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Most people think they know what good art is and yet there's a huge gap between like and taste.

You've heard the term "expensive tastes"; well most people with expensive tastes are people that know the difference between something of quality and something that barely hits the mark. I would suggest that those same people have paid attention to the information surrounding what they purchase. We are very fortunate today because we have the Internet, which can provide us with all the information we need to make informed decisions about what we buy.

When it comes to buying quality art, research is essential and it will be easier on your pocketbook in the long run. My tastes in art are very clear to me partly because I'm an artist but mostly because I look at tons of art. My mandate is to spread the word about all the great original art and artists out there. Take the leap and start looking now!

Do you have to like horses to know what a good horse (painting) is?

You might think this is a pretty stupid question but not all artists that paint horses are equal.

I've painted horses off and on over the years and have always avoided the formulas used by other artists because they were cliché and un-imaginative

The truth is, there are many ways artists have handled the subject over the centuries and you will have to dig to find something unique.

Da Vinci was a master at painting horses; he studied the intricacies of their movement and biomechanics and painted them in the same spirit.

He said, all living creatures are flesh and blood and it's important to represent them as so. Looking at daVinci's work is an excellent foundation for recognizing sophistication.

To find a good work of art you have to look past the subject matter and the surface of the canvas to understand how the image was created.

Take your time and really LOOK around and you will see things that you've never seen before, that's when things will get exciting.

What is good art?

The only way to know what is good or bad is to look at lots of art. Everybody's tastes are different so finding what suits you is as important as what is good.

Doing some research is the best foundation for finding quality art. Become friendly with artists and take a course from a recognized institution like an Art College or University. If you know someone who owns original art go on a field trip with them and visit several galleries, this will help you get a feel for the art scene in your community. The more you see the more you'll understand about art and soon you will start recognizing trends and styles.

I like it! But should I buy it ?

First impressions

Don't get side swiped by all the trappings like frames, lighting and all the other paintings. When you first walk into a gallery or artist's studio it can be quite overwhelming visually and emotionally, so give yourself time to adjust. You want to have an accurate picture of what the artist or artists have to offer.

Maybe just grab a business card and come back some other time if you are too overwhelmed.

If the gallery is busy come back another day because you don't need the added confusion of people getting in your way while you're trying to look at art.

I have had art openings where there were wall-to-wall people and you couldn't tell there was art on the walls.

Visiting a gallery more than once will give you an opportunity to get an accurate and positive perspective on the art and you'll have a chance to talk to the artist.

Remove it

Ask the artist to see the painting on a bare wall or outside of the studio. This will give you a different perspective of the piece unfettered by other pieces of art.

Lighting

Look at it under dull light then look at it under sunlight, you'll see how it changes.

I am an advocate of good lighting for art because it enhances the colour and the dark and light areas of the piece.

Sometimes studio or gallery lighting isn't realistic to how it will look when you get it home.

Here's a trick of the trade

Find a mirror

Place the painting in front of the mirror and look at the reflected image of the piece.

This is like looking at a reversed photograph and most people don't see the difference but if the mirror image has some obvious distortions than the piece may have some compositional challenges that may bother you in time.

If I'm having problems with the composition of a particular piece I will sometimes use the mirror technique to help me figure out what it needs.

Good Abstract artists move their work around or turn their canvases to capitalize on composition. This technique also generates congruency throughout the picture plain.

You probably won't have the option of using the mirror trick in an artist's studio or gallery but if you can take the painting home on approval then do it at home.

In any case, as you see more art you will become better at spotting the difference between an amateur and a professional.

Spotting a professional

A Pro. is always creating new work so there will be lots of art around their studio and they will have several portfolios full of pictures.

A professional won't apologize for their work and they will refer to it in a positive manner, "I like this painting a lot" or "this is an exceptional piece of art";

A professional won't hesitate to tell you a bit about themselves or their art.

A commercial gallery will have more than one piece of an artists work.

Galleries won't generally represent an artist that isn't producing work.

Community art centers, fairs and malls are generally filled with amateur work but that doesn't mean you won't find something great.

What defines a professional is someone that is creating new pieces of art all the time and is promoting and selling.

Talking and asking questions.

There are no stupid questions when it comes to art so don't be put off by weird attitudes because artists can be a little self absorbed. An artist will spend most of their time in solitude with minimal social interaction.

I for example will get caught-up in a piece I'm working on and forget to eat, answer the phone or answer the door. I think it's the nature of the profession.

I have found some artists out and out rude but as I started asking them questions and talking to them they began to relax.

On The Other Hand when you purchase a painting remind your self that you are also buying the artists reputation, so you don't want to remember him as an asshole every time you look at that painting.

Don't be intimidated by the art world it's an interesting place and keep looking because there's some amazing stuff to see.

A great way to meet an artist is to go to Art Openings. (Wine and cheese!)

Check your News Paper or go online for weekly openings

Ask the artist questions like:

- How long have you been an artist/painter/sculptor/printmaker etc.?
- Where's your next show?
- Do you have a website?
- Where have you shown your work?
- Can I see your work anywhere else?
- What's the inspiration for your art?

What to look for

When you look at a painting step back from it, that will give you an overall sense of its colour and composition. Trust your intuition during this process and don't get caught-up in the details of the painting. Expressionist painters are masters at inferring detail so getting up close won't give you any insight into their artistic ability. Look at the overall composition and theme and pay attention to your emotional response to the piece.

Remember the mood of a painting is meant to impact you emotionally so be sure it's something you want in your home.

Will I still like it a year from now?

Chances are if you do your homework the painting you choose will be a companion for life.

One thing that many people overlook is the connection they make with the artist. Your meetings with the artist not only have a huge influence on why you bought the painting but how you feel about it when you look at it now. Let's face it; you're hanging a piece of that emotional connection on the wall to look at every day.

What style of painting best suits you?

You can go online and start by Googling a few KEY WORDS and Art Styles and Art sites I've provided.

Art styles
Art and artists
Art History
Contemporary art
The Tate Modern
The Art Newspaper

Abstract
Photo Realism
Impressionistic
Abstract expressionism
Surrealism
Figurative
Still Life

Pop Art

RedBuBBle
Flickr
DeviantArt
FineartAmerica
MySpace
Onart
Jamuse