the art market, and how should one approach buying art as an investment? As I mentioned, it's important not to think of the art market as a monolith. There isn't one art market, there are many. We have already mentioned that there is the primary art market and the secondary art market. While those who are buying directly from the artists, and from galleries, are dealing with the primary market, once one moves to auctions, the art has been owned before. It is important to note that if someone sells my painting on the secondary market for a million dollars, I get none of the proceeds from that sale. When you buy from a gallery, about half of the money goes to the artist. Not something I lose a lot of sleep over, but I do promote buying directly from the artist when possible.

But there are variations even within the primary and secondary art markets. There is a different market for photography, for contemporary art, for Asian art, African Art, for antiquities, for design, digital art, prints, and Islamic Arts. There are national markets like those in China, the USA, Europe, the Middle East, Korea, and Mexico. Each of these markets have their own specificities, strengths, and trajectories. An artist may rise to great heights in the Korean art market, and never cross over to the European market. There is room for artists to take advantage of niche marketing, and the chance for greater exposure in a market that is narrower and more targeted.

We should probably define some terms. In the world of art sales, there are blue chip and red chip artists. That is not a world I move in, at least not yet. I suppose if you compared me to some of the high selling artists, I'd be more in the potato chip realm. But I do believe it is important to know about that rarified art strata just the same. I think it's important because so much of the art market is discussed at that level. Those markets can serve as the canary in the cave, alerting the rest of us to what might be coming our way.

Let's start off with blue chip art. Blue chip art refers to the world famous artists, known for their contribution to the history of art, and who therefore command huge prices. They are great, solid investments for collectors and museums. These are the Rembrandts, Klimts, Caravaggios, and the like. Red chip artists are those emerging artists who appear rather quickly on the

secondary market, as well as creating work on the primary market. Through direct marketing, social media, or public exposure, they have become instantly famous. They have none of the credentials and academic clout of the blue chip crowd, but can outperform them in sales because of their instant popularity. These are artists like; Banksy, Jerkface, Bepple, Matthew Wong, and Adrian Ghenie. The most amazing thing to me is that some of the blue chip crowd were once red chip artists. Look at artists like Warhol, Haring, Basquiat. They were once considered upstarts, rising too quickly to underserved fame. Now their place in the blue chip realm is assured. Suffice to say that both the blue and red chip artists are sound investments, though probably beyond what most of us will be adding to our art collections. Who knows though, with their talent and your support, the artists you hang on your wall now might end up in that stratosphere one day.

Another consideration when buying art as an investment is medium. We've already spoken about fugitive media that may not stand the test of time. Archival materials are very important for most types of art, though with the proper care, many non-traditional formats can still be a good investment. It is important to know however, so remember to ask the question when purchasing a piece of art. It's best to consult a professional if you have any doubts. We still have parchments from ancient Egypt, so when art is preserved under the right conditions, almost anything is possible.

We have also spoken about editions and prints. As an investment, paintings on canvas still tend to outsell paper, and oil tends to outsell acrylic. Original art is always more valuable over time than any sort of print, though some prints by blue chip artists still command stunning prices at auction. Painting still tends to be valued over photographs, and printmaking. Each of these formats may have its own market, so often it would be difficult to find examples from all these media at the same sale. Not all prints are the same, so always go for a giclée print, which is a high quality, fine art print, on archival paper with pigmented ink. Reproductions are usually prints that are not numbered in an edition, and have many, many copies. Reproductions are less valuable and may have no resale value on the secondary market.

The topic of editions comes up again when looking at art as an investment. Numbered editions of any series of artworks are always more valuable when the edition number is lower. Many galleries won't represent an artist whose editions number larger than five. For most collectors, number one of five is more collectable than number five of five, so the world of editions has its own rules. Once you know that an artist is representing editions in a clear and fair way, opt for the lowest number of copies possible.

One of the things that has emerged lately, now that the art market seems to be cooling a bit, is that collectors, even those who collect blue chip artists, are distinguishing between specific works of an artist. It is not good enough to purchase a Dalí, but rather one must purchase the right Dalí. Collectors are now more focused on buying the best representations of artists. The interest is not just in the name signed on the canvas, but rather that the work exemplifies the best, or most significant, work of the artist. That means that there can be quite a big price difference at auction between two works by the same artist. Knowing more about the artist in question, about the creative periods and highlights of an artistic career, can make a significant difference in how good an investment in that artist can be.

John Bishop, Reflection, Mixed Media on Canvas, from the Panca Marga Series



Caring for Your Collection

Now that you've built a collection, how do you take care of it? How do you clean it? What if it gets damaged? You have spent your time and money acquiring a piece, gone to some expense to transport it, possibly to frame it, and hang it on the wall, but how do you ensure it will outlast your lifetime?

It is amazing to me how people assume that nothing can happen to a piece of art once it comes home. Just this month, I had a painting of mine brought back to the studio with a hole in it. Apparently it had fallen from the hook when cleaning it, and landed face first on the corner of the side table. Luckily it was an abstract piece, so it was fairly easy to fix, but not all damage can be so dramatic. There can be issues with the exposure to harsh sunlight, water damage, mold, humidity, faulty framing, dust, smoke, kittens... and the list goes one and on.

I know there are companies that will store artwork in the dark, in climate and humidity controlled vaults, but where is the joy in that? If I buy a piece of art, even as an investment, I want to see it. I want to show it off at dinner parties. I want to live with it. Therefore, that means I want to be as responsible as possible to take care of my art while it is in my care.

Years ago I bought a painting from a Romanian abstract painter, and he had framed the piece with the glass pressing right up against the paint layer. I have left it alone, but feel almost certain that the paint may be stuck to the glass. The piece still looks great, but as I get older, and the artist becomes more well known, I know it may be time for me to address this situation. Another of my paintings was on exhibition when the building caught fire. Thankfully my piece was not harmed, but there is still the smell of smoke in the canvas years later. I had a small watercolor near a window in my studio, and after a year, I removed the mat to check something. The painting had faded enormously where the mat did not protect it from sunlight, leaving a pronounced rectangle of brighter paint around the edges of the picture.



Bogdan Mihai, Footnotes, Acrylic on Wood Board, from the Series Lost Memories

The issues around preservation will vary depending upon the media used in the artwork, but be assured that anything on display in your home or office is exposed to any number of contaminants and dangers. That expensive painting over the fireplace may be darkening with soot. That photograph or vintage poster may be warping with too much humidity. Acid from a cardboard back or cheap mat may be yellowing the paper inside your frame. The plastic bag you've carefully stored an acrylic painting in may have stuck to the paint layer. The metal sculpture you placed in the shed may be rusting from the base. The cleaning solution in the spray you use to clean your painting may be slowly dissolving it.

It is important for you to pay attention to your artwork, and check on it from time to time. Different media will require different cleaning techniques, storage requirements, and preservation. Remember to always use archival quality products, and a simple internet search can quickly answer most of the basic questions about care and maintenance.

If there is damage to a piece of art, all is not necessarily lost. There are art restorers out there who can fix almost any problem that occurs. Another option is to contact the artist, if that's possible. Remember that some restoration can actually diminish the value of a piece of art, particularly if it's done badly. If you have not seen the restoration work on the Spanish painting called *Ecce Homo* by García Martínez, look it up online. It's something everyone should see. But incompetence aside, the work of a restorer, or even a good cleaning, may be important in the overall conservation of a piece of art. Most of the artwork in your collection will need minimum care and protection to last a lifetime. There are a few tips that might be of help.

Oil Paintings can take literally years to dry completely. They need to breathe, and generally should not be covered by glass. They certainly should not be in contact with glass. These paintings should be kept away from dust, direct sunlight, and smoke. Oil paint can fade over time, so hopefully the artist has coated the surface with a protective layer of varnish. Old varnish can often yellow over the years, but a good cleaning by a restorer can remove the old varnish and replace it with a new coat. The newer varnishes are much less prone to discoloration over time. Keep paintings dusted with a soft duster. Avoid cleaning with a cloth if there is thick texture to the surface, as the cloth can catch on the paint and damage it. Don't clean with chemicals, or even water.

Acrylic paintings are a bit more robust, but should be treated the same as oil paintings. Remember that acrylic is a form of plastic. Never wrap or store acrylic paintings touching plastic. They can stick together quite easily. And never store two acrylic paintings touching face to face. Trust me on this one, I've done it. A simple spacer between them should do the trick.

Works on paper are a completely different story. Drawings, pastels, watercolors, prints, printmaking, and photographs are all created on paper, and paper needs particular care and maintenance. We've already spoken about the need for archival quality materials, but not all artists will have been that responsible. If you can verify the archival quality when you purchase the piece, that will help. Having said that, most fine artists will be using quality materials for their artwork. Remember to keep paper dry, and away from acid. I find the biggest challenge when people buy a piece of art, then frame it in an inexpensive frame from the local art store. The problem there is that the mat and backing that comes with the frame may not be acid free. Collectors place their paper art in a non-archival frame, and the frame itself damages the artwork over time. The easy solution is to buy acid free mats and backs, and encase your artwork in those archival materials inside the cheap frame, and your art should be protected.

Artworks on paper can also be very sensitive to light, especially sunlight. Hanging them away from a window, or investing in some UV protective glass can help a lot. Perhaps don't hang paper art next to the shower or other highly humid areas, and surprisingly

enough, protect your paper art from bugs. Lots of insects like to eat paper. Taping around the back seal with a good quality tape can create a protective barrier to pests and dust. We still have paper from the Egyptians, so your paper art can last for millenia if taken care of properly.

Art painted on wood, or wooden sculpture, has its challenges as well. Never put chemicals on artwork, including those meant to preserve and protect wood. Don't handle the piece too much either. Even the oils from your skin can discolor the wood itself. Over time, wood can crack, particularly if the wood was not quite dry when the piece was created. Excessive humidity, or lack of humidity can also split wood. It's best to keep wooden pieces away from heating and air conditioning vents, as they can create extremes in temperature changes. Keeping wood dusted, free from excessive sunlight, humidity, and temperature variations should take care of most problems. If there were to be issues with cracks, it's best to see a professional restorer. Don't try to fix anything yourself.

Metal sculpture hopefully has a patina, enamel, or powder coated paint surface that makes it a little more robust to the elements. But even metal artwork needs to be inspected over time for signs of damage. Metal can rust, and if rust occurs underneath a paint layer, it can flake the paint easily. Always discuss the ability to place a sculpture outside with the seller. Assuming that a piece can withstand the ravages of nature may be a costly mistake.

Even stone sculpture needs to be maintained and watched. A marble piece that can withstand wind, rain, and sun may be damaged by ice in the winter. Small cracks in stone or concrete can fill with water, expand when frozen, and eventually crumble a statue that should have been indestructible. We lived in Russia for a few years, and all the stone statues were covered with boxes during the winter months, to protect them from ice damage. Keep an eye on all your artwork, and act earlier rather than later to preserve and protect your collection.

It may be a good idea to insure your art collection as well. I have heard some horror stories about those who assumed that their household insurance would cover their artwork, and it didn't. Some policies require that the art is all cataloged and professionally appraised before they will cover any claim. It's best to discuss that with your agent before anything awful happens. Appraisals can be expensive, and face it, they can become outdated quickly. Some insurance policies will cover what you paid for the piece, if you have the receipt, but won't take into account any appreciation in the value of the art after it was purchased. You'll have to decide what makes the most sense for you and your collection.



John Bishop, Through the Mist, Private Collection

Organizing Your Collection

I should apologize now, but having spent 30 years as a librarian, I may geek out a bit on this section of the book. I can't express how important I believe it is to have a clear and organized approach to your art collection. The two points I want to emphasize are the need for collection development, and provenance.

Provenance we've already discussed. It is the documentary trail that connects you and the creator of the piece of art. It is imperative that the provenance be as clear as possible, to help authenticate the ownership of a work, that it is not a forgery, and that it is free and clear to be sold. That may seem strange to you now, but I can promise you that it becomes more and more important as the years go by. If you've never watched the BBC series "Fake or Fortune", check them out on YouTube. The discovery process around fine art authentication is remarkable.

If you have decided upon some clear goals for your art collection, hopefully you have written them down. You need to keep detailed records on everything about your art, and it is best to have all that information readily available when needed. Many collectors try to hold all the stories and details about a piece of art in their heads. That's a mistake. Not only might you become unavailable or indisposed in the future, but over time your collection is going to grow. What makes sense remembering in a collection of 10 pieces is impossible in a collection of 100. Do you remember working on your family history when you were in school? How many of the names and dates of your family tree are still clear in your mind now? Write this stuff down, you will forget over the years. I don't really mind how you gather and retain these records, I do it online through a specific platform for artists. There are any number of online art collection cataloging services, but there are a couple of things to consider about online catalogs.

The first is the fact that online catalogs cannot be stolen, lost in a fire, and are accessible wherever you are in the world. It's great to be in a gallery or artist studio and be able to pull up your catalog to compare what you're about to buy with what you already own.

It also makes it easy to jot down all of the information about the purchase right there where you are buying the art. You have the artist in front of you to ask about titles, dates, media, archival paper, and creation stories. Most platforms will allow you to add photographs of the work, and the snapshot of you arm in arm with the artist. These online catalogs allow you to print reports, update statistics, chart restoration, group artwork into categories, or record which pieces are in storage, or on loan to the Guggenheim museum.

The downside to online catalogs is that they may not be as robust as you would like them to be. Since most of us plan to maintain our art collections for a lifetime, what happens if the company housing your catalog goes out of business? How many of us once put all of our favorite music on cassette tapes, or CDs only to have technology change to such a degree that we can no longer access our 1980s playlists? The best answer, and don't roll your eyes, is to do both. Maintain a detailed and active catalog of your art collection online, but back it all up with paper files.

Create a physical file on each of your paintings. Write or print out all of the information you need to prove the provenance of each piece of art and stick it in the file. Keep a page on how to contact the artist or gallery you bought it from. If the artist dies, update the file with that information. Keep article clippings on anything to do with that work, including any exhibitions it has been in. Write a letter to the artist discussing or asking a question about the piece... and file the artist's signed response. Be sure to keep the receipt for the piece. It is part of the provenance and may be useful when trying to resell or insure the work. Keep the certificate of authenticity in the file, as well as any photographs you have of the work, or of the history of the piece.

I want to emphasize the importance of having that physical file. If you were to pass away, and wanted your kids to know what they were inheriting in your art collection, an online catalog may be of little use to them. They may not have access to your passwords, or even be aware that the online catalog exists. So embrace your inner librarian, clear out a drawer or two in the file cabinet, and create the physical file as well. If you want to place those folders in a remote location, in case of a fire, that makes sense too.

Divesting Your Collection

No one wants to think about it, but at some point, your valued art collection will pass from you to someone else. You may pass away and leave your collection to your children, or you may simply want to downsize as you grow older. You may want to leave your art collection to an institution, or a museum, or you just may want some cash.

Whatever the reason, divesting your art collection can be a difficult proposition. Let's start with how one might sell off a collection. As I mentioned earlier, art may well appreciate in value over time, but liquidating an art collection depends upon there being someone out there who wants to buy it. The best bet is an auction house. Auction houses may take a hefty fee for flogging your art, but they do assume quite a lot of overhead and management in the process. Here is where that clear provenance comes in handy, as the auction house must guarantee that a work is genuine and free and clear to sell. They will then enter that art into the appropriate sale, generate interest among collectors, and sell the work to the highest bidder.

You may also employ the services of an art buyer, but again, be aware that the broker needs to make a profit as well. Auction houses seem to me to be a safer bet, but that's up to you. I always assume that art dealers, art brokers, and art agents will be attending the auctions anyway. Auction houses have reputations to maintain, and are very careful and professional. There is very little vetting that happens with the other individual buyers. Most are probably fine and highly reputable, but how do you know?

The comment I hear most often from collectors is: "I don't know what's going to happen when I die." They have amassed a lovely art collection over a lifetime, one that tells a story about their experiences and their passions. However, if the provenance and the collection goals are not clear, there is no way to pass those feelings and values on to someone else.

You know why we constantly hear about people finding priceless works of art in dumpsters and at garage sales? Because some artist or collector didn't have a clear estate plan and provenance files. The difference between an abstract expressionist painting and a drop cloth is not always immediately apparent. And when faced with the task of clearing out a lifetime of belongings, less obvious treasures can easily be overlooked.

The second comment I most often hear from my collectors, usually immediately following the first statement, is: "My kids don't want it all." Having lost both of my parents, I can tell you that I would have been so grateful to have been able to know what my parents were passionate about. The idea that I could inherit a collection of artworks, each with a story of what it was, and why it was important to my parents, would have been a gift like no other. So don't be too certain about what your children will value when you are gone.



Bogdan Mihai, Summer Dream, Photography, from the Series Family Dreams

The other concern I often hear is that collectors have spent a lifetime of collecting, and they really don't like the idea of their collections being split up. The collection tells a story, and to remove bits only diminishes the tale they tell as a whole. Therefore another option is to donate your collection to an institution or a museum. There are loads of special collections housed by universities, libraries, institutes, and museums. The trick is to know who is interested in your collection, and to start making those contacts early. Here's one of those instances when working with a curator, or an art advisor can make sense. Sometimes these professionals know who is collecting what, and who may be interested in adding your collection to their own. A well organized, and well documented collection is much easier to move than one that is unknown. Make a list of the places that collect your kind of art, and write a few emails. Start those conversations now, so that this portion of your estate planning is done.

So that's it. You've planned your approach to art collecting. You've built your collection development strategy. You've identified what to collect and where to find it, and you've devised a comprehensive way to catalog what you've bought and where you found it. You even have a plan for what to do with the collection when you're finished with it. So what do you do now?

Remember why you started to collect art in the first place. Was it just the happiness you felt by surrounding yourself with art? Was it a sense of belonging to a community? Was it a feeling that you were building a sort of intellectual C.V. that defined you? Were you looking for a way to chronicle your life's great moments? All of that still applies. What do you do now? Follow that passion for art collection. Share that passion with others of like mind and spirit. Create a collection that makes the statement you want to make, the statement that brings you joy and meaning. The world will be a better place if you do.

CERTIFICATE

Of Membership in the August and Truly Awesome Realm
Of Internationally Recognized Art Collectors

This Certificate is Proudly Awarded To

DATE

John Bishop

SIGNATURE



Bogdan Mihai

BogdanFotoArt.com

His background in Romanian television, where he engaged in voice-overs, reporting, editing, and producing, provides a rich foundation for his visual storytelling. Bogdan's commitment to freelancing and dedication to fine art since 2015 reflect a passion for artistic expression. Bogdan Mihai's global footprint in gallery exhibitions and art fairs demonstrates the international recognition of his work. Exhibitions in Romania, Argentina, Switzerland, Hungary, Mexico, and the USA underscore the universal appeal of his art.

Furthermore, his commitment to supporting other artists through a nonprofit initiative is commendable and aligns with the spirit of fostering a vibrant artistic community. This philanthropic effort not only enhances his impact as an artist but also contributes to the broader cultural landscape.

Mihai's unique blend of journalistic, abstract, sensitive, nostalgic, and energetic artwork, coupled with his global presence and commitment to supporting fellow artists, positions him as a dynamic and influential figure in the contemporary art scene.



John Bishop

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John Bishop is a painter and illustrator working in Houston, Texas. Though born in Houston, he has spent most of his life traveling. John obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Texas, and has been exploring photography, creative writing, and fine art ever since college. Though he spent 30 years working as a librarian in Texas, New Mexico, California, Romania, The Emirates, New Zealand, and Russia. John returned to Texas in 2016 where he works full-time on his art business, as well as Executive Director of an arts non-profit organization.

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