

Nothing But The Best

Choosing Wisely Among The Works You Love

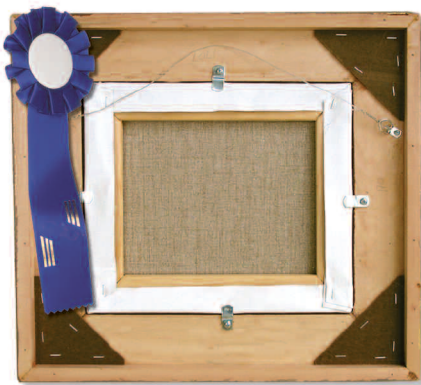
BY HOWARD L. REHS

BUY WHAT YOU LOVE. This often-heard piece of advice is absolutely right because you probably are going to live a long time with every work of art you purchase. As you add to your collection, however, other considerations should come into play.

For instance, you'll probably want to develop a theme, which can be as broad as landscapes or marine art, or as narrow as a particular artist. Visit galleries and museums, and study art books to learn what you do and don't like. Once you've established your focus, it's time to begin your collection-building journey.

For this, I have even more advice: Before you purchase more artwork, do your homework and learn to recognize quality, then never settle for anything but the best works from the best artists in your price range. Why? In the future, you or your heirs may want to sell the works you've acquired. There are always buyers looking for the best, making reselling easier. On the other hand, works of art that have "problems" (in quality, subject matter, condition, etc.) are typically more difficult to sell.

Learning to recognize quality takes a lot of hard work. Of course, you can and should turn to reputable dealers for information and advice, but you should also study the period, style, and artists you like. It is important to know which artists worked during that period or painted in that style, and who were or are the most



important ones. Look carefully at the "first-tier" artists, and try to determine why they are considered the best. Then research other artists of the period and find out how they relate to the first level. Were they students from the same or the next generation? Were they relatives? Were they imitators who came along decades later? Research and a well-trained "eye" will reveal why some artists' works are more sought-after than others.

Once you have answered these questions, you will begin to see how tiers affect price. Usually, the leaders of any movement will command the highest prices, while those of the second tier will be lower. Prices cascade down to those artists who continued to paint the same subject or style many years later, or were just copyists, mere imitators. Of course, there are always exceptions to this rule, especially when a second-tier artist was particularly skilled or creative.

If you can't afford the best works by the first-tier artist or artists you prefer, keep searching for an artist whose best works are in a price range

you're comfortable with. Perhaps you need to drop to the best of the second-tier artists, or even the third tier. (Make sure you still like the work in question!) There is a limit to how far you can go, however. If you find yourself so removed from first-level artists that you're looking at artists who painted in a similar style but worked decades later, you should probably rethink the period of art you want to collect or rethink the amount of money you're willing to spend.

On a side note, don't be fooled into thinking that every work by a first-tier "name" is a good investment. Even the greatest artists have bad days and produce mediocre or poor-quality works. Also note that some artworks appearing on the market are sketches or studies; they are not the artist's most valued works because they were never intended for sale.

As I always tell clients, the best will always be the best, and a second-rate work by any artist will always be just that. So don't settle — be patient, and remember that there is a lot of available artwork. Eventually, you will find the right paintings to add to your collection. ■

HOWARD L. REHS, president of the Fine Art Dealers Association, is writing the *catalogue raisonnés* on Julien Dupré and Daniel Ridgway Knight. For more information, contact Rehs Galleries, Inc., 5 E. 57th St., 8th Floor, New York NY 10022; 212.355.5710; www.rehsgalleries.com