

Hanging with Howard Rehs

by Julie Schlenger Adell

It's a family affair at Rehs Galleries, Inc., New York City, and has been for four generations. A new generation was literally "waiting in the wings" when *M.A.D.* spoke with Howard Rehs in early February—a first grandchild was expected that week.

As did his grandparents M. Edwin and Ruth Schillay and his parents, Joseph B. Rehs and Ann Schillay Rehs, Howard helms the family-run business, which includes his wife, Amy, and their two children, Lance and Alyssa. The family was anticipating not only the birth of a grandchild but also a soon-to-be completed space on West 55th Street that will house their gallery. After 26 years in an iconic building on East 57th Street, the business will move to West 55th Street, just off Fifth Avenue, in the early spring.

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While the generations before Howard entered the business were selling mostly British Victorian paintings—to a clientele that eventually included several department store galleries—Howard's interest in French paintings was piqued during the year he spent in London after graduating with a bachelor's degree in art history from New York University. He became an expert in the works of Julien Dupré (1851-1910), Daniel Ridgway Knight (1839-1924), Émile Munier (1840-1895), and Antoine Blanchard (1910-1988). About 11 years ago, he "started ramping up" a selection of contemporary artists' works, which has become Rehs Contemporary Galleries, Inc., headed by his son and daughter. Artists include Ben Bauer, Stuart Dunkel, Mark Daly, and Julie Bell, among several others.

"I'm an outlier in the business," Howard said, explaining that he "takes on academic art" and edits his artists by "the quality and consistency of their work." Moreover, "for contemporary artists, a lot of them aren't consistent. I don't want an artist who doesn't meet a level of quality."

He also pens a newsletter to his clients, an endeavor he started some 20 years ago, with an emphasis on what to look for when buying a piece of art. It has expanded to include updates on his stock market portfolio plus "Tales from the Dark Side" and "Deeper Thoughts," commentaries on various auction results.

The gallery is active on all social media platforms, and Howard posts regularly on the status of the move from the east side to the west side of Fifth Avenue. He is on the Art Advisory Panel of the Internal Revenue Service, a group that includes art dealers and museum curators, for which there is no payment. "We donate our time, meet twice a year, and we value the works that taxpayers have had appraised." He is a past president of the Fine Art Dealers Association (FADA) and currently exhibits at half a dozen shows a year—two in Palm Beach, Florida, in February; Charleston, South Carolina, in March; Newport, Rhode Island, in July; Nantucket, Massachusetts, in August; and Baltimore, Maryland, now held in October. "At the peak, we were doing ten or twelve shows a year."

He and Amy surround themselves with fine art in their house on the South Shore of Long Island. "Amy does like and collect elephants, so there are many around the house," Howard noted. Their collecting focus, however, remains fine art.

Although the couple attended the same high school, they met only after their mothers had "put their heads together" at the school principal's retirement dinner, and Howard was given a photograph of Amy. The couple had their first date in New York City and married soon thereafter.

Family involvement has expanded recently to include Amy's brother's son, a recent college graduate who "is an excellent writer" and is writing the galleries' blog posts.

With the arrival on February 4 of baby girl Theadora, the Rehs family heads into its fifth generation. Stay tuned.

A wall of works by artists of the ANI Art Academies. The collaborative nonprofit organization provides intensive multiyear art skills education to aspiring artists. There are six locations around the world. Eleven years ago, Rehs had a show of works by some of the artists. He called it *The Big Gamble*. Works were priced from \$200 to \$3000. It took place on a Saturday afternoon, and 700 people showed up.



Amy and Howard Rehs in their upstairs hallway, surrounded by art. On the left are works by artists of the ANI Art Academies. On the right is *Eldorado* by Edward John Gregory (1850-1909), a painting exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1907, said Howard. He purchased it for £450 in 1981 (approximately \$950) when he was living in London after college graduation.



A painting by Julien Dupré, *Glaneuse au soleil*, circa 1885. The artist's catalogue raisonné was written by Howard.



Awaiting the move to their new and larger gallery space, the Rehses use their dining room as a staging area for photographing works of art. Although his warehouse space is in Long Island City, as is his framer, Howard was expecting a shipment of 14 paintings to be delivered to the house. The photographer was scheduled for the following day. "I have to gut the living room and set up there," he explained. They left their former space in August 2022. On the wall are two paintings by Antoine Blanchard and two by Edouard Cortès.



Grand Palais by Mark Laguë (b. 1964).



Seen in the middle is *Odyssey*, 2001, by British artist Tony South (b. 1964). Placed on either side are works by Stuart Dunkel (b. 1952) executed during the COVID-19 lockdown. To the left is *Hero*, and on the right, *Never Clean Enough*.

