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There Are Lots of Ways to Buy Art but Relationships and Passion Are
Key

From social media to galleries to art fairs, here's how to make your
purchase

By Jane Lerner

Art is everywhere, but how does one find, and buy, top-quality art? The art experts boil it down to two things: Go see a lot of art to figure out what you love, and create relationships with art professionals you trust.

The transactional art market is multifaceted and increasingly interconnected—you can buy art at a traditional brick-and-mortar gallery or at auction, you can travel the globe attending art fairs, you can work with art advisers or go through an artist directly, you can plug in search terms online and view images until your eyes melt—and that epic ecosystem is navigable if you know what you like and work with trustworthy experts.

According to the Art Market 2018, a report by Art Basel and UBS that analyzed art sales across international markets in 2017, sales in the global art market reached \$63.7 billion in 2017, up 12% from 2016. It's a huge world to comprehend, and individual connections are key.

“We have a high level of trust and loyalty with our collector base,” said Tze Chun, founder and CEO of Uprise Art, an online art gallery that represents artists and introduces them to collectors, much like a traditional gallery. Through Uprise's established art advisory program, Ms. Chun explains that “we build relationships and start a conversation.” And unlike a traditional gallery space, online buyers can make those connections from anywhere, at any time.

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Indeed, we shop differently these days for everything, from art to romance to household goods—convenience and speed direct many of our purchasing decisions, but acquiring fine art is not the same as picking up dish soap, though Andy Warhol might disagree.

Gallery owners, of spaces both physical and virtual, are passionate about the artists they represent. Adam Shopkorn, founder of the New York gallery Fort Gansevoort, which is located in Manhattan’s Meatpacking District, sees his curatorial role in a romantic light. “I put artwork in front of people that I think is good and worthwhile,” he said. “It’s matchmaking.”

That kind of informed curation and advice from knowledgeable art experts can help quell the overwhelmed. “We engage and re-engage collectors,” Uprise’s Ms. Chun said, and her company’s focus is on creating ongoing relationships that emphasize “access, education, experience, and storytelling.”

If walking into an established gallery in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood or London’s Mayfair feels intimidating, work with an art adviser, through an online service like Uprise or find one through the Association of Professional Art Advisers. Advisers can help buyers define and fine-tune taste and tone, and assist with every stage of the purchasing process.

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Art fairs, on the other hand, are an excellent way to get an overview of the market at any given moment, and good advisors will walk with you through an art fair and point out the artists and galleries they think you would like best. As a dealer who's participated in art fairs around the world, "an art fair is a form of engagement," Mr. Shopkorn said, "and the process of discovery should be fun and rewarding.

The internet has drastically influenced the ways we see and experience art, and the Art Market 2018 report explains that "the global online art and antiques market was estimated to have reached a new high of \$5.4 billion in 2017, up 10% year-on-year and accounting for 8% of the value of global sales." That remains a relatively small percentage overall, and most art-making is still an analog endeavor, but every aspect of the art world now relies on digital imagery, online tools and social media apps like Instagram.

Scroll through Instagram and, depending on who you follow, images from major art stars come right after creative work from a small-town art student—the democratization of art online is profound, only adding to the sense that there's too much to see and sort through.

New York City-based painter and video artist Ken Solomon often sells his work via Instagram, and has found the app to be a great way to experiment with imagery and showcase his process. But he's quick to point out that not everything online is worthwhile. "Because everyone has a platform now," Mr. Solomon said, "as a result, the art world is even more exclusive and selective. Only a very few people get to participate in the blue-chip galleries, giving those galleries more power and punch."

When buyers approach Mr. Solomon on Instagram, he acknowledges that most of them come via his longtime art world connections. "It's a delicate place. Artists selling their own work is a tricky navigation," he said. "An artist's job is to not think about commerce."

To illustrate the ways in which the various aspects of the art market have become both easier to access and more intertwined, here is how this writer recently purchased a painting:

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Last spring I attended the Independent art fair in New York City — I was drawn to some striking abstract paintings by the Los Angeles-based artist Eamon Ore-Giron. He was showing with the Philadelphia gallery Fleisher-Ollman, who had a number of his large-scale works. On Instagram I posted a snapshot of one of the paintings and followed Ore-Giron's personal account. A few months later, I direct messaged the artist with the request to purchase a piece; Ore-Giron referred me to another gallery he works with, Páramo, which is based in Guadalajara, Mexico, and New York City. Páramo's director sent me digital images of the artist's most recent work, and I selected my favorite. I visited Páramo's Upper East Side showroom a few weeks later to see the painting in person, and I purchased it on the spot.

That story involves an art fair, two galleries, Instagram, jpgs, an in-person visit and developing friendships with both the artist and his representative. It was a circuitous route that is pretty typical of the art marketplace in 2018, and it was a lot of fun.