

COMMENTS ON THE ART MARKET

VOLUME 16

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Trying a Work at Home

When a new client comes to the gallery and expresses an interest in a particular work of art, the conversation usually turns to how will it look in their home? I am always amazed when they tell me that some of our competitors do not allow clients to take works home 'on approval'!

It is important that the galleries you deal with offer this service since there are times when you just cannot be sure how a particular work will look in the space you have in mind. Not everyone needs to do this, and many of our clients are very comfortable with buying a work and then determining its proper place once they get it home --- these are usually the people who are buying because they love the work and not to fill a specific spot. Even if you are a seasoned buyer, here are a few things you should remember:

The first, and probably most important, is lighting. Most home interiors do not incorporate advanced track lighting systems and instead often feature recessed lights or individual picture lights. On the flip side, most galleries have advanced lighting systems; giving them the flexibility to adjust the position of their lights (depending on the size of the painting), and allowing them to regulate the amount of light (depending on the style or type of painting) so that they look their best. If the gallery has the ability to adjust their lighting, ask them to lower or raise the levels to those similar to your home; or have them move the work to an area in the gallery that has similar lighting.

The second thing to keep in mind is that many galleries are open spaces with minimal amounts of furniture, allowing the viewer the ability to see a work from different angles and distances. The painting you saw in the gallery will have a different look once it is surrounded by your furnishings. In all honesty they usually look better in the home, as the right work of art will usually 'finish' the room.

Finally, it is important to know the basic measurements of your space before you start the hunt. One easy way to determine the size or look you want/need is to take some newspaper and create different sizes. Then take those pieces and hang them in the areas you are looking to fill... this will give you the flexibility to try different combinations – filling the spot with just one piece, or grouping together a number of smaller works.

Even with all the proper preparation, there may be times when you are just not sure and the gallery should afford you the opportunity to see the work in your home.

Three points to consider when taking a work home 'on approval' are:

1. Most galleries will allow you to keep a work 'on approval' for 2 or 3 days. This is all the time you should need to make your decision. I always recommend that people take the work/works home over a weekend so they have enough time to look at it. If after 3 days you are still not sure, the work is probably not for you.
2. Make sure that you do not let other people make the decision for you. The worst thing you can do is have your friends stop by to see the work while it is 'on approval'. You are bound to get one or two who do not like it. Who cares? Art is very personal; some people love Realism and hate Abstraction, while others have just the opposite taste. There is no right or wrong and you are the one who is buying the work, and you are the one who is going to live with it, so buy what you like! For more on that idea, please refer to Volume 2 of our newsletter.

3. Discuss the costs involved. Most galleries will be happy to send the work at their expense, but should you decide to return it they may require you to cover the round trip shipping costs.

Is There Someone Else Bidding?

The auction process is one in which you need to place a great deal of faith and trust in both the auction room and the auctioneer. When a work of art comes up for sale there is often a secret minimum price at which it will sell – this is called ‘the reserve’. Now here is an interesting thing to ponder. You see an item in an auction that interests you and it is estimated at \$10,000 - \$15,000. Unknown to you is the reserve price – for this instance we will use \$9,000. You attend the sale and the lot opens at \$4,000 and you start bidding. How do you know if you are actually bidding against another interested party or if you are just bidding against the owner’s reserve price? The answer is – you do not. Even worse, in some cases, you may even be bidding against the owner himself or one of his friends – an illegal act known as ‘shill’ bidding.

In Volume 6 of my newsletters I reported on a recent case of ‘shill’ bidding – well, another alleged case has surfaced. The following is a synopsis of articles in the current issues of the Antiques Trade Gazette (ATG) and the Maine Antique Digest (by Clayton Pennington):

Pennington states that... *Three people were arrested on February 6 for their alleged participation in shill bidding on hundreds of auctions of Rene Lalique glass on eBay.*

Authorities charge that David Weinstein, John Danis, and Diane Grismore conspired between September 1999 and January 2002 to bid on auctions hosted by Danis using their own eBay User IDs and the User IDs of others.

None of the three have been indicted.

ATG goes on to report that ... *The complaint filed in federal court on February 14, alleges the bidding scheme, which involves a conspiracy to drive up bids on an item on behalf of the vendor... total[ed] more than \$1.3 million, including individual pieces that sold for more than \$15,000 on the online auction Website.*

Pennington continues to point out that ... *an affidavit filed by Postal Inspector Sandra Spector reveals that since Danis became a member of eBay in May 1999, he has offered approximately 1371 items for auction. Of those approximately 1371 auctions, approximately 844 are items related to Rene Lalique glass artwork... of these... approximately 639 are pieces of Lalique glass artwork ... Spector believes... at least 429 (67%) involved shill bidding by Danis, Weinstein, or Grismore.*

Pennington also revealed that... *Danis left plenty of positive feedback in the Internet user profiles of Weinstein and Grismore. Of the 24 positive messages in the feedback profile of “rlalique” (Grismore), 11 are from her brother [John Danis].* How Sweet – but like they say...don’t believe everything you read!

The question has always been - is there a way you can protect yourself from becoming a victim of ‘shill’ bidding? As far as we know, the only foolproof method is not to bid at auction.

Howard L. Rehs

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Gallery Updates: We are still looking for information pertaining to the life and work of Julien Dupré (1851-1910). If you own a work by the artist and have not sent us good images of it, please do so at this time.

The gallery is also in the process of compiling documentation and photographic records of works by Daniel Ridgway Knight (1839-1924) for the catalogue raisonné. Please contact us if you have any information concerning this artist.

New works by George Armfield, Edouard Cortès, Antoine Blanchard, Eugene H. Cauchois and Sally Swatland have been added to our site.

Virtual Exhibitions: This month we have added something new – Rehs Galleries: A Visual History. This virtual exhibition that will feature important works that the gallery has sold during its long history. Each month a new work will be featured on its own page, accompanied by a biography on the artist. We will begin this new exhibit with two works. The first, sold this past month, is Adrien Moreau's Salon entry of 1887; *Une Masquerade au XVII Siecle*. The second, sold in 1987, is Charles Edward Perugini's Royal Academy entry of 1902 titled *The Green Lizard*. The direct URL to this exhibit is:

[Rehs Galleries: A Visual History](#)

It appears that March was Sally Swatland's month. We have added a number of the recently sold works to her exhibition, including: *Wading by the Shore*, *Sand Castle Day*, *Looking Toward Catalina*, *Early Afternoon at Todd's Point* and *Garden at Southampton*. Six works by Blanchard have been added to his Virtual Exhibit, including *Notre-Dame*; *Place du Luxembourg*; *Quai du Louvre*; *Boulevard de la Madeleine* and *Champs-Elysees*. Three new sold Cortes' have been added to his Virtual Exhibit – *Place Pigalle in Winter*, *Marche aux fleurs*, *Madeleine* and *Porte St. Denis*. Trust you will enjoy seeing them!

Next Month: I will be discussing... I am not sure... but it will be interesting!

Please note that as of May 1st there will be change in the pricing structure for Sally Swatland's work. We have also introduced three Limited Edition prints - these can be seen on the Internet at: www.swatlandgraphics.com