

Buying art is nowhere near as complicated as rocket science

By Robert Schimmel

How many times have I heard the question – “It has to go with my couch, right?” – directly or subliminally during my gallery and private sales experience. In return I’ve wanted desperately to ask, “Is that like a dating priority or matchmaking game?”

On the more humorous side is the truth that, yes, it is. Sadly, most do not take it with any seriousness akin to entering a relationship with someone and are glib or uninvolved in what amounts to an investment that will influence their lives daily for potentially long time.



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So, what’s a rookie to do when all that’s needed is an innocuous space filler? I’m so glad you asked.

Initially we must make a few assumptions and set out some premises because one artwork does not fit all. If you literally only need or want something to fill a given space for a few months and know you’ll seldom have to look at it, then go to Walmart or borrow something from mom and be happy (this equates to “throw away art” and is just fine).

However, I truly believe such to be a rare circumstance for a

lot of reasons. Thus, on the flip side of this canvas is our first premise: you want to enhance your surroundings and understand how art can enrich an attitude, recall a joy, encourage opinions and reflection, etc. Our second premise is that you want good quality, a fair price and practical guidelines, including realistic access to art. Be aware, this is not about investment art, which gets into a tricky, nefarious realm that generally requires more money, knowledge and a different attitude, not unlike what is requisite for the stock market. And, finally, you want this to be a fun, life long journey of loving and gathering art if not collecting it.

Setting the table for a process of finding and purchasing art you want to live with is fairly logical and straightforward. You have the option of making it more or less detailed and enlightening. Simply put, you need to know: A) what you like, which will come from a “seek and discover” mission that may be the most important part of the process; B) how to “select and find” the art and artists you prefer from part A; C) doing your “homework” on these semi-finalists; and D) the actual “purchase” of art – starting with your budget to negotiation to credit card – from the finalists chosen in part C.

So let’s jump into part A and look at some aspects of the “seek and discover” mission. First, you must put aside previous opinions, assume and eliminate nothing, and experience as much art as possible. Take your time; look intently and for gut responses to the old, new, small, large, as well as myriad styles (abstract, photo realist, impressionistic, surreal, etc), media (watercolor, oil, photography, bronze sculpture, etching, fabric/fiber, etc), and subject matter (landscape, portrait, still life, seascape, and on) quietly bludgeoning and caressing our senses daily.

Next, open your eyes and enjoy investigating new avenues for your feet as you take in bank lobbies, restaurants, offices, outdoor shows, museums, malls (really!), homes, galleries, sports arenas, bars (surprise!) – art is omnipresent, be

aware.

Third, get close and personal with the artwork so as to notice details and elements, like texture, brush strokes, nuances of color, line work vs. mass areas, light vs. dark, bright vs. neutral, cold vs. warm feeling, storytelling or reporting, and so forth. Be willing to experience and hear what the art is saying. If nothing grabs or intrigues you, then move on.

Fourth, if possible, create a budget (per art piece, year, whatever) you are willing to consider in order to establish some practical value boundaries, but only buy for art reasons, not because of price or urgency.

Don't forget to make notes on all your preferences (time periods, artists, media, style, themes, etc) including the emotional and analytical so not to forget important facts.

Bottom line when all is said and done, make your choices based on and for you alone. Only you will be enjoying and living with your decision. If someone else is involved, then each of you do this; only have art that is desired and loved by one or both of you. The blank wall or table top won't care, and you know for sure what I'd say about the couch.

Robert Schimmel is a professional artist and teacher in South Lake Tahoe as well as host of "Lake Tahoe Art Scene" on KTHO radio on Thursdays at 5:15pm.