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By Shivani Vora

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Her Hint for Collecting Like an Artist: Use Instagram



The Artist Zoë Buckman in her apartment, surrounded by part of her collection, including, clockwise from left, a print of Tupac Shakur by Albert Watson; Amy Winehouse from her album "Lioness"; and Ms. Buckman's "Jemima" (2016). Daniel Dorsa for the New York Times.

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The artist Zoë Buckman's loft-cum-studio in Dumbo delivers a sensory overload of paintings, photography and sketches from around the world.

Yet Ms. Buckman, born in London, has never thought of herself as a collector. "I'm someone who lives with the work of artists I've been lucky enough to know or trade with," she said on a recent afternoon, as sunlight flooded through the oversized windows overlooking the Manhattan Bridge.

Contemporary artists are her favorites, including Toyin Ojih Odutola whose works explore the complexity of identity, and Tony Fitzpatrick, a Chicago artist whose multimedia collages and prints are inspired by sources as varied as children's literature and folk art. Pieces like these are interspersed with representations of Hindu gods that Ms. Buckman picked up on trips to India, and some art by her daughter, Cleo.



Ms. Buckman's embroidered "Every Curve" (2014). Daniel Dorsa for the New York Times.

Ms. Buckman, 33, works in sculpture, installation, and photography and explores themes of feminism, mortality and equality. In February last year she unveiled a large-scale version of her

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neon sculpture “Champ,” a glowing female reproductive tract, its ovaries clad in boxing gloves, on Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood, Calif.

Much of the art she’s acquired — a painting in brown tones of a pregnant woman by the Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu, for instance — echoes the feminist motifs of her own creations. “The painting was a trade,” she said. “I loved it immediately because it represents rebirth and metamorphosis.” In exchange, Ms. Mutu got a vintage silk bralette and briefs Ms. Buckman had embroidered with lyrics from the Biggie Smalls song “Dead Wrong.”

These are edited excerpts from our conversation.

Is it common for artists to trade works?

Yes, and it’s a fun way to grow your collection because the pieces you own are that much more personal. It’s an honor to have a work by an artist you admire, and it’s an honor to know that they have one of yours.

What if you love an artist’s work but aren’t sure if they like yours?

If there’s an artist whose work I want to own, I float the idea of a trade and wait for them to follow up. You don’t want to push. With Wangechi, she saw my lingerie piece on Instagram and emailed me with a screenshot of it, with a note asking if I would consider a trade. I was thrilled to swap.

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Ms. Buckman's wall, clockwise, from top left: a print by Tim Sidell (2014); a portrait by George Hurrell; a portrait of her daughter, Cleo, by thnwblk (2017); a drawing by Toyin Ojih Odutola (2015); art by Cleo; and a vintage image of Krishna and Radna. Daniel Dorsa for the New York Times.

Do you have any art world mentors?

Deb Willis and her son, Hank Willis Thomas, who are both phenomenally talented artists and live in New York. They have nurtured my career so much.

Tell me about this quilt made up of football jerseys.

It was a trade with Hank Willis Thomas. I work with used textiles, and that's what he's done here. I am not into football, but, in my own work, I am into the intersection of masculine and

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feminine. Quilting is a typically female craft, and he is using these jerseys to speak about the exploitation of black males within college sports and how these boys are used and spat out. I am drawn to pieces that have some meaning, and I knew the meaning behind this one. But even if I didn't, I appreciate it for its form and bright colors.

What is your favorite piece that you've bought?

I have two. There's this black and white picture of people walking up a hill from a series that the photographer Sebastião Salgado did on migrants.

Then there's this photo of Tupac that I bought from a gallery in Chelsea. I was obsessed with American hip-hop as a teenager.



A Portrait of Ms. Buckman by Toyin Ojih Odutola. Daniel Dorsa for the New York Times.

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Is that a portrait of you hanging in your bedroom?

Yes. Toyin Ojih Odutola, who is a dear friend, drew it for me as a 30th birthday gift.

You have several artworks depicting Hindu gods. What's their appeal?

I have been drawn to India since I was a kid. I have a picture of the gods Radha and Krishna, who were lovers, in my bedroom. I got the picture of Krishna in my living room on eBay and the other one of Radha in Rishikesh [India] from a street vendor.

You've turned pieces like a framed Amy Winehouse album cover into inexpensive, yet appealing examples of art. How can others follow your lead?

Cutting out images you like from art books and framing them is a great way of getting beautiful works on your wall. You can also frame magazine images or pick up inexpensive art at museum gift shops.

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