

TRY THIS ...

Passion project

Kickstart an art collection

If you love the idea of art but aren't sure where to start, this handy guide will help

Words: Kelly Baker

Hanging artwork which speaks to your heart is the perfect way to create an environment that feels like 'you'. One piece (or several); over the bed, in the hall, the kitchen or all of the above. The placement is irrelevant. All that matters is that it sparks joy for you.

But how to know which piece, or pieces, will do that and further, where to find them and how much to shell out when you do track down the artwork you simply cannot live without? We weren't entirely sure of the answers to these questions and so we turned to the people who do – art experts.

I want to invest in art, but have no idea how or where to start

To begin, you should have an idea of what style you would like to invest in, says gallery director and curator Kerry-Anne Blanket.

"I recommend spending some time looking at images and artworks online or face-to-face in galleries," says Kerry-Anne, of KAB Gallery.

"This is the best way to develop your own personal taste." Once you know what you like, it's time to think about where you might like to hang your art or where you want to place the art.

If that sounds overwhelming, consider visiting a gallery to discuss your ideas with the experts.

According to Kerry-Anne, they'll be able to make



suggestions that are within your price range. They'll also know which artists are up and coming and which works are likely to increase in value over time. You can also work with a gallerist to help you choose an artwork for a particular room or place that you have in mind, says Kerry-Anne. You'll need to be patient though, she adds.

"Sometimes the process is fast and the perfect piece will be right there waiting for you. Other times it might take a while. Don't get discouraged."

Remember, hunting down your work of art (or several) will be worth it in the long run. "Art is a catalyst for joy, happiness, memories and nostalgia," says fine art lecturer and director at Belle Epoque Fine Art, Leigh Capel, when explaining why it's of so much value to include it in your life. It is completely subjective; an artwork can have completely different meaning, personal significance and sentimentality depending on the viewer, he adds, but it will always prompt emotions.

Are there types of art I ought to be buying or just what I like?

Art is to be enjoyed, but it can provide financial benefits too, says Kerry-Anne. You will need to consider a few things however.

"If you're investing in a quirky piece of art, for example, you need to ask yourself 'how will it be received in another one, five or even 50 years?'" says Kerry-Anne.

Who would be interested to buy it then? If it sold at auction, would there be lots of bidders willing to fight it out? Is the work versatile enough to suit various hanging spaces and positions?

"That said, I truly believe though that the most important thing about choosing an artwork is that



This piece is Interior with Fish Bowl, Pineapple Lamp and Newspaper, by Jackie Fewtrell-Gobert.

Are there types of galleries I should try first?

This depends on what you are looking to purchase, says Kerry-Anne, who adds that galleries focus on different segments of the art market.

For example, some galleries will specialise in works on paper, others in sculpture or primarily with conceptual installations, while others specialise in modern and contemporary Australian art. Bottom line: it's important to seek a gallery that exhibits art you feel you can connect with and enjoy.

"Some people enjoy visiting galleries run by an artist who exhibits and sells their own work, and while this can be a great way to connect with a particular style or painting by talking directly with the artist, it does limit you to a very specific type and style of painting," says Kerry-Anne. In my opinion, it's better to work with a professional gallerist who represents many different artists and styles of work so you can pick and choose what feels right for you."



Art needs to speak to you, give a strong reaction...

you love it and will enjoy looking at it for years to come," she adds.

Belle Epoque's Leigh Capel agrees. "The most important thing about engaging with art is to keep an open mind, and go with your heart," says Leigh.

"Art needs to speak to you, give a strong reaction (good or bad), make you think, create conversation, pinch a nerve and have a timeless appeal; this is what you should be taking into account. As your education broadens and your tastes refine, your awareness and justification of what you like will become clearer."

Consider also the long-term popularity of the artist and ensure they have a developed career and sales history, recommends Kerry-Anne. Buy originals only as the originality of art is one of its most precious qualities.

"My advice is to keep to a one-of-a-kind when investing in art, rather than prints or limited-edition reproductions," says Kerry-Anne. "Look for quality materials and question the long-term conservation quality of the piece."

"Again, if this feels overwhelming, your best bet is to work with an expert at a gallery who can help guide you through this process based on their years of experience." But what if your budget is modest and, importantly, you have no room to move on it? Would you still be welcome at a gallery? "It's a common misconception that galleries are only for the wealthy," says Kerry-Anne. "In reality, it's our job to source artists and artworks that we feel will attract buyers, and in turn, work with the buyer to

find an artwork that they love and meets their criteria – whether that's to suit a particular look and feel, to operate as an investment, or both."

Art is universal, agrees Leigh. "Anyone can appreciate, own, create and enjoy art, no matter your cultural, political or socio-economic background," he explains. "Yes, art can be 'pretty' and can 'complete a room', but it deserves a much deeper understanding that transcends the aesthetic."

I feel a little self-conscious about art galleries – what should I do when I walk into one?

It's a misnomer that galleries are intimidating places, says Leigh.

For the most part, they're warm, welcoming places with owners and managers who love nothing more than talking about their passion – art.

"Contrary to popular belief, art is not, and should not be, intimidating," he says.

"You do not need to know a lot about art history to visit galleries, and you do not need a degree to know what you like."

"From my experience, those newly interested in art generally cannot accurately identify 'why' they like something, and that is OK."

Leigh adds that clarity around art comes with time, mistakes and experience. It's important, however, to know that there is no wrong answer when it comes to art, he adds.

Above, Australia Day Beach Bondi by Sally West; and below, KAB Gallery director Kerry-Anne Blanket encourages buyers to visit galleries to find out what style and type of art they prefer.



Does the saying 'The more expensive it is, the better it is' hold true for art?

A little of column A and a little of column B, says Kerry-Anne.

"Typically you'll get what you pay for," she says. "An original artwork created with premium conservation-grade materials by a professional artist will scream quality but come with the relevant price tag."

Prints and lower grade artworks will be cheaper. However, there are always the one-off pieces that a good gallerist will spot from the studio and make available. These pieces may be smaller or could have simply not worked within the curatorial perimeters of a past exhibition. It doesn't discredit them in any way so you can, on occasion, nab a great piece at a lower price point, says Kerry-Anne. The art market is a market like any other. This means a range of factors such as the artist's fame and prior reputation, the supply and demand of pieces available to the market, and the current economic conditions all have a part to play in the value of an artwork and how it is priced, says Kerry-Anne.

Is there a type of art or artists you would like to see supported?

I'd like to see more support for original art genres," says Kerry-Anne.

"If only more buyers could see the value in supporting Australian creatives who are really capturing the essence of life as we know it in their beautiful mediums," she adds.

"An original piece of art offers so much for a home. From visual interest and joy to interior depth and luxury."