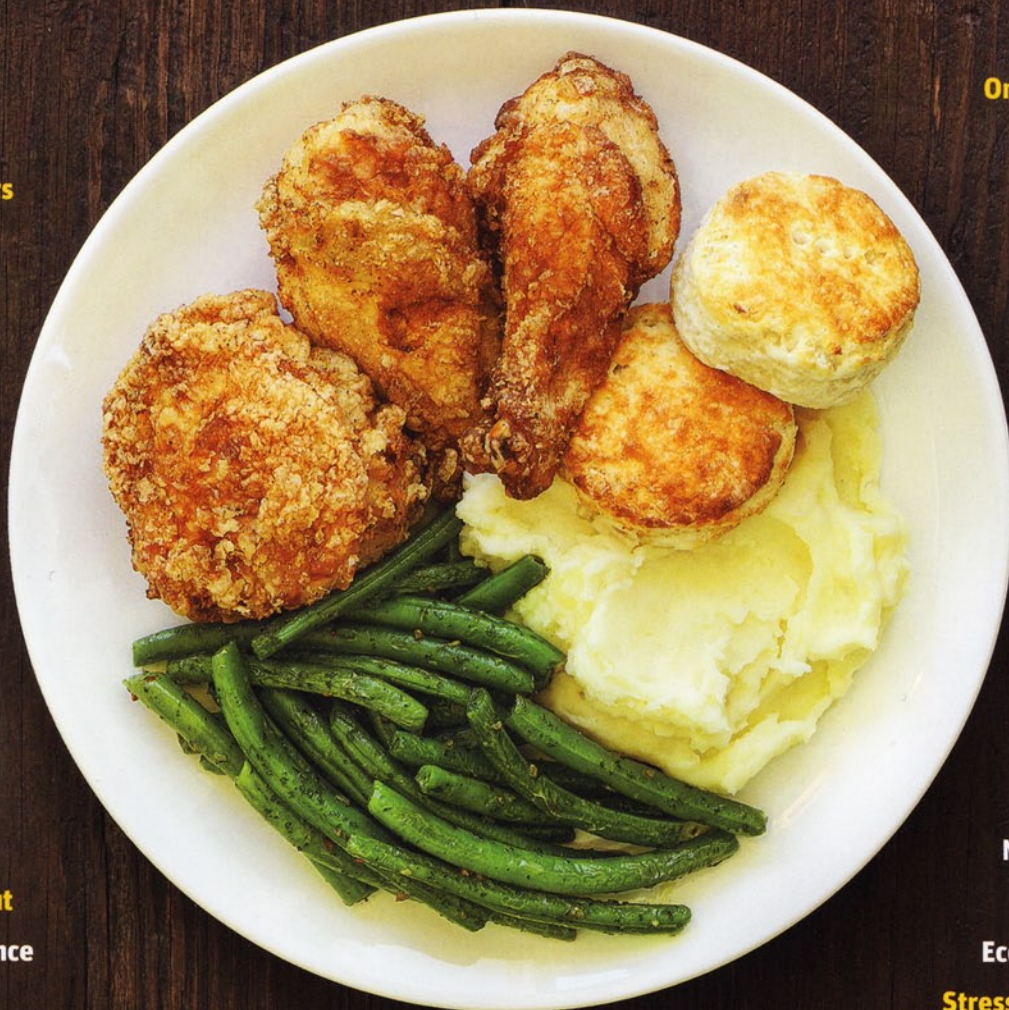


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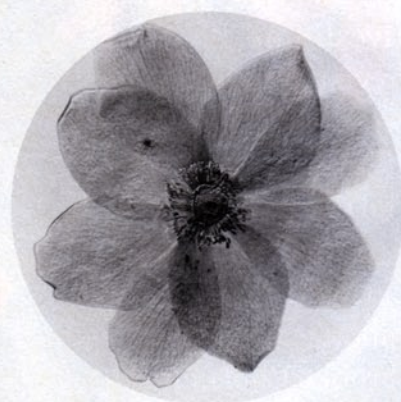
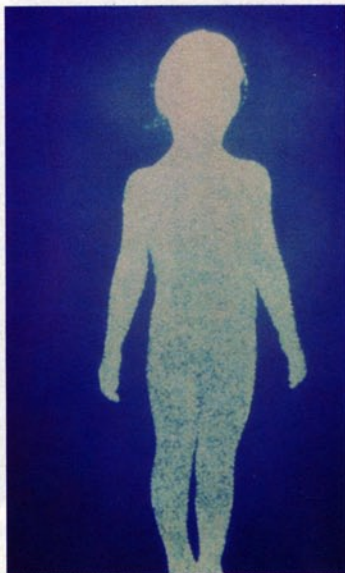
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Clockwise from top left: Christopher Bucklow's "Guest," Jackson Fine Art; Wendy Given's *No Man's Land* exhibition, Solomon Projects; Bernard Matussière's "Flower No. 3," Wm Turner; Dennis Campay's "Blu Franc," Mason Murer Fine Art; Sam Parker and Joe Tsambiras's "The Floating World," Beep Beep Gallery

The Fine Art of Collecting

Where to find pieces you'll love—and how to buy them.

By VIRGINIA PARKER

FINDING THE RIGHT PIECE of art is like falling in love. In the beginning you're dating, casually playing the field. But in your heart you know something's missing; there's a blank, a void that cries out to be filled. You start looking in earnest, and oh, the horror stories you tell your friends. You see one clueless, awkward, inept piece after the next. Friends fix you up and you stare aghast. What were they thinking? Oh, there are a few flirtations, but either you're just not that into them or they're already taken. You begin to wonder—are you too picky? Or are you yearning for the unattainable? Once you've dallied with Degas and been ravished by Rothko, it's hard to look at the local talent.

But one day you see that special piece, and it's like the beginning of an affair: the same visceral tingle, the irresistible pull to get closer, the surge and mutter of desire heating up your blood. The clandestine meetings to see it "just one more time," the fas-

SOLOMON PROJECTS: ©2008 WENDY GIVEN

ination with every detail, the delicious moment of resistance, and that thrilling plunge into passion. Yes. Yes. Oh, God. Yes yes yes.

Buying art? That's more like getting married. It's one thing to fall in love with a piece of art; it's another to have it take up permanent residence in your home. Before making that kind of commitment, you need some serious consideration. We asked gallery owners and curators for a few tips to bear in mind as you get ready to take that step.

Start by finding out everything you can and expanding your knowledge of what's happening in the arts today. Read periodicals such as *Artforum* and *Art Papers*, the Atlanta-based publication that critiques cutting-edge trends worldwide. To fully appreciate modern art, read up on art history. Make it a priority to get firsthand information—go to artist talks and curator talks.

Next, keep your eyes open. "Walk before you run—spend time getting to know what work you respond to," says Stuart Horodner, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center's artistic director. That means you must mingle. You can't catch a fish with your bait in the boat. Museums and nonprofit galleries are crammed with good stuff in a wide range of styles, periods, and media. It's all about developing a visual vocabulary. College and university museums are some of Atlanta's best-kept secrets.

To continue your education, browse at pin-up shows—popular fundraisers in which small, unframed works of art are literally pinned to the gallery wall and sold at bargain prices. Go to auctions by established institutions such as *Art Papers*, Hambidge, and MOCA GA and you'll see art in different media from artists at varying points in their career trajectories. And there are commercial galleries galore, each with its own distinctive sensibility. You'll know when the chemistry is right.

Once you've developed some background knowledge, a sense of what you like and what's out there, it's time to find that piece of art to make your own. There is

affordable, quality art at every price point, so start by figuring out what thrills you.

The medium makes a difference, and size does matter. For example, oils tend to be more expensive than watercolors or acrylics, and you'll pay more for bronze sculpture than plaster (obviously there are variations to this rule depending on the artist's history and reputation). Bigger generally equals more expensive—if

Artwork can be a solid investment. But for the casual collector, passion, not equity, should be the driving force.

factors such as medium, prices by artists doing similar work, and sales history are comparable.

One way to get your feet wet is with limited edition fine art prints. "You can afford prints by very, very good artists," says curator Julia Fenton. Original work is more costly than copies, so if you want a one-of-a-kind piece, consider works on paper; artists' drawings are often fresher and less expensive than paintings.

Fine art photography offers great bang for your collector buck. Fay Gold Gallery offers photographs by well-known photographer Robert Mapplethorpe for as little as \$7,500; by contrast, works the gallery carries by celebrated Atlanta resident and Cuban-born painter Rocio Rodriguez go for as much as \$18,000.

Artwork can be a solid investment. But for the casual collector, passion, not equity, should be the driving force. You can't analyze art like it's your 401(k)—especially not your 401(k) in the current economy. "The art world is a complicated place, and investing in art takes a lot of work. If you are not willing to do that, don't fiddle around with large sums of money," advises Jeffrey Grove, the Wieland Family Curator of Modern and Contempo-

rary Art at the High Museum. "Buy what makes you swoon. If there isn't a physical reaction, don't do it."

Ready to commit? "Be brave. Shake off the fear. Think about the long-term contribution to culture," says Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, director of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art. "And never be ashamed of layaway."

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» **WHAT YOU'LL FIND** Contemporary painting, printmaking, video installation, sculpture, and photography. Two examples: the critically acclaimed and viscerally compelling *She's Got a Gun* exhibit, shown in conjunction with the publication of the eponymous book, and the more cerebral pleasures of Janet Biggs's *Tracking Up* video installation.

» **PRICE RANGE** \$650 to \$75,000

Caveat Emptor

Is it art or schlock? Curators offer these warning signs.

- » Avoid anything labeled "hand-painted."
- » Prints that are not numbered, or that come in editions of 5,000, are a scam.
- » If the signature takes up more than one-eighth of the canvas, beware.
- » Painting sales held in hotels and touted as "European Artists" are mass-produced. It's Kinkade territory. Valueless.
- » A gallery that represents hundreds of people is like a menu with hundreds of entrees—not a good sign.
- » "Starving Artist" sales are bogus.
- » Don't be talked into a decision by anybody else. Sleep on it.
- » If you walk in the door and you're not comfortable, trust your instincts and leave.