

## Starting an art collection - and why you should stick with South African art

There are more people collecting art now than ever before, according to Astrid McLeod, owner a popular art gallery in the Western Cape town of Riebeeck Kasteel called The Gallery.



McLeod says that art has been emerging as a new asset class for those looking for a well-diversified portfolio and, for many, the attraction of art as an investment is that it provides an opportunity for portfolio diversification into an area that has historically provided high returns and shown a low correlation to other asset classes.

“According to the 2014 Deloitte Art & Finance Report, 75% of art buyers are purchasing art for collecting purposes with an investment view — a substantial jump from 53% just two years earlier.”

### Buy for pleasure

However, McLeod warns that many financial experts advise against art as an investment and says that one should not buy art for investment, but rather for “pleasure and enlightenment”.

Many great collections have started for different reasons, such as intellectual, aesthetic and emotional satisfaction. Whatever your reasons for deciding to start an art collection it can be a daunting prospect and one that seems out of reach for many. Where do you begin? What is the difference between an original work and a limited-edition print? Which artists should you be focussing on? Where do you shop for art?

McLeod provides some tips on getting started:

**Buy it because you love it:** “Step one is being true to your tastes. This means acknowledging that you like certain types of art regardless of what you think you're supposed to like or what seems to be the current trend,” says McLeod. “Don't buy an artwork just because you think it's a good investment – rather buy it because you love it and not because you feel you must.”

**Consider your budget when making a decision:** “If budget is tight you can look to start with limited

edition prints, which are a great way to own reasonably priced works by well-known artists. Alternatively, you can buy original paintings by lesser-known artists.”

Original art includes any art that is one of a kind (original paintings, drawings, sculptures and more). “These cost more because they are once-off and the artist can profit only once from the sale,” explains McLeod. “Prints tend to cost less, but while not one of a kind, they are still an original work of art as the artist uses at one of a number of methods to create an original image on a surface like wood, rubber, stone or metal, applies colour and then creates a print on paper.”

Print types include engravings, lithographs, screen prints, aquatints, linocuts and woodblock prints.

**Size matters:** According to McLeod, if you’re buying a work that is part of an edition, check the edition size to ensure that you’re paying the right price - the smaller the edition, the higher the price. “Also make sure it is signed and has the edition number written on it.”

“In addition to the size of the edition, the size of an artwork also affects the price and, as a rule of thumb, the bigger the work, the higher the price.”

Think about where you’ll put the work: This may influence the style of the work you’re looking for, as well as the size.

**Browse and browse again – explore your tastes and preferences:** “Before diving in and making a purchase, spend some time getting to know what sort of work you respond to. Browse galleries, pick up an art magazine or flip through a stack of art books. This will give you an idea of the styles of art that you like (or you don’t know already).”

**Do your research:** “Once you have chosen a selection of artworks you like, do some background research on the artists,” says McLeod. “Find out things like if they have been featured in any exhibitions or if they have won any competitions or prizes.”

**Be confident in your taste:** McLeod reiterated that art is subjective, and that there is no right or wrong. “Don’t be shy if you feel like you ‘know nothing about art’ – you have to start somewhere.”

**Talk to people:** “Chat to the owner of the gallery in which the art work is hanging, or if you have art-savvy friends or relatives, drop them a call and ask for their advice.”

**Train your eye:** “It can take years to train your eye, but this is the best way to spot a future star. Slowly build a library of books on the history of art, and read contemporary journals to get an idea of which themes and aesthetics are in fashion,” says McLeod.

**Go for quality, not quantity:** Art is a purchase for life, so it’s better to collect slowly with focus than try to rush and take a more decorative approach. “Invest in fewer pieces that are higher quality,” advises McLeod.

## Why South African art?

Newly armed with this information on how to start your art collection, McLeod states that South African art is the way to go.

“South African art is on the rise, both locally and internationally, with increasing interest being shown in

contemporary South African art,” says McLeod, who goes on to advise that there is definitely a new-found interest in South African art by an international audience, possibly because South African artists have a fre approach that is an attribute towards the international art scene.

“South Africa has an amazing mixture of cultures that work to produce exciting works of art. The overseas market has taken notice and the market within South Africa has also strengthened, and art lovers and collectors are focussing their attention here. Technology has also helped to get our artists seen elsewhere the world and by making art more accessible to more people, one naturally sees increased growth and support.”

Experts also cite the strong growth of African economies and the rising wealth of the middle class as lead factors in the surge of interest in South African art. The public is becoming more ‘art aware’ and more individuals are starting to invest in artworks, or buy for pleasure.

McLeod provides the following list of artists that she recommends for art collectors and enthusiasts:

- Andre van Vuuren: [www.andreanvuuren.co.za/profile.html](http://www.andreanvuuren.co.za/profile.html)
- Emma Willemse: [www.emmawillemse.co.za/about](http://www.emmawillemse.co.za/about)
- Tamlin Blake: [www.tamlinblake.com/profile.html](http://www.tamlinblake.com/profile.html)
- Claudia Gurtwitz: [www.claudiaswall.com/theartist.html](http://www.claudiaswall.com/theartist.html)
- Solly Smook: [www.sollysmook.com/behind-the-brush.html](http://www.sollysmook.com/behind-the-brush.html)

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