

How you can get the hang of affordable works of art

by Diana McCormick

SOME people want blank walls at home. But if you're not one of them then it's never been easier to invest in paintings, prints and framed photographs.

A study by the National Campaign for the Arts reveals that our appetite for art is at an all-time high, and with galleries and art fairs popping up all over the country, there is no excuse for complaining about your walls.

The prospect of buying artwork can be daunting; most of us would feel self-conscious entering a fashionable gallery, let alone buying something.

But now art is accessible to everyone, no matter what their tastes or budget — and you can browse from home in online galleries such as the inexpensive *degreeart.com* and pricier *artur.com*.

The success of Frieze London and the Affordable Art Fair (Bristol, September 19 to 21) confirms that art is no longer elitist nor confined to savvy metropolitan types. Romy Westwood, director of the Affordable Art Fair Hampstead, North London, says: 'You don't have to be an expert or a millionaire to collect art. You just have to enjoy it.'

Will Ramsay founded the Affordable Art Fair in 1999

with the aim of making art fun, friendly and affordable'. Since then there have been 100 fairs and 1.4 million visitors around the world, with total sales of more than £203 million.

The annual Aberdeen Art Fair, which runs from September 5 to 7, exhibits many Scottish artists and sells work from £50.

Buy Art Fair — the largest in the North — is held in the Old Granada Studios, Manchester, from September 26 to 28 and features the work of more than 500 artists from 80 galleries.

Childwickbury Arts Fair in Hertfordshire on July 4 to 6, offers live music and crafts for children as well as art. Chester Arts Fair, held on the racecourse, has artist demonstrations.

At the Edinburgh Art Fair from November 14 to 16, you can get involved by joining a workshop.

When it comes to starting

your own collection, it pays to follow a few guidelines:

■ **BROWSE** around. In addition to online research, you can get a feel for the style you like by visiting galleries, exhibitions, fairs and museums.

■ **THE** websites *artnet.com* and *Artinfo* (*uk.blouinartinfo.com*) are a great tool for researching artists and auctions.

■ **ONCE** you begin to find pieces you like, think about the walls that need to be filled. 'I would recommend working with the colours of the room, particularly any accent colours you have,' says interior designer Manuela Hamilford (*hamilforddesign.com*).

'It's nice to mix contemporary furnishings with antique artwork and vice versa. For a cleaner look and to make smaller rooms look bigger, use larger pieces of artwork. If you're going to put various frames together, mixing up the sizes adds interest.'

■ **SET** a budget and stick to it. Some galleries offer payment plans such as the Own Art scheme (*ownart.org.uk*) so you can spread the cost. *Degreeart.com* has works for much less than £500, and the



Picture mixture: Original art personalises a room without costing too much

Affordable Art Fair has pieces ranging from £40 to £4,000.

■ **ORIGINAL** prints make good first buys. 'Unframed they can cost very little,' says Romy Westwood.

'Galleries that specialise in prints include Printmakers in Residence, TAG Fine Arts, Jealous, East London Printmakers and Manifold Editions.' Other inexpensive sources for art include *achica.com*, Trowbridge Gallery (*trowbridgegallery.com*) and Joss and Main (*jossandmain.co.uk*).

■ **ART** is subjective and most experts agree you should not buy it purely as an investment. All the same, savvy clients

can see their purchases rise in value by as much as 600 per cent. 'It's a cliché, but buy what you fall in love with, not what someone tells you that you should like,' says *Degree Art.com*'s Elinor Olisa.

If you're still not convinced, there's always IKEA.

■ **BRISTOL Affordable Art Fair**, £4 adults, under-16s free, *affordableartfair.com*. **Frieze London**, tickets available from July, *friezelondon.com*. **Aberdeen Art Fair**, £3, *aberdeenartfair.co.uk*. **Childwickbury Arts Fair**, £9 adults, £6 children, *childwickburyarts.com*. **Buy Art Fair, Manchester**, first 10,000 tickets free (apply at *buyartfair.co.uk*).

Home truth

A seascape bought for £3,700 at a Kent golf club auction turned out to be a work by J.M.W. Turner, valued at £20 million

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