

Connect, Then Collect

BY MICHELLE FALKENSTEIN



Young members of the **Art Institute of Chicago** attend a party for the museum's recent exhibition "So the Story Goes," which included photographs by Sally Mann.

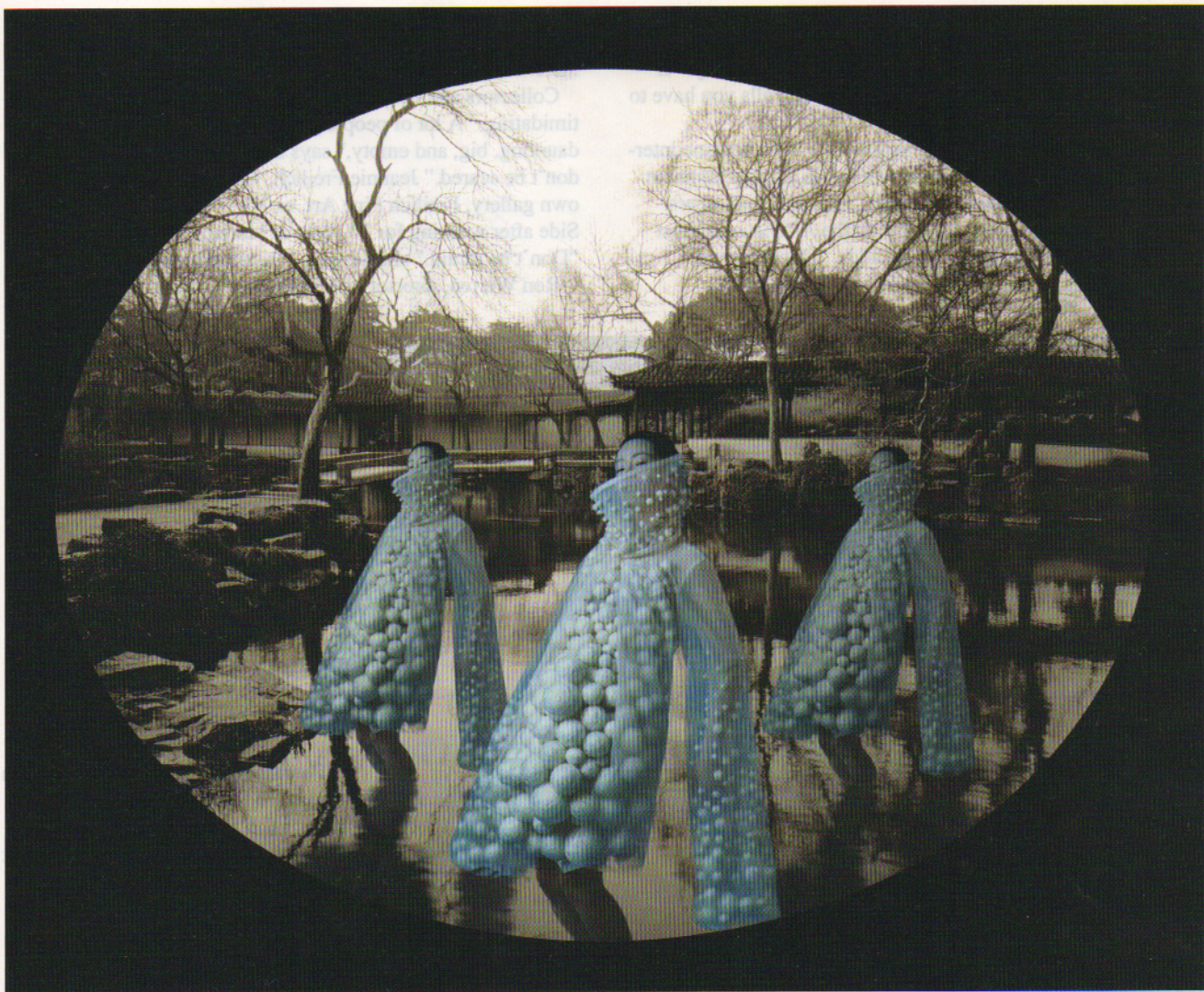
Whether at galleries, museums, auction houses, or fairs, developing relationships in the art world and viewing as much art as possible are among the first steps to take in starting a collection

When Michael Lynne began collecting in the early 1980s, he visited New York's Mary Boone Gallery to see a Julian Schnabel show. "I walked up to the person at the desk and said, 'Wow, I'd like one of those,'" recalls Lynne, cochairman and co-CEO of New Line Cinema. "She looked at me like I had lost my mind." That person happened to be Boone, and she informed her visitor that there was a long waiting list for the artist's work. Lynne didn't get his Schnabel that day but did ultimately become friendly with the dealer. "We laugh about it now," he says.

Collector Donald Rubell remembers that when his children were small, he and his wife would promise them ice cream or a trip to the playground in exchange for visiting five galleries. "I realized that collecting art would only work if the whole fam-

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**Tianmiao Lin's
C-print *Here or There?*,
2003, from the
collection of Ninah and
Michael Lynne.**

ily was interested in it," he says. As it turns out, his son, Jason, and daughter, Jennifer, now in their late 30s, are intimately involved in making decisions about the family's growing collection. Some of their nearly 6,000 works are on view at a private museum in Miami.

Karen Boyer purchased her first work in 2002 at Art Basel Miami, where she had traveled with the Junior Associates of New York's Museum of Modern Art. The trip included visits to a number of private collections, several of which contained work by Takashi Murakami. When Boyer arrived at the fair, she spied the artist's *DOB Flower*, printed in 2001 in an edition of 300, for \$100 in the booth of the Paris-based Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, and something clicked. "It never occurred to me that I would buy anything," says Boyer, who handles investor relations and raises money for a hedge fund in New York. "I had to get cash out of a cash machine. I carried the print out." From that modest beginning, Boyer

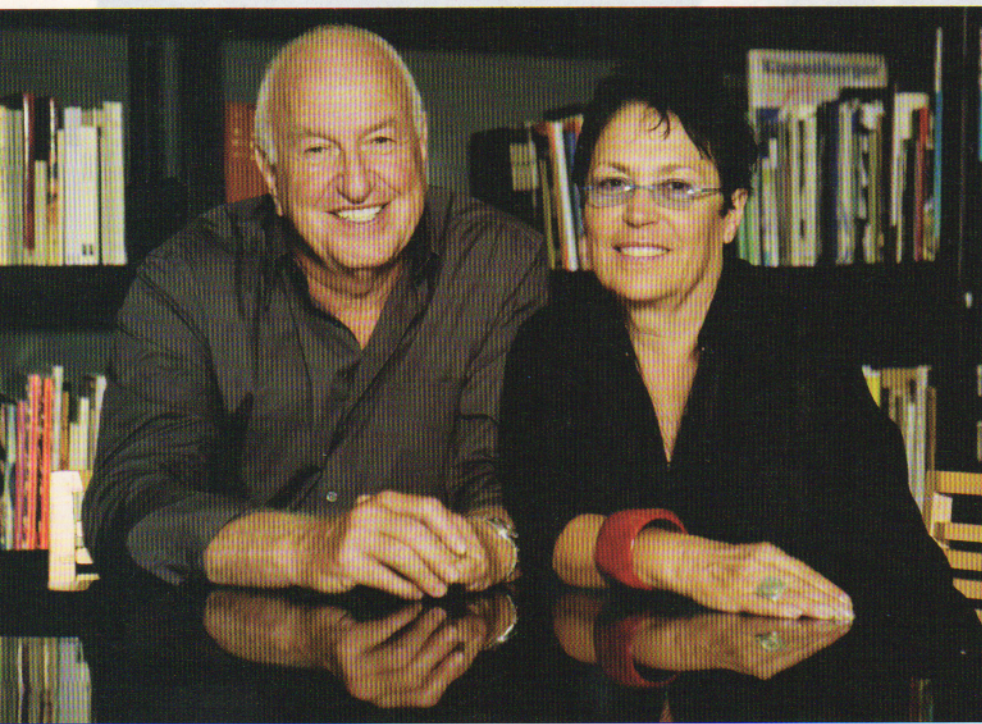
has built a small collection of contemporary art, including works by Yoshitomo Nara, William Kentridge, and Daniel Zeller, and she spends thousands, not hundreds, of dollars on acquisitions.

Collectors say that building a collection is a gratifying and intellectually stimulating experience. For many, buying art is more than a hobby, it's a way of life—one that involves visiting galleries and museums, belonging to arts organizations, planning vacations around art fairs and museum shows, attending lectures, taking classes, and reading. Rubell says he owns 30,000 books on contemporary art.

Not everyone who buys a work of art can be considered a collector, but for some buyers, one purchase leads inevitably to another. "Collectors have a different relationship with this experience," says Tracy Freedman, co-owner of the San Francisco gallery Hackett-Freedman. "For the occasional buyer, it's like buying a new car. Real collectors are obsessed. They have

to have it. At some point, if you're a collector, you cross that line." Rubell—who along with his wife, Mera, is on the *ARTnews* list of the top 200 collectors—puts it this way: "If you have one more piece than the number of walls you have to put them on, you're a collector."

Collecting sneaks up on you, says Lynne, who became interested in art in the 1970s when he worked as an entertainment lawyer and met Francesco Clemente, Schnabel, and others. Ann Tenenbaum, another collector on the *ARTnews* 200 list with her husband, Thomas H. Lee, adds, "Once you get started, it takes on a life of its own."



Donald and Mera Rubell, who own 30,000 books on contemporary art, in the library of the Rubell Family Collection in Miami.

artists, as well as other art lovers. "Good artists are all over the place," says Freedman. "Someday they may say, 'Who knew there was such interesting art in Dubuque in the 1950s?'"

Collectors and dealers acknowledge that galleries can be intimidating. "A lot of people go into galleries and find them daunting, big, and empty," says Boyer. "Ask about a piece—don't be scared." Jeannie Freilich, who recently opened her own gallery, Freilich Fine Art, on New York's Upper East Side after working for 16 years at Marian Goodman, concurs. "Don't be afraid," she advises. "Be straightforward and bold."

Ron Warren, director of Mary Boone Gallery, says he enjoys when new collectors come in and ask intelligent questions. "It's not about how much money they have, it's about their curiosity and interest in the works," he says. He recommends knowing something about the gallery before visiting. Gallery Web sites are great resources. New York dealer

Bruce Silverstein suggests examining a dealer's stable to "assess whether that gallery's vision is in line with yours."

Forging relationships with people in the art world—gallery owners, curators, critics, private dealers, artists, even other collectors—is an important step to becoming a collector. "This experience happens within a dialogue," says Freedman. "Through these discussions, you will start to form a sense of what you should buy and why." Silverstein, who started out

The first step to becoming an informed collector is seeing as much art as possible. Marc Glimcher, director of PaceWildenstein Gallery in New York, says that people who are new to collecting often come into the gallery and ask to see his inventory. "I say, 'No, we're going to start at the Guggenheim or the Whitney or the Met and spend the day walking through the collection.'"

Alicia Bona, a specialist in postwar contemporary art at the Heller Group, an advisory service in New York, says that collectors can train their eyes by attending viewings at auction houses. "Instead of work by 30 artists, you will see work by 300," she says. "It might not be your price point, but it's a good exercise." Christie's and Sotheby's offer lower-priced works at their midseason sales, and Phillips, de Pury & Company hosts Saturday@Phillips, an auction of design objects and contemporary art geared toward novice collectors.

New Yorkers have an advantage when it comes to collecting, especially contemporary art, says Lynne, a Manhattanite who is listed on the *ARTnews* 200 with his wife, Ninah. But there are many opportunities elsewhere in the country to see art in museums, galleries, and during studio tours, where visitors can become acquainted with artists and learn firsthand about their work. Gallery openings, too, can be opportunities to meet

as a collector, says he learned a lot from dealers. "Most dealers want to build long-term relationships and are willing to invest in the process with new collectors," he says.

Another way to meet members of the art world is through museums' young membership groups, which host educational and social events for art lovers under 40. MoMA has its Junior Associates, the Art Institute of Chicago has its Evening Associates, and the Guggenheim has its Young Collectors Council.

Joan Young, an associate curator of contemporary art at the Guggenheim, works very closely with the Young Collectors Council, developing programs and presenting works to its acquisitions committee. There are approximately three events a month for council members, including private tours of the museum's exhibitions and visits to artists' studios, auction houses, fairs, and private homes. "I have seen members who started to collect," says Young. "When they talk to collectors, they're always asking them what they bought first."

Tenenbaum's first purchase, in the late 1980s, was a hand-painted image by Santa Fe photographer Bob Wade for \$2,000. She and her husband now collect Abstract Expressionism, 20th-century photographs, and postwar German art and have acquired pieces by such artists as Walker Evans, Andreas Gursky, Willem de Kooning, and Gerhard Richter.



Photography is still a popular entrée into the art market for many collectors. "It's a good value," says Los Angeles dealer Carole Christensen Loeff. Silverstein, whose first purchase was an Arnold Newman photograph of Igor Stravinsky, advises photography collectors to invest time in learning about the medium and seeing as many works as possible. "New collectors tend to gravitate toward images they know. Very often they outgrow those images quite rapidly," he says. "There are so many interesting directions a collector can take when exploring photography." Other collectors begin with drawings and work their way up to paintings, but others stay with drawings. "What's nice now is seeing people interested in drawing as a medium in itself," says Bona, "not just because they can't afford paintings."

Kristin Heming, director of New York's Pace Prints, where works by traditional and contemporary artists range in price from under \$1,000 to \$200,000, recommends starting with prints. They are "affordable when compared to unique work," she says.

Tenenbaum, whose parents collected prints and gave her a sculpture for her college graduation gift, also suggests the drawings-and-prints approach. "You can take more chances," she says. "There's cool stuff you can buy for not much money—a couple of thousand dollars." But Rubell has a different take. "Instead of a Warhol print," he says, "start with a painting by someone in your generation that you can relate to."

The first important piece that Rubell and his wife bought was Clemente's mixed-media watercolor *Creation* (1980), later renamed *Self-Portrait Inside Outside* by the artist. "It became the bellwether we matched everything against," says Rubell, a hotelier and former gynecologist who estimates he

has spent 25 percent of his annual income on art over the years. "Now we measure by how fast it makes our heart beat."

New York-based dealer Zach Feuer agrees with Rubell's philosophy and suggests that novices consider buying "great pieces by emerging artists." He tells collectors to use their eyes, not their ears, and not to buy a piece because they've heard that a major collector has acquired one by the same

A Louise Bourgeois lithograph, a Stilnovo lamp, Olivier Mourgue chairs, and an Anna Castelli Ferriero table from a recent Saturday@Phillips auction.

artist. "If you do that, you will end up with lesser work by bigger names, which is always a bad mistake," he says. But, Feuer adds, there are some mistakes new collectors shouldn't be afraid to make. "If you end up hating something, it's not the end of the world," he comments.

Because tastes evolve over time, Loeff thinks investment value should be taken into account when buying an artwork. "You want things with some liquidity," she says. "What are you going to like in

five years? It's a real turn-off when you can't get rid of it." She recommends looking at midcareer artists for good values and suggests that collectors set a budget. "Are you going to spend \$20,000 a year or \$100,000?" she asks. "Do you want one piece or ten pieces? You can be very systematic about it."

Tenenbaum, on the other hand, advises against buying art as an investment. "It's nice if art appreciates, but that's not collecting," she says. "Collecting is about buying things that I love and I want to live with. I have very rarely been led astray by that viewpoint." Glimcher concurs, "If you handle your collection like it's a portfolio, that's what it's going to be. If you are not homed into the transcendental part of art collecting, you are walking around blind."

Noting that most art hasn't held its value over the years, Warren says, "Art is an investment but not necessarily a good one." He adds that collectors who consider themselves patrons feel a connection to works that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. "That's an ideal world," he says, "and those are the ideal collectors."

Takashi Murakami's 19½-inch square offset lithograph *DOB Flower*, 2001, was Karen Boyer's first purchase.

