

# VOGUE

## Artists and Gallerists Explain How (and Why) to Buy Art Online



BY ARDEN FANNING ANDREWS

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Photo: Elizabeth Whiting & Associates / Alamy

The traditional art world has been historically—and sometimes comically—prohibitive. It's something that social-media accounts like [@jerrygogosian](#) address in a scroll of memes: “You are cordially invited to dinner in honor of the artist whose work will never be available to you” framing Kate Moss eating ice cream or “TFW when they ‘let’ you buy an editioned print after 2 years” over smirking Ben Affleck. Still, beyond the occasional *Emperor’s New Clothes*–esque

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gatekeeper, art collecting is experiencing a renaissance in the increasingly relevant virtual space.

Gallerists recognize that online shopping platforms are democratizing the experience. “It’s fantastic for collectors and artists alike to have opportunities outside of the traditional art-world system, which tends to be highly exclusive,” says Lisa Marie Pomares, partner at Los Angeles’s Simchowitz Gallery. “These platforms level the playing field by way of providing access without having to jump through all kinds of ridiculous hoops to either be deemed worthy of collecting and purchasing artwork—or deemed worthy of having work exhibited and seen.” This bit is key. “Most artists don’t get the opportunity to exhibit,” Pete Voelker writes. The New York–based visual artist, whose photo work has been tapped by Calvin Klein and Sies Marjan, created a new outlet for indie photographers like Elizabeth De La Piedra and Amanda Heck with his zine Pix. Voelker accepts submissions at Spotz.club and acknowledges that on the collector’s side, “seeking out small editions and projects to buy from artists directly is extremely impactful.”

The act of buying “has also developed an aura of philanthropy around it in recent years,” says Owen Duffy, director of Yeh Art Gallery at St. John’s University. “I always tell people who are interested in collecting to focus on supporting artists.” In agreement, I call the person who introduced me to the scene (from whom I purchased one of my first works), Tamara Johnson. As codirectors of Dallas’s Sweet Pass Sculpture Park, she and Trey Burns create Our Mutt ceramic dog bowls as handmade pieces that funnel back to the nonprofit. Anything they would pocket from sales goes directly to maintaining the grounds, paying artist stipends, and providing educational programs like Sculpture School, which the pair hosted this month. She tells me how RISD Made spotlights shoppable works from its alumni, and SYNT (See You Next Thursday), based in New York, features weekly art auctions via Instagram.

Of course, NFT auctions are the latest fascination—though the industry is still adapting to the system. “In order to purchase an NFT, you have to buy cryptocurrency,” explains Brooklyn-based artist Elise Swopes, who’s slated to speak at the NFT.NYC conference in November. She credits @herstoryDAO for “doing great work in helping minority artists sell” and notes that “digital art is worth investing in because it’s always been here; it’s just been taken for granted because we see it and have access to it.” It’s an interesting point to absorb regarding

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the old-school value of closed doors. Keep an open mind, Swopes suggests. “It takes time to understand the platforms, the community, and how an artist creates.”

Below, a source for gliding through the cyber lands of art and commerce:

## Photography

“I’d look for both quality and substance when purchasing any art, but sight unseen via a website, I’d let quality lead the way,” says Voelker of navigating the waters of e-comm photography. “In terms of smart collecting, my recommendation is to stick to things that are archival—you want it to last, whether it’s a small or large investment.” He mentions sorting out framing as soon as possible with matte UV plexiglass. “Your viewing experience will be worth the small premium, not to mention the preservation of the artwork.”

## Prints

“It’s possible to support artists and social causes at the same time, as evidenced by Art for Change, which offers affordable editions by important contemporary artists like Melissa Brown and Summer Wheat,” says Duffy. Pomares adds that Tappan Collective is another great resource for collectors to explore without feeling intimidated by the process. “They did a limited print with one of my favorite artists, Umar Rashid,” she says. “You can purchase a print for under \$500, and he is someone who has exhibited around the world and is included in the ‘Made in L.A.’ exhibition at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.”

## Sculptural Objects

“I think sculptures have an incredible ability to remind us of material, density, and volume in ways that are grounding and physical,” says Johnson. Pieces often merge fine art and functional design. “Prospect NY is pretty sharp for a shop that partners with artists to produce more design-oriented works,” she says, pointing out that Judy Chicago has several on the site, from

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printed silks to a Goddess Trio of a candle, soap, and a gold-plated pin. Also, “Hyperallergic has a great online store featuring pieces by artists like Mickalene Thomas and Louise Bourgeois.”

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## Illuminations

Continuing the thread of form meets function, electric works double as emotional light sources. “I love 1stDibs as my furniture and decorative objects go-to,” says Pomares. New concepts utilize tech in moving images. “Azikiwe Mohammed’s *Looking for Solace* from Infinite Objects is an innovative take on the limited edition—a work of video art that can fit on your desk,” says Duffy. “It’s also an incredible opportunity to live with a work of art by a *New York Times*–lauded artist.”

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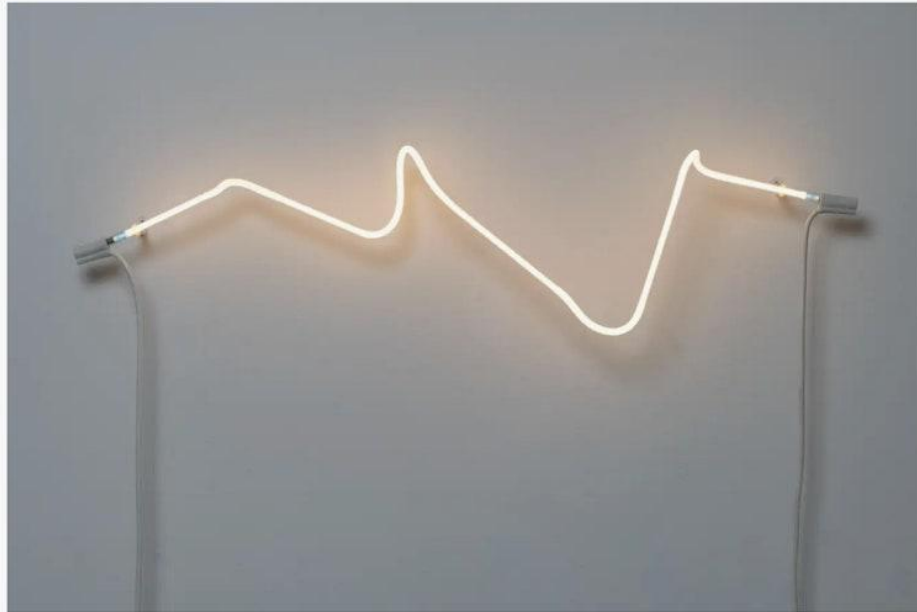
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**Azikiwe Mohammed “Looking for Solace” large acrylic**

\$290  
INFINITE OBJECTS  
[SHOP NOW](#)

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**Annesta Le “Vibrations” warm white neon glass light, 2015**

\$1,625  
1STDIBS  
[SHOP NOW](#)

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**Carnevale Studio XE neon light**

\$1,750  
CARNEVALE STUDIO  
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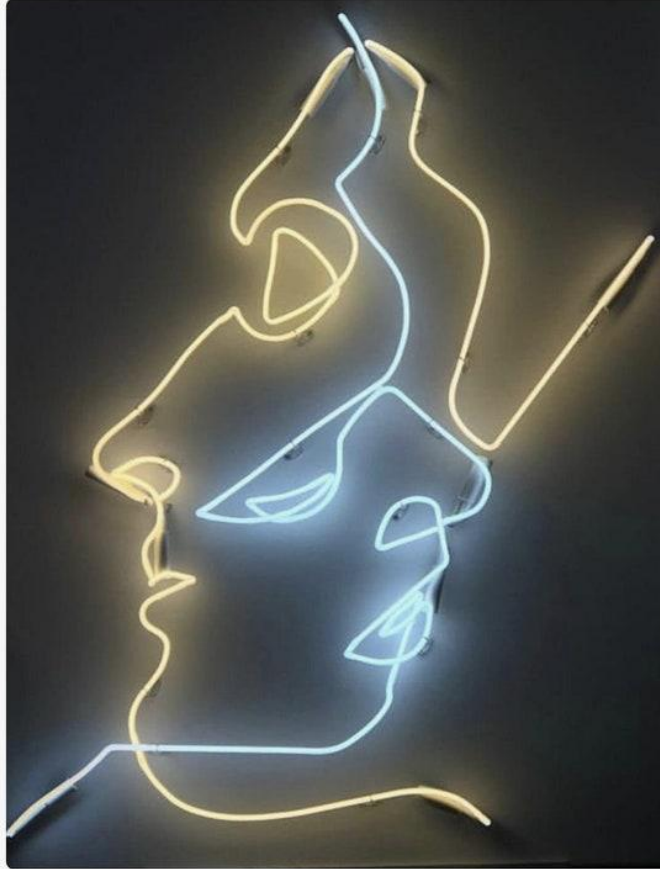
**Kristina Larson “Wall Flowers”, 2020 ceramic and LED sculpture**

\$2,500  
1STDIBS  
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**Neon Art Creations custom neon light**

\$138  
ETSY  
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**Vincenzo Ceccato “Indeterminacy - Original Mixed Media”, 2016**

\$2,691\$2,080  
1STDIBS  
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## Handhelds and Wearables

“I think one of the great things about buying zines and small-edition pieces from indie artists is the attention to detail,” says Voelker. “They are items usually made by the artists and

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meticulously crafted to share their message.” The category offers “a step into their world.” Consider Brian DeGraw’s album art for musical artist Quickly, Quickly’s upcoming *The Long and Short of It* or Benjamin Degen’s virtual merch table of drawings turned postcards. In the heart of Manhattan’s garment district, digital prints of Hope Macdonald’s paintings are hand cut and sewn into wearable pieces.

## Paintings

“When I saw how Tappan Collective chooses guest curators to put together collections of works, I obviously was drawn to Maya Erskine’s picks,” says Johnson of the *Pen15* creator-producer-actor’s selects, including Alexis Arnold’s sold-out *Crystallized Books* series and Ali Beletic’s *Material and the Sensual* painting. She adds that “GIFC (Got It for Cheap) has a cool platform that features shows by emerging curators and artists—the works are available for purchase online, so you can buy up really nice pieces and skip over some of the high fees that a gallery takes.”

## Mixed + New Media

For an interesting combination of mixed and new media, Pomares likes Galerie Perrie, which was founded in 2021 by Gabé Hirschowitz. “This site is a wonderful go-to as there are always fresh and exciting pieces by a wide range of contemporary artists at a variety of price points for a collector,” she says. Duffy respects the logic of artist Mat Gasparek’s Flat Rate Contemporary for emerging artists’ works since “the parameter is that they must fit in a UPS flat-rate envelope. It very much follows in the tradition of other mail art projects, from Charles White to Ray Johnson.” And Swopes encourages due diligence for digital. “Some art may seem pretty, but it may be stolen,” she warns with a laugh. “So do your research.”

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