

COLLECTING

Latin dealer believes in art for artists' sake

.....
Peter Guy

moneypost@scmp.com

Adriana Alvarez-Nichol, from Mexico, is the first art dealer in Hong Kong dedicated to Latin American art. She started the Puerto Roja gallery and is a board member of the the Hong Kong Art Gallery Association. She talks about the trends she sees in local art collecting.

What encouraged you to open a gallery in Hong Kong?

My love of art, culture and living in Hong Kong after an international banking career. The Hong Kong art market required more participants to achieve the kind of commercial depth and diversity you see in London and New York where there are so many different galleries. It's not just about selling contemporary Chinese art to tourists. But the Hong Kong market is growing much faster than the other centres. The Basel art fair [Art Basel, an annual exhibition of global artists] is an important development.

How does a collector develop skill and knowledge?

The learning curve starts with an interest in local artists, followed by

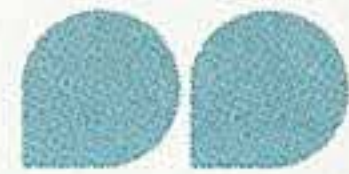
brand name artists. When the art collector becomes smarter and more experienced in sourcing and buying a broad choice of art they can diversify internationally.

What obstacles confront the local art investor?

Big auction houses dominate the art market in Asia. They become the main, if not the only, determiners of the price and supply of quality art. This encourages an environment where local buyers focus on profit. Auctions can create an unhealthy fixation on price points much like statistics on a stock exchange.

What should motivate new collectors?

Art is an asset that can also give you personal enjoyment as well as



You should buy and own art as a way to support an artist that emotionally engages you

ADRIANA ALVAREZ-NICHOL

potential value preservation. But you should be buying and owning art as a way to support an artist that emotionally engages you.

What are the risks of investing in China's emerging modern art market?

Collectors should be aware that some popular artists may not be around or popular after 10 years. So Hong Kong collectors should look beyond China and understand how local interest in food and foreign culture inevitably spurs curiosity about art. In Hong Kong, I can see how the proliferation of Latin American restaurants is generating interest in that region's art market. Everybody who buys art is a potential collector. Not just rich tycoons are able to collect. All of us can take part.

What is your advice to new collectors and first-time buyers?

Don't buy right away. Visit other galleries and engage the owner or curator in a discussion about your interests. Focus on the artist you like rather than the price; study the artist's biography and find out if he is already supported by leading museums or art institutions. Look for an artist who displays a long term career. Don't buy into fads. For



Adriana Alvarez-Nichol, founder of Puerto Roja. Photo: Jonathan Wong

expensive acquisitions seek advice from a dealer or specialist.

All collections should arise from personal taste based on pieces you can grow and diversify over time. It is up to the collector to bring cohesion to his collection, which allows him to later broaden it. If you really like an artist you can collect their entire work. That's one way of building a collection.

Should the government do more to encourage the art scene?

The local art scene needs help so students and young people can experience more opportunities to view world class art that is not necessarily for sale. We and other galleries also work closely with local schools giving talks and shows to educate students.