

CheckOut

A SMART BUYER'S GUIDE TO STYLES, SHOPS, SALES AND SERVICES



A ROOM WITH MANY VIEWS Artwork purveyor Mixed Greens provides free at-home consultations to potential buyers.

CHECK OUT

GET THE HANG OF IT

Buying art need not be intimidating—or bank breaking. Here's what to look for and where to look. By Valerie Stivers

Serious art collectors pride themselves on knowing which works could end up in a museum one day. And then are those of us with everyday eyeballs, who visit galleries and museums but aren't confident enough in our knowledge of the art market to buy a piece for ourselves. We worry that a purchase that doesn't appreciate in value is a bad buy; we don't know how it's going to look separated from the gallery context and placed in our apartment; and we aren't sure how to frame or display it. So we limit ourselves to painted walls or framed posters. This is a shame, because New York is thick with young artists selling gems for anywhere from \$100 to a few thousand dollars—and these investments have more permanence than the \$300 pair of shoes or \$700 plane ticket you allow yourself to splurge on. In fact, if you can afford those indulgences, you can probably

swing a piece of art. You just need to look at it from a different perspective.

GETTING STARTED
The first truth about acquiring art is that even people with serious collections aren't necessarily buying something because they think it's going to increase in worth (though it very well may). Bill Previdi, a founding member of the New Museum's New Group for young collectors, owns more than 100 pieces of art and says

that he bought all of them for the simple reason that he liked them.

Most people who take the leap from loving something in a gallery to handing over a month's rent for it are acting on a gut instinct. Dave, 33, a small-business owner with a mid-size Soho loft filled with eclectic art, bought his first serious piece for his 30th birthday: a painting by artist Matthew Greenway of a boisterous crowd raising glasses in a toast. Why that particular work? "I enjoy looking at it," he says, and adds that it had

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PERSPECTIVE CANDIDATES Drawings and photographs are thrifty ways to break into art. From left: Mathew Cerletty's drawing *Last Chance Dance* is now on view at the Rivington Arms, and A.L.Steiner's c-print photograph *Untitled (Caden and the virgin woods)* is available at John Connelly Presents.



personal significance. "It reminded me of my childhood growing up in the Catskills."

Bill Moulton, one of five partners in Williamsburg, Brooklyn's new Riviera Gallery, says that in his experience, most sales result from no more than a feeling. "People tend to zone in on one piece," he says. "They leave, then come back maybe two times to look at just that piece again. They don't necessarily have 'art collecting' in mind, but the work has grabbed them." The idea is so simple, it's easy to lose sight of: Just buy what you like.

Still, there are some things to keep in mind when you bring art into your home, especially with contemporary works, which can have shocking subject matter or require complicated installation. A few years ago, I found myself in the back room of Gorney, Bravin + Lee in Chelsea, looking through a file of photographer Justine Kurland's images. A picture of a roasting pig immediately struck me. But did I want to look at a huge pig carcass every day at home?

Although everyone has different tolerances for disturbing imagery, experienced collectors suggest caution. Previdi warns that he's become more conservative in his choices as he's learned more about living with art. "Things become more difficult to look at over time," he says. In the early '90s, Previdi bought a piece by Lisa Petrucci called *Gory Brunette*, which reproduced an image from a film of a woman who'd been beaten. He still loves it, but it became too painful to see every day. "And it also sometimes really disturbed guests—especially women," he adds. (In my case, I decided to skip the pig and go with Kurland's reverie-inducing image of two nymph girls, seated in a field of cacti.)

You also need to think realistically about your space. Renters shouldn't buy anything that would need to be set into a wall or require other structural modifications to the apartment. If you've got crumbly old plaster walls, you might not be able to display something heavy. Brooklyn resident Julie Berman, 32, recently bought a large metal frame for a lithograph she purchased, only to discover that when she tried to hang it, nail, artwork and a chunk of wall came crashing down.

In many cases, however, artists will help you fit their creations into your apartment. For example, Sarah Sze, who makes sprawling, site-specific installations out of tiny objects such as Styrofoam peanuts, Q-tips and plastic spoons, will slightly modify her work to fit a potential buyer's pad. Jay Sanders, Sze's rep at the Mari-

anne Boesky Gallery, explains that though she often designs with a particular exhibition space in mind, she'll tailor something for a residence.

WHERE TO LOOK

Once you've decided you're ready to take the plunge, you need to start hanging out in places where you'll meet the right piece of work. Look for venues that cover a wide range of styles and primarily connect you with emerging artists (the rule-of-thumb definition of *emerging* is people who haven't yet had a solo show in the city). The benefit of buying from unknowns is that prices are lower—you aren't paying a name-value markup.

The resource with the most varied selection of high-quality, low-priced contemporary work is **Mixed Greens** (601 W 26th St between Eleventh Ave and the West Side Highway, 212-331-8888; www.mixedgreens.com), whose stated purpose is helping ordinary folk buy art. The place stockpiles hundreds of options in the hundreds of dollars range (prices start at \$80). Mixed Greens lists prices on its website—something that snootier galleries wouldn't consider—and allows you to search by categories such as "price" and "size." You can also buy a "new home" gift certificate to help a friend get a piece for his or her abode.

Moreover, Mixed Greens' Judy Schulich aids those who are uncertain about their art-buying skills. Like a personal shopper (but free!), Schulich will come to your house, get a sense of your taste and then return with suggestions of artworks you may want to consider, from both her employer's roster and elsewhere. Gouache-on-canvas illustrations of New York dwellers by Leah Tinari (whose amusing sketches can often be seen in the "Talk of the Town" section of *The New Yorker*) fetch \$1,200 for an 11" x 14" piece. A framed painting of a bird's eye in close-up by Paul Plante is \$200.

Also in Chelsea, **John Connelly Presents** (526 W 26th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves, 212-337-9563) has an irreverent vibe and sometimes accessible pricing: The recent "K48-3: Teenage Rebel—The Bedroom Show" installation, which mimicked a teenager's bedroom—complete with wall-to-wall carpeting—sold pieces for \$20 to \$6,000. Connelly is the NYC source for work from rising photographer A.L. Steiner, whose prints have been exhibited in galleries around the globe; here, Nan Goldin-esque images of her friends in intimate situations

and quirky environmental shots cost from \$500. Another exciting artist on Connelly's roster is Eli Sudbrack, who makes digital prints of images culled from pop-culture sources (a picture of Bob Dylan's hair, for example), priced at \$800 and up.

The Rivington Arms (102 Rivington St between Ludlow and Essex Sts, 646-654-3213) has both low prices—most work costs from \$600 to a few thousand bucks—and a pedigree: It's co-owned by art star Brice Marden's daughter Mirabelle. The current exhibition, titled "Trying to Live Beside the Point," displays a series of 23-year-old Mathew Cerletty's oil paintings and charcoal drawings of detached, narcissistic hip-

Border control

Need a frame? Head to these well-priced experts—or follow our DIY tips.

Unfortunately, once you've found and bought a piece of art, your work is still not done. You'll need to make a decision about framing. The best-case scenario is that the artist has provided a frame and the gallery has included the cost in the total price. If not, ask someone at the gallery if the work can be framed: Almost all galleries can handle the task and offer prices competitive with those you'd get at framing centers.

However, for comparison's sake: Three respectable, low-priced framers are **Pearl Paint** (56 Lispenard St between Broadway and Church St, 212-431-7932), **Skyframe** (60 Mercer St between Broome and Grand Sts, 212-226-6028; 96 Spring St between Broadway and Mercer St, 212-941-1600) and **Sam Flax** (12 W 20th St between Fifth and Sixth Aves, 212-620-3038; 425 Park Ave at 55th St, 212-935-5353). All offer custom framing for prices starting at around \$80. To frame a 7" x 17" drawing in natural wood with a two-inch, acid-free mat costs \$73 and takes five weeks at Pearl. At Skyframe, it's \$100 and takes a week. Sam Flax quoted a price of \$122 and a wait of a few days.

DIY types can buy a premade frame, plus a mat (the store will cut it to your specifications) and double-sided acid-free tape, at any of those outlets and assemble the whole caboodle themselves—saving between \$10 and \$30 per piece. No matter which framing option you choose, you should be sure to ask for acid-free matting and adhesives, or you risk damaging your new prized possession.—VS

sters; the work varies in size and price, but 33" x 55" drawings can be had for \$2,000.

In Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which arguably has more artists per square inch than any other neighborhood in the city, Bill Moulton's **Riviera Gallery** (103 Metropolitan Ave at Wythe Ave, 718-599-5589; www.seeyouattheriviera.com) carries work that the locals can afford. Come April, there will be an exhibition of street-fashion shots by photographer Angela Boatwright, whose prints cost only \$100.

And while most major galleries are likely to be out of your league, it never hurts to check. At **Leo Koenig Inc.** (249 Centre St between Broome and Grand Sts, 212-334-9255), a recent show of works on paper in watercolor, ink and pencil by David Scher included a few pieces for as low as \$500. **The Drawing Center** (35 Wooster St between Broome and Grand Sts, 212-219-2166) is a Soho nonprofit that doesn't represent artists, but does allow those who show there to sell their stuff, and sometimes has pieces for a few hundred dollars. Chelsea's **Clementine Gallery** (526 W 26th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves, second floor, 212-243-5937), whose mission is to give artists their first NYC solo show, claims offerings for less than \$2,000. Currently in stock are whimsical, small drawings of animals by Neil Farber of hyped Canadian collective Royal Art Lodge for as little as \$300.

A trick to landing choice art at a low price is to focus on photography, lithographs, etchings and woodcuts—or anything else that comes in a series, usually of anywhere from 10 to 100. The best source around is **Editions Fawbush** (www.fawbush.com), a website devoted to multiples from huge names in contemporary art such as Damian Hirst, Kiki Smith and Andres Serrano. A 35" x 25" silk screen of one of Shahzia Sikander's Indian mythology-influenced visions is \$1,200. Two 10" porthole sculptures (complete with view) by Andrea Zittel are \$5,000 and can turn your floor, wall or ceiling into a window. A wonderful print shop is **A Clean, Well-Lighted Place** (363 Bleecker St at Charles St, 212-255-3656), which sells contemporary etchings, woodcuts and lithographs, the majority of which go for between \$75 and \$400. Mezzotints of objects such as typewriters and fans by Carol Wax are \$125 for a 5" x 5", and four-plate etchings of items like apples, roses and oranges by Mary Teichman are only \$125 for 2" x 3" images.

City residents also reap the rewards of frequent art fairs, sales and auctions. The upcoming **White Columns** auction on April 12 will have pieces from nearly everyone who shows at the prestigious space (320 W 13th St at Horatio St, entrance on Horatio St, 212-924-4212), with prices starting at half retail, which means some will be as low as \$200. And for future reference: **Gale Gates et al.** (37 Main St at Water St, Dumbo, Brooklyn, 718-522-4596) has an annual benefit auction in December of work from primarily local artists; the **Affordable Art Fair** is scheduled for October 30 to November 2 at Pier 92 in Manhattan (for information, call 212-255-2003); the well-stocked **Klotz/Sirmon** photo gallery holds a deeply discounted holiday sale in December (for information, call 212-741-4764); and the annual **Scope Art Fair** takes place in late February (for more information, visit www.scope-art.com).

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MIXED GREENS

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