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the **ART & SCIENCE**
of **SELECTING ART**

5 TIPS TO DETERMINE PERSONAL AND MONETARY VALUE

by *Karen LeBlanc*

Roaming the Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain, recently, I was struck by the redundancy of masterpiece subject matter painted by celebrated artists such as El Greco, Goya, Rubens, Titian and Velazquez. The collection, amassed by Spain's 16th and 17th century monarchs, reflects the prevailing royal tastes of the times — primarily an affinity for religious iconography and royal portraiture.

Among the numerous religious allegories and portraits of royal progeny are two paintings that disturb and fascinate. One portrait depicts an obese 6-year-old girl by court painter Juan Carreño de Miranda. Another painting features a bearded lady nursing a baby by Jusepe de Ribera. At first glance, both works appear to be 16th century versions of “Ripley’s Believe It or Not.”

Upon closer examination, you begin to see a story emerge of the Spanish court’s fascination with perceived oddities. Through art, we gain insight into the cultural psyche of other eras. For centuries, long before digital media captured every millisecond and minutiae of our existence, art has been telling our story in ways that words cannot. This storytelling propels artistic creation and inspires people to collect works that connect with their personalities, passions, aspirations and affinities.

The value one places on a painting or objet d’art is both emotional and monetary — influenced by market forces, trends and

a certain *je ne sais quoi* that collectively become both an art form and a science.

To help us better understand this art and science of selecting and collecting artwork, I consulted several respected art consultants in Central Florida and distilled their insight and advice into five tips to help you determine the personal and monetary value of an art work.

DO THE RESEARCH:

Whether you intend to purchase a blue chip painting or a local art fair canvas, research is the first step to acquiring art. Prestigious fairs, such as Art Basel, and auction houses are well-known sources for collectible artwork. However, working with an art consultant is a solid starting point to avoid rookie mistakes. Art experts have spent years building trusted rela-

tionships with the right people in vetted art circles to help you source authentic works and discover your artistic muse. Art consultants also help filter through the marketing hype about trends and the next “it” artist to discover and invest in real, quality, relevant assets.

“A passion for art is like a voyage of discovery. Sometimes, it helps to know which route to take to get where you want to go. Research is a part of that. You need to know the market and the factors that influence price. Without a doubt, investing in the works of named artists is one sure way to get where you are going quickly,” says Russell A. Glotfelty, president and CEO of HG Arts and RG Private Label.

“We advise clients who are beginning or adding to a collection to purchase art

STEPHEN ALLEN



Russell A. Glotfelty



Lael DeWahl

that speaks to them, either emotionally or visually, to ensure long-term enjoyment for many years to come. This is an investment in the quality of life you experience in your home or corporate environment,” explains Lael DeWahl, an art consultant and director of Art Gallery at Mills Park.

“Beyond our access to the better galleries, art fairs and dealers, we also have exclusive access to European resources and the better art schools for undiscovered and emerging artists that make an exciting addition to collections. Many of our collectors are very well versed in what is hot now from an investment standpoint and it is our job to vet out something they haven’t discovered before,” she adds.

“I look at the word ‘investment’ in two ways: a financial investment and a pleasure investment. If you love it and it brings you pleasure, it is a good investment. If you are spending a great deal of money, you might want to spend more time to study the provenance of the work, and it is a good idea to learn as much as you can about the kind of art that appeals to you,” advises Judy Albertson, owner of Albertson Art Consulting.

While some collectors buy art to diversify their investments, others acquire art as

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aficionados. “These are passion investments, as we call them, and they are becoming increasingly attractive given Wall Street’s continued market volatility. Purchasing art that you love will always serve you, whether it accrues in value or not,” says Lael, partner in the art consulting business LDVC.

DETERMINE WHAT SPEAKS TO YOU

Just as the Spanish Crown’s oddity paintings spoke to me and the countless religious works dulled my senses at the Prado, art is entirely a subjective experience. No one can tell you how to think or feel about a painting or art object. The art experience is entirely personal and discovering what speaks to you is a process.

“Art is a personal expression of culture and taste. Fundamentally, the buyer should feel an emotional connection to their artwork and this gut feeling should guide any purchasing decision. That being said, anyone who buys fine art hopes to have that purchase grow in value. In that sense, art is still very much an investment,” Russell says.

Judy, who advises and guides government and corporate entities as well as private clients in the purchase of artwork, suggests exploring many different types of art to discover what resonates and learn about the artists who interest you. “Look carefully and ask yourself what you like about it and what maybe you don’t like about it. Can you live with it anyplace in your home or office? Can you afford it? Do not think of art as a monetary return. It is a big gamble. It is more fun than the stock market and over a 20-year period the blue chip market has actually been safer than stocks,” she says.



Judy
Albertson

GET ACTIVE IN THE LOCAL ART SCENE:

“When you get involved in your local art community, art becomes less of a commodity and more of an experience,” adds Russell, who recommends visiting local galleries and attending art openings. “Take the time to explore the work of new artists. You’ll be exposed to new ideas and talents you might not have heard about. If you buy directly from the artist at their show, you’ll support the community and encourage the artist at the same time. It’s a win-win situation for everyone!”

VERIFY AUTHENTICITY OF ART:

“The internet has definitely given the art buyer an advantage in that the market has become much more transparent and democratized. With collectible artwork, it is always important to engage trusted art resources that can perform extensive background checks into the provenance of the artwork. Even with safeguards in place, make sure the results are to your satisfaction before buying,” Lael advises.

“The real fact is that the only way to consider art an investment is if you are buying blue chip art. It is expensive. It has a track record of sales and has usually been to auction. Beyond that, the possibility of buying a work of art to gain a lot of value

is to be lucky, and smart by holding on to the work,” Judy adds.

“When shopping online, specifically eBay, beware of forgeries. If the price seems too good to be true, it probably is. Many stated ‘limited editions’ may not be signed by the artist and may only be reproductions. Read the fine print. Insist on a certificate of authenticity, but realize that even COAs can be forged. Lastly, learn who your seller is. Those who make art sales their business will have earned a reputation. Ask questions and do your research!” Russell learns.

CONSIDER THE SHOWCASE SPACE:

Art makes a powerful statement in a space by influencing the emotional tone and ambiance of a room. Art can be a focal point, forging human connections with the architecture, a nonverbal message or a decorative convention to bring flow and interest to a room.

“A singular, significant art piece can serve as the ultimate unifier, bringing together all the design elements to create a cohesive mood and environment. The integration of art is an important design element that allows for a personal and human connection to the built environment,” Lael says.

TRADE SECRETS

Selecting artwork that resonates in a room is a tricky task because art is appreciated differently depending on its surroundings. Art in hospitality environments tends to have more mass appeal than the edgier works that one might see in a residence.

Experts advise looking for pieces that complement your sense of style and décor. Consider how the artwork will fill the space and tell your story.

“While art is only one element in overall interior design, it certainly is the most important. With art, presentation is everything. Whether a piece is minimally displayed as a gallery-wrapped canvas or whether it is set off by ornate closed-corner framing, these additional elements serve to enhance the designer’s vision,” Russell says.

Regardless of the price, provenance or

artist’s name, experts agree the true value of art lies in its emotional connections and visceral experiences.

“The art we purchase tells a powerful story; a story about our deepest thoughts and passions. It is a gift that has the ability to reawaken dreams and imagination and allows us to experience one of the greatest joys of life,” Lael says.

“People refer to having good taste which can be intuitive but it can also be cultivated. More factual knowledge leads to educated and intuitive choices,” Judy adds.

Ideally, selecting art that tells your story relies on both facts and intuition—that inner voice that says, “I’ve got to have that for the way it makes me feel and for what I want to communicate.” Just as the Prado Museum collection endures as a commentary on and documentary archive of

16th and 17th century Spanish royalty, modern day art, albeit paintings, furnishings, sculpture or multimedia installations, is our footprint in the sand of the 21st century.

Karen LeBlanc is host of The Design Tourist series. She travels the globe attending some of the world’s premiere design events in search of the latest trends, tastemakers and unique finds. Learn more at thedesigntourist.com.



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