



Art Attack

Buying a piece of art doesn't have to be a scary experience. *I-S* has the experts take you through it step by step.

By Melissa De Silva

So you've got that swish new pad, but it's looking a bit bare. If you think "art" is the answer, but are clueless about going about it, this is the moment you've been waiting for.

Firstly, says Pwee Keng Hock of Utterly Art Gallery, "it depends on what kind of person you are." Those who are more conservative tend to go for scenery, while others just want something colorful for the wall. Knowing basic art terms can help gallery staff recommend something for you. Simple words like "abstract" or "landscape" will do, assures Pwee, because those who bandy about technical terms such as "impressionist" without understanding them will run into problems as gallery staff understand them as specific historical styles.

When you see something that catches your eye, ask about the artist's background, previous exhibitions and the concept behind the work, says a spokesperson from Art Seasons Gallery. Says Pwee, "this will let you see if the artist's ideas are similar to what you are thinking [about the work]; if it is different but interesting, or if you cannot relate to it at all." Viewing the artist's previous works can give you an idea if what's on the wall is a good progression for the artist.

Once you've decided on the piece, there are a few ways to part with your money. Most galleries offer installment or lump sum payments through credit card, cash or check. For very expensive works, the paintings are delivered only after the final payment. For larger paintings, the gallery usually arranges for delivery and

installation of the work, says the spokesperson from Art Seasons; while small paintings can be hand carried home. If you buy your piece during an exhibition, you'll have to wait till the exhibition ends to collect it. Some places, such as Opera Gallery, offer after sales service and delivery, sometimes even flying to clients' homes to deliver and install pieces personally.

And now for the question you've been waiting for—is it absolutely crass to ask for a lower price? "No, not at all," says Gilles Dyan, founder of Opera Gallery. Pwee agrees, saying that "it is within your rights to negotiate, and the gallery staff are within their rights to accommodate." However, cautions the Arts Seasons spokesperson, don't treat buying art like bartering at the fish market.

Before plonking down your cash, check the work for damage. For oil and acrylic pieces, look for scratches on the surface and sides that are discontinuous with the work, says Pwee. Check the back of the canvas for mould. A small spot of mould can be brushed off with soap and water, but larger spots may need to be professionally treated. For paper works such as calligraphy, look out for dots (known as "foxing") and warping of the paper due to humidity.

And don't let the gallery environment intimidate you. Says Pwee, "There should be no barrier to asking questions, no matter how silly they might seem, as the function of the gallery owner is to make you better understand the work you are viewing." Dyan advises people never to be afraid of wandering into galleries that catch their eye, as "art is to be loved by everyone."

Art House

Fitting your art to your home decor is the way to go, says interior designer Derrick Lim.

There are lots of art styles, but Derrick Lim of White Space Living believes that it's ultimately your home's theme that should determine your art. If your home is playful and colorful, you can get a pop art work; while a minimal neutral home can handle any type of painting. A good rule of thumb is to keep it in the same color family. So if your room is a warm brown, choose from other warm hues such as beige, red or orange. For proportion, Lim has some basic guidelines. For a long wall (five to six meters), a large painting (or many small paintings) looks good, while huge paintings can work for high ceilings (three meters and above). Get creative with display. Use the floor to prop up paintings. Or mount a series on frames of different widths so that a three dimensional effect is created. It's about whether the piece creates impact, believes Lim. "Even an Ikea print can make an impact," he says, "although materials used for original works, such as oil and acrylic, lend uniqueness and texture."

Understanding Abstract

Allan Teo of Momentous Arts explains.

Abstract art is just art that doesn't literally depict objects in the real world. It originated in the '50s with Bauhaus and Abstract Expressionism. But all you need to know is that the forms, colors and textures are an external expression of the artist's subconscious and feelings. So, says Teo, "You should not try to figure what it means or intellectualize it. Just focus on the brush strokes, the layers of texture and the colors to experience the artist's feelings." Balance of composition—such that no element appears jarring—is another facet of appreciation. Also, paintings are like people; we gain first impressions that change the more we look at them, says Teo, citing critically acclaimed Australian artist Waldemar Kolbusz's textured yet translucent works as having this effect. However, he admits, this is an aspect you would only be able to enjoy fully when you live with a piece at home.



"PLATTER" BY WALDEMAR KOLBUSZ