

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

How to **buy** art



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Escutcheon, 2000-2006, by Virginia Bodman,
from work available at Globe Gallery. Photo: Colin Davison

Why buy art?

The best reason for buying art is because you like it, and – like buying anything else of quality – it is worth trying to buy the best you can even if it means stretching your budget slightly, or paying in instalments.



Kt 28, by Antonio Riello, from work available at Globe Gallery.
Photo: courtesy of the artist

Why buy art?

This is a brief guide for those who want to have the thrill and satisfaction of owning original works of art by living artists.

Buying contemporary and original works of art can make your world a better place:

- art can enhance your home or working environment
- art can be for a special occasion (wedding, birthday, retirement present)
- buying art helps support an artist's career

This guide focuses on what is often described as contemporary art or modern art, that means it is usually by a living artist and can include drawing, painting, sculpture, print, photography, an artists' book, video, film, live art and new media.



Cat from next door, 2007, a plastic modelling compound, enamel paint, 14x15x8cm model by Jock Mooney.
Photo: Colin Davison. Courtesy: the artist/Vane

Here are some tips to help you form your own opinions before you buy:

Look around and get information

- visit as many galleries as possible, talk to staff and sign up to their mailing list for information on upcoming shows and events
- visit art school degree shows which usually take place in June
- visit artist studios on 'open studio' days when you can meet and buy work from the artist
- visit art fairs where you can see many different galleries in one place
- theatres, cafes, and libraries often show art which is for sale
- look at art magazines for information
- look on the internet



Ceramics by Sun Kin, from work available at mima.
Photo: Gilmar Riberio at g2 photography

Budget

- galleries have price lists on display; if not, ask to see one
- research the price range of the sort of work that you like and fix your budget
- you may have to frame, transport or insure your works of art; check exactly what is included in the price you are quoted: the frame? VAT?
- does the gallery provide an interest free loan scheme such as Own Art*?
- if you want to buy art as an investment, then be prepared to invest substantially to begin with; study the market very thoroughly or pay for specific independent advice

You may choose to take higher risks buying more works that are very affordable – if you buy the work because you genuinely like it then you will not mind if it does not become an investment, but it might!

- red dots by a work indicate that it has been sold, a half dot that it is reserved, but ask anyway



Sky print by Chiho Aoshima, 2005. Courtesy Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris & Miami
©2005 Chiho Aoshima/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.
From work available at BALTIC.

Where to look:

- **'gallery'** is a name for both commercial dealers and publicly-funded exhibition spaces. Prices may not be available and questions about sales are often referred back to the artist. This may take time, so do persist
- **artists' studios** provide opportunities for buyers and browsers to meet artists and buy from them at 'open studios' on specific days, or a weekend in the year
- **print studios** or workshops are places where artists make and sell original prints
- **degree shows** are usually held for a week in June at universities. The public can see and buy work from that year's graduates
- **art fairs** are held annually in London, Glasgow and many other cities. You can talk to gallery staff, attend talks, and look at art magazines

For lists of galleries in the North East check listings magazines such as The Crack and look online at www.thecrackmagazine.com

For national listings and information about artists and exhibitions there are several websites including:

www.a-n.co.uk

www.axisartists.org.uk

www.craftscouncil.org.uk

Questions to ask before you buy

- if you find a work that really appeals you may want to ask yourself if I walk away will I regret not buying it?
- do I want many varied works or a few very distinctive pieces?
- do I like it for its own qualities or because it reminds me of another work that I can't afford to buy?
- do I like this artist's work but maybe not any particular example here? (Ask to see more or to be told about future exhibitions.)
- will it fit the space I have in mind? Have measurements with you but be adventurous about the size of works you buy and the places where you display it. Before you arrange transport check that the size you are given includes the frame – and check the weight of sculpture

Ask the gallery/artist

- what is the artist's track record?
- who else has bought this artist's work? Private collectors? Companies? Museums? Am I a pioneer? (Don't be afraid to be the first to buy, after all Van Gogh only sold one painting in his lifetime, someone has to be first!)
- how is it made? Is it fragile? Are there any special ways to display it?
- can you reserve it for me for a few days?
- does the gallery offer an interest-free purchase facility such as Own Art*?
See www.artscouncil.org.uk/ownart

Frequently asked questions

Q. Why is this work not signed?

A. Contemporary artists sometimes do not sign their work. A painting is sometimes identified on the back. It is usual to expect an invoice or receipt that states exactly who made the work and details of materials and date. You should keep this.

Q. Why is this painting not framed and has unpainted edges?

A. This is how the artist wants it shown. You can make your own decisions after you have bought it but you will be altering the artist's intentions.

Q. Can I visit the artist's studio?

A. This is ok as long as you really want to see or buy more work. An artist is unlikely to sell their own work if they have a gallery representing them.

Q. How do I know that this work is not overpriced?

A. If you like the work enough, have done some research, made some comparisons you should feel reassured and confident.



He Loves Me, a piece from *As soon as you've got it you want something else* series by Rachel Gretton, available from Designed & Made. Photo: Steven Landles Photography

Glossary

Limited editions

- many types of work are editioned
- each is numbered and usually signed: each one is equal although many people like to buy the first of the edition (1/250) or a low number. There is no logical reason to do so
- works of art in limited editions include:
 - **sculpture**, especially bronze
 - **prints**, often called artists' or original prints to differentiate from mechanically printed reproductions
 - **multiples** are works produced in a multiple edition by artists. A multiple might be a small sculpture, a poster, a t-shirt, anything that the artist decides
 - **artists' books** may be unique and by a very well known artist at a fraction of the cost of their other work
 - **photographs** can be unique but are often editioned and sometimes combined with digital technology
 - **video, film and new media** are now regularly created by artists and are usually editioned. The artist retains the artist's copy and then licences exhibition copies. If you wish to buy new technology it is wise to discuss transfer to other formats such as DVD

Other techniques and care:

- **oil and acrylic** – acrylic is a cheaper, quicker drying, and modern version of oil
- **support** – oil and acrylic are usually painted on to a support of canvas, cotton or linen. Paintings are susceptible to changes in temperature and humidity and may warp or crack. Avoid hanging over heat sources. Screwing the frame or stretcher to the wall instead of hanging from hooks may help
- **works on paper** – drawings, watercolours, prints and photographs will discolour from exposure to strong light. They should be framed under glass or Perspex to protect them
- **mixed media** – exactly what it says and could include anything, so ask

Afterwards

Contact a good framer who will advise you on mounting and framing. Ask for advice about lighting and displaying the work safely.

Take a photograph of the work and keep it with the artist's CV for insurance purposes. Ask to be kept up to date with future exhibitions.

Congratulations!

You have started a collection.

Front cover image:

Grindon Lane Series, screenprint by Bridget Jones,
from work available at Northern Print

Photo: David Lawson



Petal surface detail Orchid 2, 2006,
(SEM Microscopy), a digital print by Claire Davies.
Courtesy: the artist/Vane

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