

How To Begin A Contemporary Art Collection

MutualArt

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We asked leading gallerists to reveal their key tips for building a collection — from how much you should spend, to how to ensure a work's authenticity

How can I find out more about the contemporary art world?

"I think the best way to find out more about the contemporary art world is to experience it for yourself... immerse yourself in it," says Annie Vartivarian, co-founder of **Letitia Gallery**, a new contemporary gallery opening in Beirut in February. "Attend gallery openings, museum exhibitions, talks, auctions and if possible visit artist's studios. This experience will not only give you a perspective on which artists are relevant and popular in today's market but, also the price ranges in contemporary art, where you can acquire it and consider how good an investment the work might be now and in the future".



Eileen Cooper (1953), *Under The Same Moon*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 122 x 92 cm. Exhibited at the Letitia Gallery, Beirut.

What should my budget be for a first time buy?

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The professional verdict is: it doesn't matter. Collector and gallerist Marwan Zakhem, who is the founder of [Gallery 1957](#), suggests, "A collection can be started with any budget, so adapt your first buy to whatever you can afford. At the end of the day, the work's monetary value won't dictate the level of excitement you get from looking and purchasing. My first 10 or 15 pieces cost me less than \$100 each. Collecting has a tendency to become an obsession so make sure that you stick to the rule of buying within your means."

Vartivarian agrees that a large budget is not important when you're starting out. She reassures us that "the first purchase is always the most difficult and I have always felt that it should be made primarily on instinct. In that I mean the work speaks to you perhaps through its colour, its composition or its meaning, as in conceptual art." Frankie Rossi, Director of Sales at [Marlborough Fine Art](#), adds, "Buying prints by established artists is a good way to start a collection. Begin with a modest budget, and increase it with your own self confidence."

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Allen Jones (1937), Pour Les Levres, 1965. Oil on canvas, 76.5 x 50.8 cm. (30 1/8 x 20 in.), image courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art.

Which artists are relevant right now?

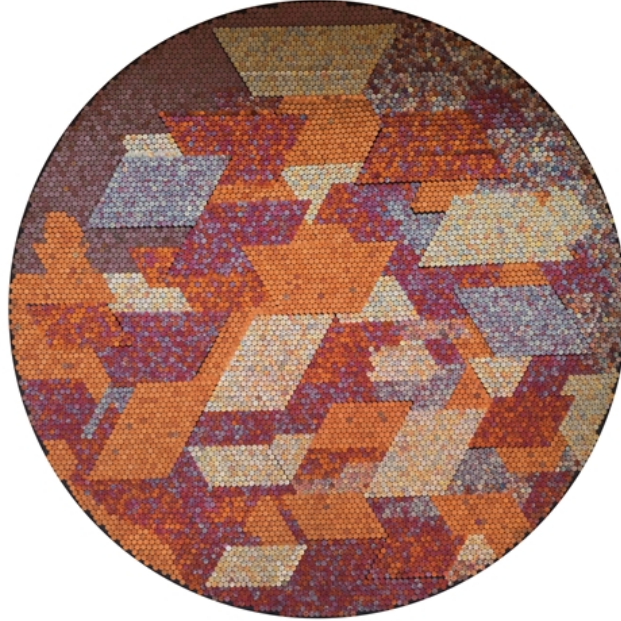
"The international arts scene is now rightfully taking greater notice of contemporary art from Africa – especially West Africa," says Zakhem, who's gallery is based in Ghana. "[This is] where a large part of my personal collection is from – so I naturally recommend this growing market as a good place to start. [Serge Attukwei Clottey](#), who we are showing as part of a gallery takeover at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai later this month, is one of Ghana's best known artists, alongside more established names such as [Ibrahim Mahama](#). From Nigeria, El

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also more emerging names to watch out for such as Yaw Owusu, Gerald Chukwuma, Jeremiah Quarshie and Zohra Opoku; in August this year we will be showing new works from the Nigerian-based Modupeola Fadugba, who is certainly one to keep an eye on."

Simon Tovey, head of Phillips' *New Now Sales* in London, recommends two artists: "Shara Hughes and Celeste Dupuy-Spencer, garnered broader critical attention this year when they were included in the Whitney Biennial and now have achieved greater market support after being included in our *New Now sales*."



Yaw Owusu (1992), *Gold Rush*, 2017. Treated Copper Coins on Wood, 72 in. diameter. Showing at Gallery 1957.

Where should I go to buy?

According to Tovey, "There are a number of options available to a budding collector, from galleries and artist studios, to art fairs and auction houses. Auctions are a great way of getting access to material you can't find on the primary market." Tovey believes we must demystify the auction house, suggesting they really are open to everyone. "People can be intimidated by the idea of an auction house, especially if they haven't worked with one before, however we are a tremendous resource for collectors. Auction houses are a democratic and transparent process in terms of understanding values and costs and what your money is actually buying. Talk to us, and ask us questions. We're very open about what we do; we have a passion for art and we want to try to pair you with works that you love and want to live with too."

This sentiment is supported by Mattia Pozzoni, resident expert at MutualArt: "The good thing about auctions is that they're democratic. If you like big names, auction is a good bet." Pozzoni adds, "If you're interested in getting to know an artist, go to a gallery, and try to befriend some gallerists before you start buying. That way you'll get first dibs on the available artworks. If you follow an artist from the ground up, you'll be the first in line when they make it big."



Celeste Dupuy-Spencer (1979), Ceviche and Peruvian Meat, 2011. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 61 cm. (30 x 24 in.). Price Realized: \$23,750 (Estimate: \$10,000-15,000).

How should I display my artworks?

"However you can enjoy them most," says Zakhem. "Personally, I believe that artworks should be lived around and involved in part of the everyday conversation. I am lucky enough to share part of my collection in the Kempinski Hotel in Accra, as I am passionate to get as many people as possible to experience these exciting works; I'd encourage all collectors to share their works where they can." For Tovey, the way you display your artwork is a matter of instinct; "it is entirely personal and depends on the artwork and the space."

Pozzoni suggests "You should have a feeling when you're buying something that you know exactly where you want to put it. Arguably more important than the location is the framing. Sometimes you see even Picassos in terrible frames. Think about the use of colour, the use of paper. This makes a huge difference. A good option is to work together with an art advisor and an interior designer, but most of all, go with your feeling. Follow your instinct."