

ESTRADA FINE ART NEWSLETTER – June 2009

Last month I wrote about certain things a new collector should think about before embarking on beginning an art collection.

In addition, there are six additional key issues to consider when weighing a potential purchase according to the Art Dealers Association of America.

- 1. Authenticity** No one wants to buy a fake. Dealers who represent artists or their estates automatically have access to primary source information that can be used to authenticate works. A dealer with an extensive history of handling a specific artist's work will also build up an archive of information as well as a body of experience which can help resolve questions of authorship and title. Many art dealers can authenticate works in their area of specialization or make a referral to an appropriate expert.

Tip: Purchase your art from an established dealer with a known reputation and insure the piece is authentic. Here's some important legal terminology for you to know: "When an art dealer or artist in California sells a fine art multiple (any fine print, photograph, sculpture cast, collage or similar art object produced in more than one copy), a written instrument must be provided to the purchaser which sets forth certain information regarding the multiple (i.e. name of artist, whether artist signed the multiple, description of process, prior editions and quantity, date of production and total size of a limited edition)." This is called a Certificate of Authenticity.

- 2. Quality** Experienced dealers and collectors agree that it is always advisable to buy the best one can afford. The most effective way to develop an eye for quality art is to look at art, and remember no one assesses more art than a good dealer.

Tip: Figure out your budget in advance in order to purchase the best art your budget allows.

- 3. Rarity** Although there are exceptions, rarity tends to enhance value. The rarity of a given work is determined by how many similar examples exist and how frequently such work becomes available for purchase.

Tip: Do your homework by researching the artwork and the artist and remember to speak to a couple of reputable dealers.

- 4. Condition** The condition of a work varies depending on the age of the piece, how it's been handled and displayed since being created and the materials used. In addition to being able to counsel on the nuances of condition that a layperson would likely miss, a dealer can advise on restoration or conservation.

Tip: Accept that it is almost impossible to find an example in pristine condition but that it doesn't necessarily affect the value. That's where a high quality dealer can be helpful.

- 5. Provenance and Exhibition History** Provenance is fancy dealer terminology for the history of the artwork – when it was created, the socio-political circumstances of the time, exhibition history and previous ownership. A good provenance can help establish authenticity, art-historical importance and title. Similarly, inclusion in significant exhibitions may enhance a work's pedigree.

Tip: The absence of a complete provenance need not be a cause for alarm, provided the dealer is reputable. Check to see if good records exist. Not all of us are like Edward G. Robinson who was known to purchase artwork only if there was interesting provenance which included fascinating or intriguing previous owners.

- 6. Value** Particularly when prices are rising, the idea of "art as an investment" gains credibility. However, collections assembled with the idea of making money often prove to be poor investments. Art chosen solely on the basis of price may yield a mediocre collection that in turn will not hold its value on resale.

Tip: Collect with passion and intelligence, both aesthetically and monetarily.

In summary, I don't want you to be intimidated to purchase art with so many issues to consider. Instead, they are just some ideas to get you started as well as a reminder for seasoned collectors.

- Geneen Estrada

Geneen Estrada is the owner of Estrada Fine Art. We represent established mid-career artists. More information can be obtained at www.estradafineart.com.