



House Beautiful x BUSINESS OF HOME

GET GOOD AT BUYING

ART

Four years ago, a bona fide Jackson Pollock was discovered in someone's garage. Too bad we can't all be so lucky. Don't give up, says *Kaitlin Petersen*, editor in chief of design industry resource *Business of Home*. Here's what you need to know to start your own collection.

Know What You're Buying

Art is a broad category, encompassing everything from portraits to performances. But for people decorating their homes, most collecting will center around paintings, drawings, and prints—the stuff you can frame and put on a wall. These pieces generally fall into one of three categories: original works, limited edition prints, and open edition prints. An **original work** is fairly self-explanatory: It's the piece created by the artist, and is more valuable than a print. Prints are produced in multiples; the size of the edition indicates how many were made. In general, the rarer a piece is—one in an edition of five, or even one of a hundred—the likelier it is to hold its value or appreciate. The online fine art marketplace Artsy recently sold a **limited edition print** by the street artist Banksy for \$160,000—but the platform also sells thousands of prints in the \$100 to \$300 range. These can be a stepping-stone to an original piece or the end goal. (In contrast, if you don't see a clearly marked edition size on a print, it's likely because there isn't one—that's what's called an **open edition print**, meaning an unlimited number can be produced, and none will hold much value.)

"Prints give people access and the opportunity to enjoy that artist's work without paying the price of the original painting or artwork," says Everette Taylor, Artsy's chief marketing officer. So what drives the relative values of a print? "It's just basic supply and demand," says Katharine Earnhardt, founder of Brooklyn-based art advisory Mason Lane, which connects clients with emerging artists. The fewer editions that were produced, the more valuable they are—which is why Earnhardt encourages art buyers at all price points to seek out unique works rather than pieces with a supersize run. "A 'giclée print' is a nice poster," she says. "West Elm and God-knows-who-else call it this weird French word, but it's really just a print using good ink."

Do Your Homework

"If you found something that you really love, what gallery is it from? Check out the gallery to see what their reputation is, and ask them to talk you through it," suggests Houston-based art consultant Elise Arnoult Miller. "You need to know something about the artist, know that the source is reputable, and know about quality. I wouldn't go and just buy things blindly as a new collector on any platform."

Artsy is a great source for that sort of intel. In addition to its robust fine art marketplace, the platform houses a free-to-access database of more than a million works by some 100,000 artists. A quick search for a featured artist turns up a bio and list of works currently for sale—plus upcoming art shows,

recent articles, past auction results, and similar artists. While many platforms have a specific curatorial point of view, Artsy pulls from an array of vetted artists—and in doing so, demystifies the art world's inner workings. With a free log-on, you can save and track artists, and then easily follow their work (and its prices). See that an artist you like is part of an upcoming group show at a prestigious gallery, or that one of their works sold for an all-time high at auction? If you've got your eye on a particular piece, keep an eye out for clues that it might be the time to buy before prices rise.

"A gallery can be very intimidating and unwelcoming, especially if you don't feel like you're well-versed in the art world," says Taylor, who bought his first piece on Artsy before he ever joined the company. "I didn't have to worry about anyone judging me, or about not knowing XYZ about the artist. This was all available to me right at my fingertips." Taylor likens exploring the art world through Artsy to the shy person you know in real life who becomes an extrovert on Twitter: **"It levels the playing field for people entering into the space."**

Invest Wisely

Many things can boost the value of an artist's oeuvre, from their experience level to how many well-known collectors have purchased their pieces. While gallery representation can help ensure that an artist's body of work will grow in value, it can also add upward of 50 percent to the price of their pieces. The art world, Earnhardt says, is not so different from the stock market. **"If you want pieces that are more likely to appreciate, that have a story, and were made by a promising artist, it's going to cost more,"** she says.

Art is subjective and deeply personal—there's no universally accepted standard of what's "good" or even valuable. Collecting, then, exists at a curious intersection of what you love, what your home needs, and what *feels like* a sound investment. Gallerists, curators, and art advisers across the market agree that the best route is to view appreciation as a happy surprise, and to surround yourself with pieces that move you personally.

What does money really buy—and what do you get when you spend more? "Quality seems so subjective, but when you start looking [closely] at lower-cost and higher-cost

pieces, you start to see the difference," Earnhardt says. "The materials, the content, and the subject matter are just more interesting visually, and the reputation of the artist is different—they are probably represented by a gallery known for leveraging artists' careers and getting them into certain museums, so those artists' markets have strengthened accordingly. All of that ladders up to quality in the art world."

That said, if you're pursuing art only for financial gain, you're probably better off placing your bets elsewhere. **"It's not that art can't be a good investment, but that shouldn't be the priority,"** Miller says. "If you're just looking for a place to park money, the stock market is probably a more sure way [to do it]. There are some relatively safe bets if you're buying blue-chip artists—I mean, it probably will continue to be true that Picasso's market grows over time. But do we know 100 percent? No. And for any other artist, there's no way [to know]."

Improve Your Eye

"A good collector is collecting with their eyes, not their ears. They stay true to who they are," says Chelsea Neman Nassib, who founded the online art collective Tappan in 2012. But what if you don't know what you love yet? Art advisers of all stripes say there are no shortcuts; the best way to learn what moves you is to experience more art. "When you go to museums, start collecting a list of artists whose work you really love," Miller says. "That might point you toward clues like, 'I really love still life.' Really, anyone can be a connoisseur of any kind of fine art, it just takes looking and looking and looking and looking."

The more you look at art, the more you'll be able to spot quality in the wild. "When you develop your eye, it becomes very easy to spot Zara versus a couture collection," says Nassib. "But what's happening is that people are spending a lot on Zara because they don't understand the difference. The more you see, the more you can understand."

On the Hunt? FOOLPROOF ART SOURCES

FOR BEGINNERS

Aggregate Online Platforms

These tend to offer an edited selection—albeit a huge one—along with robust search tools to help you explore different kinds of art. **Artfully Walls** and **Society6** sell open edition prints for under \$100. **Absolut Art** sells certified limited-edition prints by emerging artists. **Saatchi Art** carries original works by more than 94,000 artists, who upload their own works and set their own prices, which means there's no curatorial filtering of what's for sale; And the established contemporary art platform **Artspace** works with galleries and cultural institutions to offer thousands of works, which can range from \$20 to \$200,000.

FOR NEW COLLECTORS

Curated Online Collections

A host of smaller platforms act like digital galleries, working with fewer artists and offering a distinct curatorial point of view. **Tappan**, founded in 2012, sells original works as well as prints, and typically limits all editions to 30 or fewer; meanwhile, **Uprise Art** offers a tightly curated selection of originals—most under \$800—by vetted emerging artists. Founded in 2016, **Better-Shared** features original and limited-edition works by more than 200 artists from Africa and of the African diaspora. And **Domingo Comms**, founded last year to amplify the work of Latin American and Latinx artists, sells limited-edition prints on demand.

FOR TACTILE SHOPPERS

Online/In-Person Art Fairs

For the past two decades, the **Affordable Art Fair** has been a leading player in showcasing high-quality works at more accessible prices. At its biannual fair in New York, all works shown are capped at \$10,000, with more than 50 percent under \$5,000, while its online marketplace maxes out at about \$8,300 (and has a section of prints under \$250). The fair also places strict limits on edition sizes of the works it accepts, from 25 for sculpture to 150 for photography, and requires displayed prices on all pieces; all works selling for less than \$500 are marked with a sticker for increased transparency.

FOR SERIOUS COLLECTORS

Art Consultants

Part of the appeal of working with an adviser is the depth of their network and knowledge. Houston-based art consultant **Elise Arnoult Miller** helps clients hone their taste while connecting them with works from galleries, art fairs, auction houses, independent artists, and even private dealers. Katharine Earnhardt, founder of art advisory **Mason Lane**, takes on clients with budgets as low as \$1,000. "It's all about spending your money wisely," she says. "Someone can take \$100 and go buy art. If they hire us, they pay us \$20 and then have \$80 left over, and we're going to find them something much better for that \$80 than they would've gotten for \$100. It goes back to financial markets: If I tried to buy stock on my own, I would probably not make as sound decisions as I would if I had an expert. I'm paying [the expert], but I'm making better choices with the remainder [of the money]."

