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INSPIRED LIVING

Getting the HANG OF IT

A LOCAL ART ADVISOR OFFERS A CRASH COURSE IN COLLECTING

BY LIZA GRANT SMITH

Ready to master the art of art collecting but not sure where to start? Melanie Werner, a fine art advisor with Palm Beach's **Galerie Werner**, shares how she helps clients deck their walls with works that speak to them on multiple levels. (*galeriewerner.net*)

MELANIE WERNER (INSET) OF GALERIE WERNER ADVISES CLIENTS ON THE SELECTION OF DISTINCTIVE ARTWORKS SUCH AS *NEVER ALONE* BY LÚCIO CARVALHO (BELOW).



COURTESY OF GALERIE WERNER



NICKLAS SARGENT PHOTOGRAPHY

PBI: What are your first steps when advising new clients?

Werner: After establishing the budget, the initial goal is discerning where the clients' tastes, interests, and collecting inclinations rest. I then compile an extensive portfolio of art selections, which includes a wide range of styles, periods, mediums, subject matter (from figurative to abstract), cultural diversity, palettes, and price points. For example, I recently sent a couple over 300 "vetted" options just to get the creative process flowing. They aligned on about 50 artists, and I delved deeper into the body of work for those 50 artists. They eventually selected 11 pieces from various artists from around the world. The collection was diverse and dynamic, just like the couple themselves.

How should the pieces of art that you own speak to you?

When a piece is "right," the viewer typically has a physical, visceral response. Does it take your breath away or send chills through your body? Has the work emotionally moved you in some shape or form? On some level, does the piece invoke or inspire curiosity? If the answer is yes, rest assured, the piece is right for you.



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What should people never do when selecting art?

Never match the art to accessories. It's novice and implies [an] art world neophyte.

What is in high demand now among your South Florida clients?

Generally speaking, I sell more abstract works in South Florida. With the volume of uncertainty in the world today, abstracts [like those by Mark Rothko, Wassily Kandinsky, and Brice Marden] are less complicated, freer, and more open to interpretation. That said, I have many clients who prefer figurative works

[like those by Pablo Picasso and David Hockney] or more tangible subjects such as landscapes.

Should an art purchase work toward building a collection with a general theme, or can each piece function independently?

Some collectors are well versed, quite disciplined, and have set distinct parameters for what they're looking to acquire. These buyers center a collection around a favorite artistic period, movement, or style. Other collectors are more visually random and purchase what resonates. In this case, their collections tend to be more diverse. That said, I've often found that even collections formed "independently" carry some level of cohesion—a common thread, if you will.

How much should artwork be an asset investment versus an emotional investment?

That depends on one's investment strategy. If you're planning to build a collection as an asset class in and of itself, then buy the very best avail-

able from a favored artist. An advisor can help navigate [you] toward that very best category piece and can help acquire it at the right price. A more casual collector might be drawn to an emotional purchase. In this case, I'd advise to carefully review artists' bios and exhibition history as a safeguard for potential growth.

What is your favorite "first piece" that you've helped someone buy?

Never Alone by Lúcio Carvalho. It was gratifying to place this piece because I believe the artist is on the rise and currently affordable. Additionally, it suited [the collectors'] personalities—traditional at heart but willing to take a risk on a fantastical representation of the fragility of life.



COURTESY OF GALERIE WERNER

What is the best way for people to begin learning what type of art they love?

Visit museums, art fairs, and galleries and see artwork in person. Over time, you'll discover what you're drawn to, what you like, and equally important, what you don't like.



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