

Art Appreciation



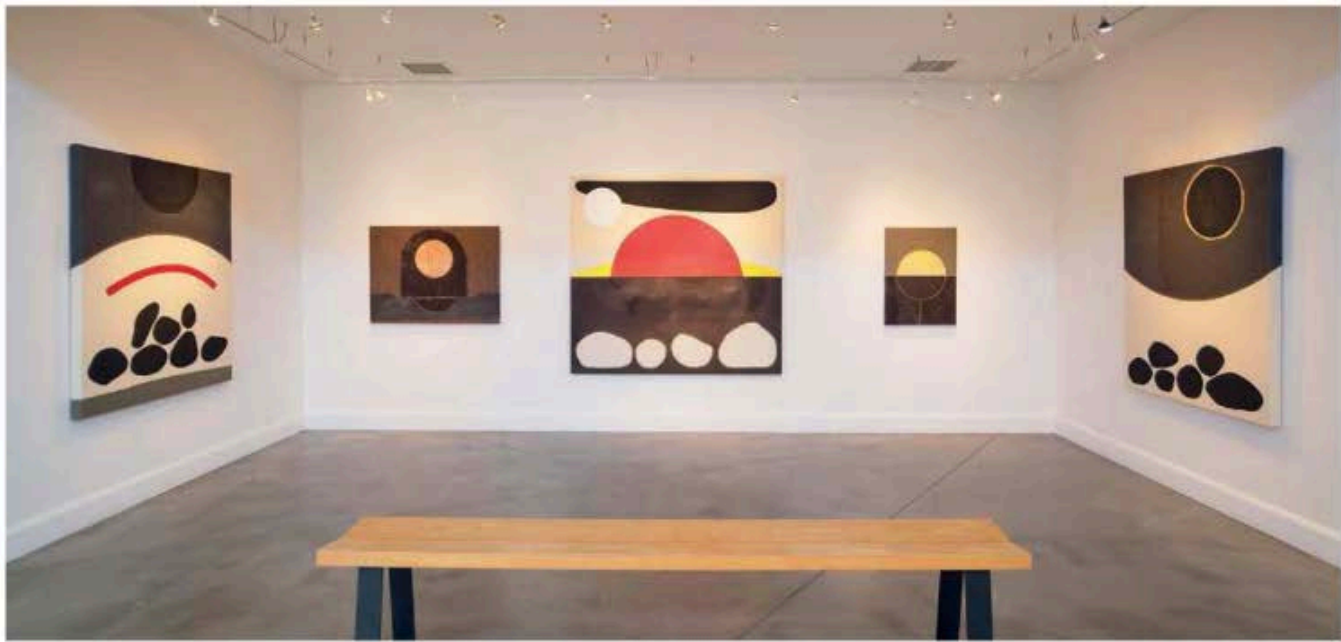
by **Andrew Cruickshank**

101

Choosing original artwork that imports joy and complements your home decor can be daunting for the first-time buyer. But fear not: herewith a roster of tips to make your journey easier to navigate.



"Newton and Einstein" by Joseph Drapell, right, and "In Memory of Clement Greenberg" by Joseph Drapell.



A recent exhibition of works by Pat Service at the Oeno Gallery.

As a first-time art buyer, you can't be faulted for stepping out of the warm glow of a gallery, exhibition or museum, feeling as if your eyes are two colourful, spinning plates. The art world can be a complex and daunting place, further hindered by headlines announcing the sale of masterpieces for outrageous sums of money to rooms full of billionaires.

But you don't have to be Bill Gates to start collecting art. In fact, anyone can collect art. The industry encompasses a broad range of mediums and styles, at multiple price points. It does, however, help if you know what you're looking for and, indeed, where to start.

People have different reasons for collecting art, notes gallery owner Carlyn Moulton. Some people invest in art pieces in the hope they'll appreciate and later sold on, or they use those pieces to pass on wealth to their children. Other objectives could be to decorate their space in a way that makes them feel good, or to become a patron of certain artists. "We have clients who have bought numerous pieces by the same artist because they see themselves as an enabler of that artist, a supporter," Moulton notes.

Moulton runs Oeno Gallery, which leases land from Huff Estates Winery in the heart of Prince Edward County. The gallery, which features a three-acre sculpture garden, sells a variety of artists and art styles, but has a specific focus on promoting underappreciated female artists, such as Milly Ristvedt, and first-generation Canadians, such as Turkish-Canadian artist Derya Ozparlak.

Moulton has spent the past 20 years advising people on how to fill the blank spaces around their homes and cottages and she'll tell you that, regardless of your objective, the first step is to cultivate your style and figure out which type of art you're

interested. The best way to do this is to look at lots of art — and to do this you needn't even leave your home. The digital age has made the art world much more accessible: galleries such as Oeno provide high-resolution images of inventory on their websites, artists showcase their work on social media accounts, and platforms like Artsy.net host auctions that don't threaten to bankrupt you. It also doesn't hurt to delve into the anachronistic — flipping through an art book.

There are, however, two main rules when cultivating your style: don't get swept up by current trends — they're liable to disappear — and don't be swayed by price tags. As Moulton says, dollar value shouldn't dictate taste. "I bought my first sculpture when I was 19," she recalls. "I'd been invited to go and see an exhibition in somebody's house, and I walked in and the sculpture was there. I had an experience, what I now call SIB syndrome, which is Sharp Intake of Breath syndrome. In my experience, when that happens, you're doomed. You're going to buy the piece."

Choosing art should be about gut instinct. Consider your lifestyle. Perhaps you're a traveller and want to collect international pieces that represent the places you've visited. Or maybe you're someone who likes the pop of colour an abstract painting can bring. Or an avid gardener who would appreciate an outdoor sculpture. The decision is dependent upon what appeals to you.

If you feel like you need to get up close and personal, consider browsing in-person. Art fairs are a great place to peruse — they're like the supermarkets of the art world, featuring various types of artists and styles. They're also a great place to snag a deal and meet the artists. Local galleries are also fantastic spots to immerse yourself in art, but ensure you know what they have on display. "If you walk into my gallery in May



"Equilibre Rouille 3/10," an impressive sculpture by Philippe Pallafray, is currently on display at the Oeno Gallery.

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or September, you're going to have a completely different experience on each of those occasions," Moulton says. "On some of those occasions, you might love what we're showing. On other occasions, it might not speak to you at all. What is on the walls in a gallery at any given moment is a minor reflection of what they may have available."

Once you've established the type of art you're interested in, the next step is to develop a budget. "This can be different for each person but can be considered in the same way as any large purchase," says Marla Wasser, president and CCO of art advisory firm Pursuits Inc. "Budgeting for artwork can be determined by examining one's savings after personal needs are accounted for."

The size of your budget will dictate what's available to you. If you want to start off with more affordable pieces, there are lots of options. Many artists create smaller, less expensive works in similar styles to their larger pieces. There are also art prints – high-quality reproductions of an original work – that can be framed and displayed, or you can buy from an emerging artist. Since they have yet to cut their teeth in the industry, their work tends to be less expensive than established artists. Wasser warns, though, that investing in an emerging artist can also be a financial gamble. There's no guarantee their pieces will appreciate in value, which is why she suggests clients start their collection with mid-career artists. "This means they are established with important galleries, and starting to be collected by respected collectors as well as museums.

When you've finally landed on the piece you want to buy, there are further considerations to keep in mind. Buy from a reputable dealer and gallery: the best way to do this is to ensure the seller includes the artwork's provenance, which is the documented history of ownership that can be traced back to its creation. Without it, there's always the chance you're buying a forged or stolen piece. For contemporary artwork, provenance is generally straight forward, but it can get murky with older pieces, Wasser notes. "Provenance can be traced via certificates of authenticity, gallery stamps and labels, signatures and printed records. We are now seeing a new form of provenance emerge via the use of blockchain technology, known as NFT (non-fungible tokens)."

If all of this sounds overwhelming, don't worry, that's why there are experts like Moulton and Wasser to help. "The art market is often seen as a complex place to navigate and an art consultant can cut through the noise and open doors to a global art world – which is very exciting – but most importantly share expert advice to help navigate the risk for their clients to make sure their transactions are seamless and transparent," Wasser says.

The bottom line is that collecting art should be fun. It's meant to bring joy into our lives, so don't get hung up on the competition of auctions or the status of artists. Instead, use it as an opportunity to express yourself and connect with like-minded people. The art world, as Wasser explains, is very social, with lots of chances to get involved via museums, cultural organizations and gallery communities.