

The Responsible Collector

Collectors of art fall into two basic categories. The first is the collector that decides to live with art, buys it until all the walls are filled, and then stops. The second revels in the experience of collecting, and like the artist, feels compelled by some greater force to continue with this passionate relationship, regardless of the decorative or functional aspects.

What many collectors don't realize, is the process is not over once the piece is hung. It becomes even more vitally important to become a responsible collector if you are collecting museum quality artists. Following, I have outlined the three basic areas that require attention from all collectors.

Documentation

It is important to professionally document each piece of art in your collections. This could prove to be an invaluable resource, should the need arise for restoration, or in the event of damage. The best and most economical form of documentation is 35mm slides. Slides should be properly labeled to include artist's name, title of work, date of completion, media, and dimensions. Also, an indication of top and front is advisable. Remember, 35mm slides are not archivally stable, so in most cases it is a good idea to follow up with black and whites as well.

Biographical Information

It is also important to keep yourself informed about the artists' activities, and save related materials. Write-ups and reviews, as well as exhibition announcements should be kept on file for each artist in your collection. This will increase the value of the work as an artist's career develops. Minimally, you should keep an up-dated biography or artist resume. Several collectors also ask the artist to write a brief statement about their particular work. This is not always possible, but if you have contact with the artist, it is an additional luxury that only collecting living artists affords.

Provenance

In most cases, if you have purchased a piece directly from a gallery or the artist, the artwork doesn't have a history of having been in prior exhibitions or collections. But, occasionally if a specific piece you own has been previously exhibited or owned, this should be recorded accurately, and is referred to as the "provenance."

Keeping accurate records regarding your collection will allow for immediate access to current information for future exhibitions and catalogs. It is necessary backup for insurance and tax purposes. As your collection grows, it is a good idea to get a periodic professional appraisal.

Finally, as a courtesy to the artist, it is always a good idea to contact them when you move or sell the art. Artists need to have access to their work for retrospectives or survey shows. Also, as a reminder, California State Law now requires sellers to pay a 5% royalty to the artist on sales over \$1000.

If all of this sounds overwhelming, it's not meant to. Remember, you, as well as the artist, are becoming a part of history-if you make the commitment to become a responsible collector.