



## How to Buy Art: a Guide for Beginners

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Capitol Hill Art League

The decision to buy an original work of art is a difficult one. How much to spend? Is it a good investment? Will I still like it next year? Will it work in my home? This article is designed to help the beginning collector address some of these general questions. It also shows the value of purchasing art from a juried show.

### I want the art to fit into my decor. What do you suggest?

All that really matters is that you like the piece. Sometimes my wife or I will buy a work just because we are taken with it. Finding a place for it may require rearrangement of our current collection. Sometimes you may shop for a piece of art to fit a specific location. Then you might wish to consider size and shape. Does a horizontal or vertical piece work better? Horizontal work is more common and is often easier to fit into wall spaces. Consider the idea of three-dimensional art such as sculpture or pottery. Size and price are often linked. Thus, a small sized work may be better as a first purchase. The advantage of a more affordable piece is that you can put it up and get to know it without having made a major investment. Over time you will notice if it continues to engage you - or you may find you lose interest in it. Try to figure out why you feel the way you do about the work - it will help you in making future purchases.

### Can a piece of art convey a mood?

Yes. A work of art can be calming or energizing depending on whether the shapes or lines are sharp or angular or hard-edged or soft. I like a piece with some ambiguity so that it can be seen in different ways and sustain my interest. Others prefer a subject that is well-defined and can be enjoyed without analysis. Some art buyers want a beautiful rendition of a place they have visited or would love to visit. It is great if a piece can take you there. Artists usually simplify what they see and may even idealize the subject.



Shannon Perich (left), Associate Curator with the National Museum of American History was the judge for November's juried show. She is pictured here with Equal Merit Award winner Jackie Hoysted. Jackie received the Phillips Gallery Membership Award. Other award winners were: Marcus Lundell, Equal Merit Award winner and recipient of the National Museum of Women in the Arts membership award; and Honorable Mention award winners Nancy Donnelly, Jackie Saunders, Wally Szyndler and Ann Thomson. Perich presented each of the award winners with a copy of her book, co-authored by the late Richard Avedon, *The Kennedys: Portrait of a Family*.

### Should color be a consideration?

Colors help to convey mood. Generally, a piece of art will have a color dominance of one kind or other. This may be warm or cool. Warm colors include reds, oranges, and yellows. Cool colors are blues or violets. Within these two categories, there are colors that are brighter (or closer to the colors of the rainbow) and those that are dull (called desaturated). Bright warm colors are exciting. The less-intense and cooler colors are often calming. The contrast of neutral and bright colors or cool and warm colors in a piece can be very dramatic. In choosing your art, consider what mood you want to convey with the piece in its planned location.

### What about the colors in my home?

This is perhaps one of the most common and difficult questions to answer. If you like it, buy it and don't feel it has to match. If you want to integrate it into your decor, consider changing the frame or mat. Art pieces sold in juried shows are required to have simple frames and mats in basic colors such as white or cream. This is necessary so that works in the gallery go together even though the sizes, styles, techniques, and subjects are very different.

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A colored mat often overpowers a piece, but a double or triple mat showing only a thin border of color can be effective.

### Is there a "best" media?

The short answer is no. Historically, oil paintings have been most valued. This is no longer true. In today's art world, good art is conveyed through use a variety of techniques, often in combination. Oils and acrylics have a similar look and do not need to be protected by glass.

Watercolors can convey a bright, airy look achieved when the transparent paint allows light to pass through to the white paper and reflect back. Etchings and lithographs can have a significant amount of tiny details. Other print forms such as monotypes can be lively and fun.

Photographs are a wonderful way to capture a moment or mood. Digital manipulation is providing a new and exciting edge to photography. Three dimensional arts such as pottery or sculpture can provide endless fascination with the play of light and shadow on them. Pastels can transmit clarity of color and detail different from other art forms (note, they do require special handling when framed). The buyer should choose the media that pleases him or her.

### How do I know the quality of the art?

Art in a "juried show" is generally of high quality. A recognized art authority such as a university professor, museum director, or gallery owner reviews the pieces that have been submitted for a show and selects a smaller number for inclusion. Therefore, a work of art in a juried show has been reviewed by an expert and deemed of good quality.

### What does the juror look for?

Generally, the juror is looking for creativity, good composition or design, and technical ability. Overly familiar subjects are often passed over. Creativity can overcome the familiar. An unusual viewpoint, uncommon colors, or an unexpected element are appealing. Beyond that, subject and even relationship to the show's theme is secondary to composition. A good composition has a dominate element, a variety of shapes, and a sense of unity. The artist's level of expertise with his/her chosen media is also a consideration.

### What is a reasonable price for a piece of art?

To determine if the piece you are considering is priced reasonably, make some price comparisons with other art of similar sizes and media. Factors that may be considered by the artist in pricing a work are: size, cost of materials and framing, gallery fees, time involved in the creation of the art, and level of experience of the artist.

## Where can I find reasonable art on Capitol Hill?

The Capitol Hill Art League (CHAL) is an affiliate of the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (CHAW). The Art League conducts six juried shows a year which are exhibited at the Arts Workshop gallery located at 545 Seventh St. SE. All the regular shows at the Capitol Hill Art League (CHAL) are juried. The juror attends the opening on the second Saturday of the month to talk about the selections and awards. Attending this discussion can be very educational for a new art buyer. In addition, you can review a book of artist biographies containing pictures of a sample of their works. This is available at the reception desk. An unjuried "wrap it up" show is held in December with small works of reasonably priced art on sale in time for holiday giving. All work shown is always original and current as it must have been completed within the last three years.

At CHAL, most pieces sell in the range of \$200 to \$800. There are exceptions on both ends of the range. Let's take an example of a painting priced at \$500. CHAL charges the artist a gallery commission of 30 % (lower than most galleries which charge a minimum of 40%). A modestly priced frame with a mat for an average sized piece may cost \$200. The paint and paper or canvas used by the artist is additional cost. The breakdown looks like this:

Sale price = \$500  
Less 30 % gallery commission = \$350  
Less cost of framing (\$200) = \$150  
Less cost of materials (varies)

As you can see, at a net profit of less than \$150, the artist is not taking home a large amount of the price of the art. What might initially seem costly to the first time buyer is in fact a reasonable price for the work.

## FEBRUARY SHOW "Untitled"

Juror: Gwen Bragg

Receiving: February 7 and 9, 9:30-11:30am

Opening: February 14, 5-7pm

## February Show Juror

Gwen Bragg is a signature member of the National Watercolor Society. She has taught for many years at The Art League School and her works have won awards at The Art League. She is active in the Potomac Valley Watercolor Society and Arlington Artists Alliance.

GEOFF AULT



**THE TAO OF LIGHT**  
FEBRUARY, 2009

Alcione Vinet's  
**Park Cafe**  
February 1-28, 2009

Opening reception  
February 1  
5:30 - 6:30pm

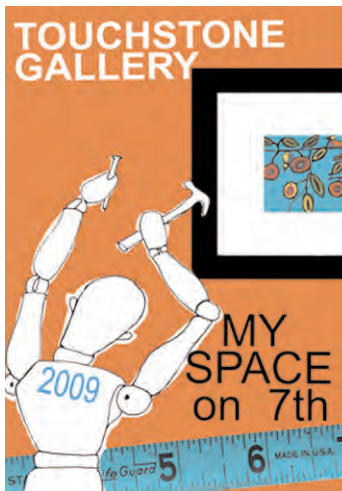
106 13th Street, SE  
Washington, DC  
at Lincoln Park  
202.543.0184  
www.parkcafedc.com

**Domestications:**  
exploring daily life works on paper  
by  
**Linda Baughan Norton**  
at  
**Fusion Grill**  
515 Eighth Street, SE  
Washington, DC

**Ronald Riley** is exhibiting in a three man show at the Foundry Gallery during the month of February. The opening reception is Friday February 6 from 6:00 to 8:00 which coincides with the "First Friday of the Month" Gallery openings in the Dupont Circle area.

Ron will also have a solo show in Annapolis at the Holley Gallery which is part of the Circle Gallery run by the Maryland Federation of Art. The show runs from January 21 through February 4 and the opening reception is Saturday January 24 from 2:00 to 4:00.

Art League members **Pat Bennett, Jackie Hosted** and **Lisa Rothenstein** will be exhibiting in the My Space on 7th exhibit at Touchstone Gallery.



**TOUCHSTONE GALLERY**

406 7th St, NW, 2nd floor  
Washington, DC 20004  
(202) 347-2787  
www.touchstonegallery.com

**My Space on 7th**  
88 Area Artists

January 7 - February 7, 2009

Opening Reception:  
Friday January 9, 6-8:30 pm

Wed to Fri 11-5  
Sat & Sun 12-5

## Open Figure Drawing

The Capitol Hill Arts Workshop is offering open life drawing in February.  
Saturdays, February 7, 14, 21 and 28, 1:30 to 4:30pm.

Sign up for all four sessions for \$60.  
Drop in rate is \$20 a session as space permits.  
Registration for this opens January 5, 2009. Space will be limited, so signup early.

To register in person or by phone:  
Capitol Hill Arts Workshop  
545 7th Street, SE  
202 547-6839

Session monitor is Sarah Thibodeaux.  
Questions may be directed to her at:  
sarah@studiothibodeaux.com

## Capitol Hill Art League Annual Meeting

The CHAL annual meeting will be held on Saturday February 21st from 4 to 6 at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. CHAL will provide wine and cheese, and members just need to show up. It's a great chance to meet and greet old friends and new members. Members in attendance can receive 30 day-passes to the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Members are invited to bring artist friends who might be interested in joining. There will be a short business session followed by cheese and wine.

## Wrap It Up Wrap UP

This year's Wrap It Up show was quite successful. The reception was very well-attended, and over 35 pieces sold.

Please remember to claim your unsold work from the closet to make room for this Spring's shows. Any work left in the closet for more than 60 days becomes the property of the Capitol Hill Art League.