

Easiest and Most Fun Way to Shop For Original Art



"Red Sailboat" by Holly Van Hart

COLLECTOR'S GUIDE TO BUYING DIRECT FROM AN ARTIST

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Contents

Introduction	3
Five Things You Must Do When Purchasing a Painting	3
#1 Fall in Love with the Art.....	3
#2 Assess the Price.....	3
#3 If Needed, Negotiate.....	5
#4 Get to Know the Artist.....	5
#5 Get the Artist’s Advice – Framing, Hanging, Care.....	6
Three Things to Avoid	6
#1 Do Not Buy Art as a Financial Investment	6
#2 Do Not Settle for Something Less than Great	6
#3 Do Not Walk Away From a Painting You Love	7
Enjoy Your Painting to the Max, Forever	7
#1 Hang Your Painting in the Perfect Spot	7
#2 Enjoy the Painting On Your Own	7
#3 Enjoy the Painting With Others	8
#4 Keep a Connection with the Artist.....	8
About the Author	9

Introduction

Shopping for original art should be easy, exciting, and fun. Original art transforms and personalizes our homes and workspaces, and can bring deep happiness and satisfaction every time you look at it.

But why does it seem tricky to shop for? Why is there so much mystery and worry involved?

Whether you own 100 pieces of artwork or are about to shop for your first one, this Collector's Guide to Buying Direct from an Artist is intended to de-mystify the process.

This guide includes advice on shopping for original paintings that are sold directly by artists, typically priced at less than \$10,000. It does not include advice on reproductions, art other than paintings (sculpture, drawing, ceramics, etc), or buying through galleries, dealers or at auction. Also, commissioned work is not included.

This guide represents my personal view on the shopping and buying experience. Others may agree or differ, but this is my best advice to you on the subject.

Five Things You Must Do When Purchasing a Painting

#1 FALL IN LOVE WITH THE ART

Falling in love with a piece of art is like falling in love with a boyfriend or girlfriend or (because we often use the word more loosely) a car or sweater or necklace. You know it when you see it and when you feel it. The work speaks to you in some deep way. Whether it's the subject, colors, scale, design, idea, or feeling, it catches your attention and keeps it.

Each of us falls in love in a different way. You might be a 'fall hard fast' kind of gal, or a 'let's not rush into things' kind of guy. Do what suits you best . . . you can decide to purchase a piece right then and there, or pause for further reflection, research, and visits just to be sure.

#2 ASSESS THE PRICE

Do a quick reality check . . . what is the all-up price, including tax, shipping, and (if needed) framing? **Can you afford to purchase this painting?**

If yes, great. If not, there are options . . . First, ask the artist if you can use a lay-away plan; or, you could consider using a credit card and making payments over time. Some artists will rent

their work. Another option would be to look for a similar but smaller work from the same artist.

Is the painting offered at a fair price? This is a tough one, as art pricing can be subjective. But there is such a thing as a fair market value; the 3 main determinants of market value are size of the painting, credentials of the artist, and media (oil, watercolor, etc).

1 – Size of the painting. Bigger paintings cost more, smaller paintings cost less. Some artists even price by the square inch. But most likely the artist has done the math and can show you a price sheet by size.

2 - Credentials of the artist. Ask to see the artist's 'bio' (resume). The more credentials the artist has, the higher the price of their work. Look for the following:

- Affiliations with art societies
- Awards
- Art degrees, coursework, and/or workshops taken with master painters
- Artist's teaching experience
- Museum exhibits
- Gallery representation

The longer the list of credentials, and the more prestigious the institutions (museums, galleries, universities), the higher the price.

3 - Media. Oil paintings are viewed as the 'gold standard' for painting and tend to be priced the highest. Price-wise, oils are followed by acrylic and mixed media paintings on canvas, then by works on paper (acrylic, watercolor, and other media).

Be sure the work is original. If you have any doubts whatsoever about whether the work is a unique, original painting (one-of-a-kind and painted by hand by the artist) or a mechanically-created reproduction or print, be sure to ask. It's not always easy to tell. A few artists even use a blend of the two (for example, applying paints over prints or photos), so don't be embarrassed by the question.

Original art costs more than reproductions, and it's important to know you're getting the real thing. It's fine to buy reproductions too, but not at original art prices.

Ask the artist. For higher priced works, you may want to ask the artist 'How many paintings have you sold at this price?' or 'How did you establish this price?' Direct questions like these might catch the artist a bit off-guard, but they are fair questions.

Many artists post price lists on their websites, so you can do some 'compare and contrast' research online.

#3 IF NEEDED, NEGOTIATE

Most artists cannot earn a living wage from sales of their art. This is a fact. If the painting seems priced fairly, and you can afford it, it helps the artist when you pay the asking price.

If the painting is priced higher than market value, or if you can't afford to purchase it (or start a lay-away or rent it), then by all means negotiate.

Some artists are willing to consider lower prices, others are not. As long as both parties discuss the price in good faith and with respect, then the result will be amicable. The negotiation may not result in a sale, but good-will can be established and perhaps the perfect piece can be purchased at a later date.

On a related note . . . Be sure to get a receipt for your purchase. (A receipt would come in handy later if you ever decided to sell or have your painting appraised.) And whether you're buying a painting online or in person, be sure to understand the return policy. You can ask a simple question like "I don't anticipate any reason for returning this beautiful painting, but just in case . . . what is your return policy?"

#4 GET TO KNOW THE ARTIST

While not 100% essential, you'll get so much more enjoyment from the art when you have met or spoken with the artist that I recommend doing so.

While you are shopping, you'll have the artist's full attention. Take advantage of this opportunity to connect with the artist and learn about their painting process and the story behind your painting. You can do this in person, or if you're not in the same locale, by phone, Skype, or email.

Typical questions are:

- Where are you from?
- Tell me about your painting process. What makes it unique?
- What is the story behind this painting?

If you have the opportunity and time, visiting the artist's studio is an excellent way to soak up even more info about the art.

It's also a great idea to peruse the artist's website, including the bio/resume and artist's statement. The artist's statement is typically a few paragraphs long and gives insight into the current series of work. Some artists use a lot of confusing art-speak in their written materials; don't worry if you don't understand it, most of the rest of us don't either.

#5 GET THE ARTIST'S ADVICE – FRAMING, HANGING, CARE

Ask the artist for advice on these things:

Is a frame optional, or do you recommend framing this painting? What type of frame looks best? Any recommendations for a framing shop?

How do I hang this painting?

How do I care for this painting?

Three Things to Avoid

#1 DO NOT BUY ART AS A FINANCIAL INVESTMENT

If you're looking to make money, invest in the stock market or real estate or in your own business. If you're convinced you can earn money from art, then my recommendation is to work with an art dealer.

If you're buying art direct from an artist in the price range considered here (\$10,000 or less), it's best if you're seeking the pure enjoyment of owning a piece of original art. If you are lucky, the artist's career will blossom and the value of your investment will go up. Whether this happens or not, you cannot assume there is a secondary market for resale of your purchase.

#2 DO NOT SETTLE FOR SOMETHING LESS THAN GREAT

Be sure to hold out for a painting that speaks to you. If you enjoy shopping for art and talking with artists, then go ahead, shop around at art festivals, art school shows, open studio tours, and on artists websites. Take your time and look at a lot of art. You will find something you love.

Don't settle for something because it matches your furniture or because it seems like a good value. There is a lot of excellent art available. With some legwork you will find the perfect piece.

#3 DO NOT WALK AWAY FROM A PAINTING YOU LOVE

If you find a man you love, marry him. If you find a painting you love, buy it.

Once you're comfortable with the artist and the pricing, take the plunge and buy your painting. For less than the price of most vacations and even most television sets, you can experience a lifetime of enjoyment from a piece of original art.

When art collectors are asked about regrets, there are rarely regrets about paintings they purchased. But there are many regrets about the 'one that got away'. Don't let this happen to you.

If you're worried about what other people think about your choice, don't be. The appreciation of art will always be subjective. No one piece of art makes everyone swoon. You've done your homework and can reap the rewards. Read more in the "Enjoy your painting with others" section of this guide.

Enjoy Your Painting to the Max, Forever

Looking into the future . . . you've fallen in love with a painting, met the artist, learned the story behind the work, and purchased it. Now what?

#1 HANG YOUR PAINTING IN THE PERFECT SPOT

It's your home or office and you get to decide the perfect spot for your new painting. If you'd like to read advice and see sample photos from interior design professionals, [click here](#).

Follow the framing and hanging recommendations you received from the artist.

Remember to hang your painting at eye level, so you can get maximum enjoyment from it.

#2 ENJOY THE PAINTING ON YOUR OWN

"Paintings repay the attention they are given . . . the more you look, the more you feel." - James Elkins (author)

Every once in a while (or even every day), slow down, I mean really slow down, create a quiet moment for yourself, and look at the painting. Let it take you away into another world or time.

Look for something new in it you haven't seen before. Entertain a new interpretation. The more you look, the more you feel. Let the painting work its magic and surprise you.

#3 ENJOY THE PAINTING WITH OTHERS

Art personalizes your space, and you'll enjoy it even more by sharing it with others.

Show the painting to your friends and family. Talk with them about the artist, the meaning behind the work, and/or the reason you connected with it so strongly. Even just a couple of sentences, stated clearly, will put your choice into context and help others appreciate the painting that much more.

Don't worry (even for a second) whether others like the painting as much as you do. The appreciation of art is subjective, and everyone's taste is unique. (Think of the multi-million-dollar masterpieces you've seen in museums that you wouldn't want to hang on your own walls.)

#4 KEEP A CONNECTION WITH THE ARTIST

Maintaining a connection with the artist will give added life to your painting, and deepen your appreciation of it over time. Get on the artist's mailing list, follow the artist on Facebook or Google+, attend a reception or open studios event, and in general follow the artist's career. You'll be glad you did.

Follow the steps in guide and you'll be sure to make the right choice when shopping for a painting direct from an artist. You may love the experience so much you'll want to go out and do it again (and again).

Further Reading - If you really get the art bug, and are thinking of collecting many new pieces, I recommend reading the book "The Art of Buying Art" by Paige West. If you'd like an insider's view into the world of dealers, auction houses, and high-end collectors, "The Value of Art" by Michael Findlay is a fascinating read.

I wish you all the best on this path you're traveling down. If you have additional questions (whether you're considering a purchase of my work or another artist's), please don't hesitate to ask me at holly@hollyvanhart.com. Suggestions for additional tips to include in this guide are always welcome.

About the Author

Holly Van Hart is an award-winning artist based in the Silicon Valley, California. She paints abstract nature paintings that surprise us with unusual colors and textures, and ignite new excitement about a particular slice of nature.

"My artwork has opened up new friendships with art enthusiasts and collectors from all over the world. These connections are a huge source of inspiration for me."

- Holly Van Hart



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