



Using Instagram to Build Your Art Collection

With auction prices for works of fine art skyrocketing to exorbitant levels and large festivals like Art Basel Miami having a profound influence on the art market, it's important for collectors to remember that when it comes to building an impressive and potentially valuable art collection, what matters isn't necessarily how much you can spend — it's the connections you can make.

Timing, Proximity and Passion

Consider the story of Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, who amassed a remarkable collection of conceptual and minimalist art — nearly 5,000 pieces over 45 years — on Herbert's \$23,000 postman's salary. Despite their modest means, the Vogels were able to purchase pieces from artists like Cindy Sherman and Roy Lichtenstein without ever attending a festival or an auction.

How'd they do it? It was a combination of timing, proximity and passion. Living on the Upper East Side of New York City during the 1960s and '70s, the Vogels were just a subway ride away from scores of emerging artists just starting their careers and willing to deal. The couple cast a wide net and got creative, offering to purchase works on installment plans and by exchanging favors. According to the *Washington Post*, they acquired a collage by the renowned conceptual artist Christo by agreeing to mind his cat.

Word got around that the Vogels were a reliable source of income for struggling modern artists, and those artists began seeking them out. By engaging with and supporting artists who were just beginning their careers, the Vogels were able to get in on the ground floor of a significant art movement.

While not every artist they dealt with became famous and not every piece became priceless, the collection as a whole is regarded as a masterpiece in and of itself. In 1990, they donated much of their collection to the National Gallery.

The Power of Social Media

Not everyone can be so lucky as to live at the epicenter of a significant art scene like the Vogels did. But 21st century art collectors have an advantage the Vogels would surely have envied: social media. Through social media platforms like Instagram, collectors can discover emerging artists from all over the world and reach out to them directly, building relationships and networks in much the same way the Vogels did, but on a much grander scale.

Young art collectors are already taking advantage of this new frontier. 79% of art buyers under the age of 35 use Instagram to discover new artists.¹

¹ Hiscox Online Art Trade Report, 2018

Paulette Insall, an abstract artist from Portland, Oregon (Instagram: @pauletteinsall), says that social media has radically transformed how she promotes her work. “It’s enabled me to cultivate a very large, loyal following.” Over the last few years, Insall has managed to attract more than 52,000 followers, giving her near-instantaneous access to a large, diverse audience that would be practically impossible to reach through traditional means.

Her social media success has translated into real-world benefits, too: more sales, to both private and corporate collections; opportunities to work with art consultants and interior designers; and invitations to exhibit her work in galleries throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Tips for Building Your Network

While these tips could apply to most social media platforms, they mostly apply to Instagram, which has become the platform of choice for art aficionados. According to the 2018 Hiscox Online Art Trade Report, 63% of survey respondents indicated that they use Instagram for art-related purposes.² In contrast, the use of Facebook for art-related purposes has declined precipitously, from 56% of respondents in 2016 to just 31% in 2018.³

Seed Your Feed

On Instagram, the first step in building your network is to “seed your feed” with accounts relevant to your interests. Start by following artists that you like or whose work you already own. Add a few galleries you are familiar with or that you know feature artists you enjoy. You may also want to follow art-savvy influencers like Eva Respini (@curator_on_the_run), the chief curator for Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art, who regularly posts contemporary artwork and commentary.

Explore Hashtags

When viewing art-related posts, you’ll probably notice that the captions include a number of hashtags — some general, like #artwork or #originalart, some very specific — a landscape painting might be tagged #landscape, for instance. Tapping on these hashtags will reveal recent posts that bear this tag, allowing you to discover even more work and artists you might not have seen otherwise. You can even follow these hashtags so that any new post with these tags shows up directly in your feed.

According to an Artsy survey, 94% of Instagram collectors search by hashtag.⁴ You can start with common terms (for example, [here are 101 common hashtags](#)), but also try out the names of artists you like, or translate some of those common hashtags into other languages, like French or Spanish.

² Hiscox Online Art Trade Report, 2018

³ Hiscox Online Art Trade Report, 2018

⁴ “7 Ways to Win Over Collectors on Instagram,” Elena Soboleva, Artsy.net

⁵ “How Artists Use Instagram to Present and Sell Their Art,” Alan Bamberger, Artbusiness.com

Reach Out

So far, these tips have been largely about observing, but the true value of social media is how it simplifies interacting with others. According to art consultant Alan Bamberger, social media allows artists and collectors “to make genuine, in-depth connections that often end up playing out in real life.”⁵

In order to do this, however, you need to reach out. Insall recommends liking and commenting on an artist’s posts often. “Most artists love to connect with fans and collectors online,” she says. “When you engage with them often on social media, it lets them know that you enjoy what they are doing and shows them you support their work.” This can be a great way to build a personal rapport with an artist you like.


If you’re interested in communicating with an artist privately, send a private message.

“Collectors reach out to me in private messages to discuss my work,” says Insall. Often, it’s just to express their admiration. “They tell me they find my art inspiring,” she says, “and that it resonates with what they believe and value.”

But Insall makes sales via the platform as well. “Once they’ve decided what pieces they’d like to purchase, or what size they would like to commission, I send a payment invoice back to their email and they can pay securely online.” Insall says that the majority of her sales take place on Instagram, rather than through traditional venues like galleries or art fairs.

Follow Your Passion

Social media can do for you today what an Upper East Side apartment did for the Vogels in the 1960s and ’70s: put you in close proximity to the next wave of up-and-coming artists. But to truly make the most of the benefits that social media affords today’s art collectors, you’ll need to follow your own passion and pursue the things that bring you joy.

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