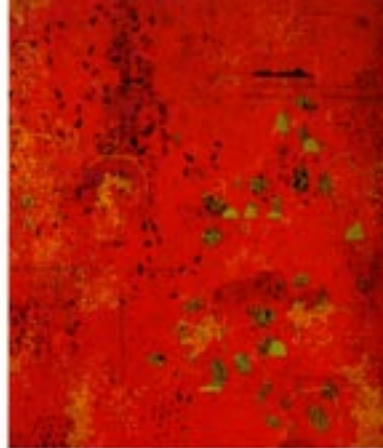




# STARTERS

MANY OF US HEAR THE WORDS 'ART COLLECTION' AND FEEL IMMEDIATELY INTIMIDATED - THE MISCONCEPTION BEING THAT TO COLLECT PAINTINGS, SCULPTURE OR PHOTOGRAPHY YOU NEED INFINITE FUNDS AND AN IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE OF ART HISTORY. ALEX WARREN FOUND THAT ALL YOU REALLY REQUIRE IS ENTHUSIASM, A NOSE FOR RESEARCH AND THE CONFIDENCE TO ASK FOR ADVICE. ABOVE ALL, HAVE FAITH IN YOUR CHOICES - AN ART COLLECTION SHOULD BE ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE, NOT WHAT YOU THINK YOU SHOULD LIKE. WORDS ALEX WARREN

*Ethereal V* by Erika Gothon, \$3500, courtesy of Frances Keevil Art.



#### COLLECTORS' TIPS

TRY TO VISIT A GALLERY EACH WEEKEND, BUT DON'T OVERDO IT - AND TAKE JELLYBEANS TO KEEP YOUR ENERGY LEVELS UP!

**Merryn Schriever**

"AVOID MATCHING ART TO YOUR DECOR. GOOD ART WILL LAST MUCH LONGER THAN A SOFA."

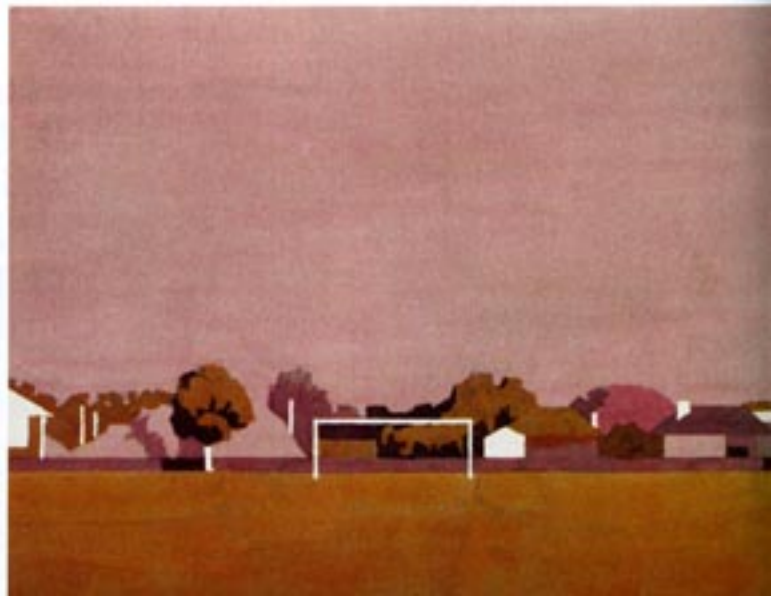
**Paul Greenaway**

"BE PREPARED TO PURCHASE WORKS FROM ARTISTS YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF. ALL ARTISTS WERE UNKNOWN ONCE."

**Darren Knight**



**[Above]** *Continuous Memory* by Mami Yamataka, \$2200; **[top right]** *Dream Landscape* by Lilly Cherry, \$4800, both courtesy of Flinders Lane Gallery. **[Above right]** *Hummingbird* by Vera Möller, \$4600, courtesy of Philip Bacon Galleries. **[Left]** *Dear Mat* by Helen Fuller, \$1800, courtesy of Sullivan + Strumpf Fine Art. **[Right]** *Goal* by David Hurwitz, \$1400, courtesy of Über Gallery. **OPPOSITE PAGE (top)** *Untitled* by Melinda Harper, \$800, courtesy of Sullivan + Strumpf Fine Art. **[Middle left]** *Surveillance (Ginger Lily)* by Kim Spooner, \$5000, courtesy of Christine Abrahams Gallery. **[Middle right]** *White Drape and Fruit* by Crispin Akerman, \$5000, courtesy of Greenhill Galleries. **[Bottom]** *Poly Dolly* by Emma Davies, from \$280, courtesy of the artist.





In May 2004, a Picasso oil painting was sold to an anonymous bidder at Sotheby's in New York for approximately A\$134 million. Around the same time, I bought a much smaller oil painting for about \$350 at an artist-run gallery in Sydney's Surry Hills. The intimate scene of Hyde Park now hangs in my living room, and already I feel I've got far more than my fair share of pleasure from it.

The first example – famous artist, mystery buyer, high-powered auction and ridiculous amounts of money – is the sort of thing that makes many of us steer clear of buying art; it's all too overwhelming for words. But it doesn't have to be like that – at your own pace and within your own budget, getting involved in the world of art can be as serious or as low-key as you want it to be and, more than anything else, a lot of fun. To find out how to get started, we asked a few experts in the field.

#### DETECTIVE WORK

Before you spend any money, do some research. This means finding out about artists and, more importantly, what type of art you're interested in.

"Go to commercial galleries and ask to be put on their mailing lists," says Merryn Schriever, from Stills Gallery in Sydney. "Gallery openings are a good place to start looking. You can relax over a glass of wine and feel less conspicuous than you might in an empty gallery. Go to state and regional galleries, art fairs, look on the Internet, start reading art magazines – ask collector friends what they read – and make sure you scribble down the names of artists that catch your eye."

#### GALLERY HOPPING

Just as every clothes shop isn't right for you, the same can be said of commercial galleries. Don't be put off if you don't feel at home in the first one you visit – keep trying. Remind yourself that galleries need people like you. "I don't know of any that would shoo you away if you said you were interested in starting an art collection – those are the golden words we all want to hear," says Merryn.

Most commercial galleries will be happy to invite you to exhibition openings, answer your questions, show you work from the stockroom and let you know when new work is available. "Don't be intimidated," says Sydney gallery owner Darren Knight. "Art is about communication, and one of the jobs of the gallery is to demystify it." However, if you really do have a problem with a particular gallery but love the work of an artist it represents, find out if any other galleries represent them.

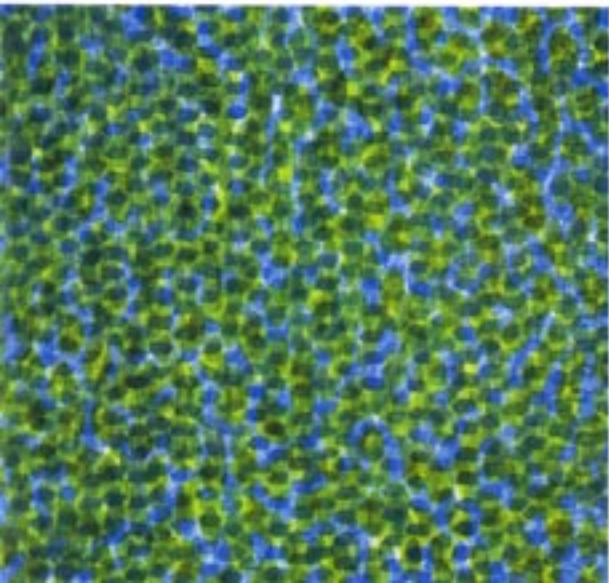
#### NO NEED TO RUSH

After doing all that homework, you're probably desperate to start spending, but it's important to bear in mind you don't have to rush into a purchase. "If you like something at an opening, place a reserve sticker on it – it gives you a couple of days to think about it," says Merryn. →



**[Above]** *Modern Exterior, Blue and Red Palms* by Paul Davies, \$2200, courtesy of Tim Olsen Gallery.

**[Above right]** Hand-thrown celadon bowls by Liz Lowe, from \$30, courtesy of Collect. **[Below]** *Man & Doll (b)* by Destiny Deacon, \$3000, courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery. **[Right]** *Tale 14* by Matthew Bax, \$950, courtesy of Uber Gallery. **[Bottom left]** *Painting 139* by Lisa Wollgramm, \$1500, courtesy of The Church Gallery. **[Bottom middle]** *Shenae and Jade* by Petrina Hicks, \$1650, courtesy of Stills Gallery. **[Bottom right]** *Sublime* by Andrew Mangelsdorf, \$3300, courtesy of Soho Galleries.





#### ALTERNATIVE ART FINDS

- **FUNDRAISERS** THESE CAN OFFER GOOD WORKS IN A FRIENDLY, LESS INTIMIDATING ATMOSPHERE.
- **ARTIST-RUN INITIATIVES** OFTEN IN INNER-CITY AREAS, SO IF YOU DISCOVER ONE ASK ABOUT OTHERS.
- **AUCTIONS** THE PERFECT WAY TO SEE WHAT'S SELLING, BUT NOT A GOOD IDEA FOR BEGINNERS.

[Above] Cronulla, December 1955 from the Bookallil Family Collection, \$990, courtesy of McG Gallery. [Below] I Asked Him ... by Angela Brennan, \$4000, courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.

I asked  
him with  
my eyes  
to ask again.

Don't succumb to the pressure of a gallery saying there are other people interested in a work, warns Paul Greenaway of Greenaway Art Gallery in Adelaide. "The last thing you want to do is buy on impulse."

Of course, there are exceptions – if an artist is in high demand, the gallery may be less inclined to give you breathing space, unless you're a very valued client. On the other hand, if you want to buy work by an artist with an upcoming exhibition, let the gallery know – chances are you'll be able to preview the works and buy before opening night. You can also ask to be put on a waiting list for works by a particular artist.

#### FOR LOVE, NOT MONEY

"I avoid the conversation about investment as much as possible," says Darren Knight. "It's the wrong way to approach buying art. I try to put works with people who love them, because the artists have put so much love and thought into their work." However, if you do your research, listen to the experts and buy pieces by artists with a consistently good body of work, they will probably increase in value over time.

#### MIX IT UP

"It's good to be eclectic," says Merryn Schriever. "Look at lots of different types of work." Paintings, prints, photographs and sculpture, for instance, can all sit alongside each other – no one form is better than another.

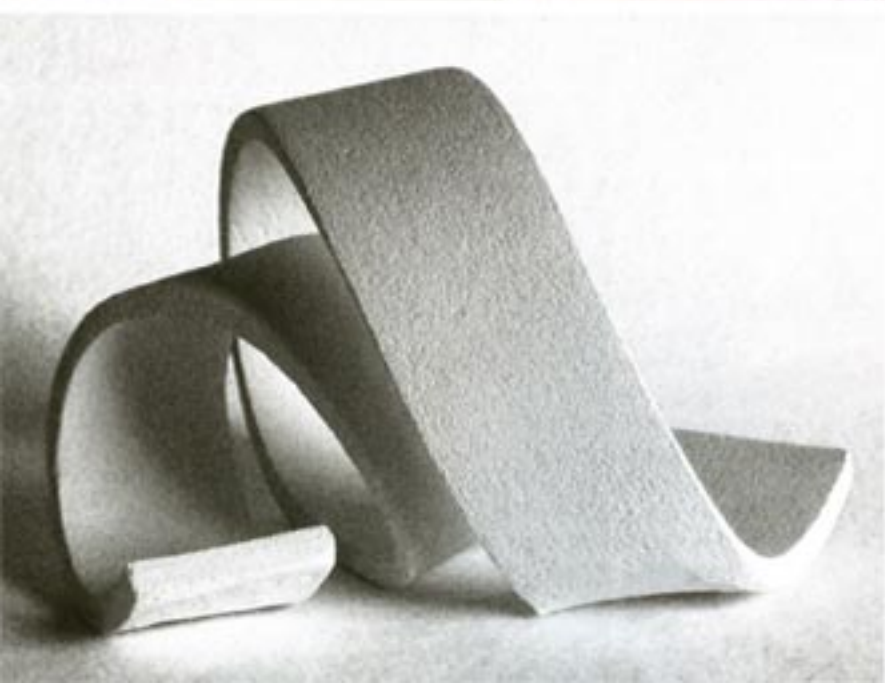
Zahava Elenberg, daughter of Melbourne gallery owner Anna Schwartz and the late artist Joel Elenberg, believes an art collection "should be autobiographical" and hers contains a number of different media – including painting, photography, sculpture and mixed media.

Louise Pfanner, who has written and illustrated a number of children's books, found her art collection contains mainly illustrations. "It didn't start out that way, but about 15 years ago I saw an exhibition in Paris of works by Hergé, the creator of Tintin, and that really influenced me." →



**[Above]** *Lagoon House* by Garry Wapshot, \$350, courtesy of McG Gallery. **[Above right]** *Grandma's Ginger Jar* by Chris Chun, POA, courtesy of the artist. **[Below left]** *Rolling Shadow* by Emma Walker, \$8000, courtesy of King Street Gallery. **[Below right]** *Little Collins Street* by Ji Chen, \$3650, courtesy of Paintbox Fine Art. **[Right]** *Mainly Air, Cocoons* by Ana Pollak, \$350, courtesy of

Spirit Level Designs. **[Bottom left]** *Opus I* by Gaye Porter, \$650, courtesy of Spirit Level Designs. **[Bottom right]** *Lambada* by Ian de Souza, \$1800, courtesy of Lynne Wilson Gallery. **OPPOSITE PAGE (top)** *Bay Island* by Katarina Westerberg, \$11,000, courtesy of King Street Gallery. **[Bottom]** *Painters, Warwick Farm* by Jeff Carter, \$1800, courtesy of Christine Abrahams Gallery.





## YOUNG TALENT TIME

IF YOU FEEL NERVOUS WALKING INTO A GALLERY OPENING, SPARE A THOUGHT FOR THE ARTIST.

"I'M USUALLY TOO BUSY TO GET TOO WORRIED BEFOREHAND," SAYS CHRIS CHUN, WHOSE ATMOSPHERIC FOOD-RELATED PAINTINGS (OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT) ARE IN HIGH DEMAND. "BUT ARRIVING AT THE OPENING IS LITERALLY LIKE TURNING UP NAKED - I PUT SO MUCH OF MYSELF INTO MY WORK, IT'S AN INCREDIBLY PERSONAL THING TO DO."

CHRIS SAYS HE'D RATHER SELL TO SOMEONE WHO LOVES HIS WORK THAN SOMEONE LOOKING FOR AN INVESTMENT. "AND I LOVE PEOPLE ASKING ME ABOUT THE WORK OR COMMENTING ON WHAT THEY SEE IN IT. WHEN I BUY ART, I LIKE TO CHAT TO THE ARTIST AS WELL, TO GET A SENSE OF WHO THEY ARE."

## SPEND WISELY

Just because you're buying something you love doesn't mean you should ignore the subject of money. If you're really serious about building up a long-term collection, work out how much you can afford to spend each year and put that aside. "If you buy one piece a year - and it doesn't have to be expensive - over 20 or 30 years, you will have built up a great collection," says Zahava Elenberg.

Paul Greenaway suggests you set yourself a couple of secure limits from the beginning, starting with a figure to play with - for example \$500 - which lies very comfortably within your budget. "You can then make some decisions without advice from anybody," he says. For instance, if you fall in love with an artwork for \$500, buy it on the spot if you feel like it. "You can enjoy that work for itself, and it won't matter if you can never get that \$500 back."

If, on the other hand, \$1000 is a lot of money to you, think carefully before you spend it. Be sure to consult experts and do your research - you don't want to live with a mistake. "Buying art should only involve joy, never regrets," says Paul. If you can't afford to pay for your artwork outright, it's also worth asking if you can pay by instalments - many galleries will happily oblige.

On the subject of money, if you're considering limited-edition photographs or prints, says Paul, compare the price to that of an original by the same artist. As a general rule of thumb, if an edition of 10 sells for \$500 for each piece, an original by that artist should sell for around \$5000 (10 x 500). If, however, it's an edition of 100 at \$500 each, and the one-off is \$5000, the print would be considered highly overpriced.

## DEVELOPING YOUR COLLECTION

Over the years, you'll probably find your tastes change and develop. "That comes with maturity and exposure," says Zahava. As a teenager, she bought a teddy bear painting by Melbourne artist Mirka Mora, which now hangs in one of her children's bedrooms. "I have great affection for it, but wouldn't want it in the living room."

If you find you really do outgrow an artwork and don't even want to hang it in a guestroom, consider going back to the gallery where you purchased it, advises Paul, and ask them to put it on consignment. Once it's sold, you'll have some extra cash for the most enjoyable pursuit of all - buying your next artwork. ✦

*For the addresses of art galleries mentioned in this story, please turn to page 193.*

