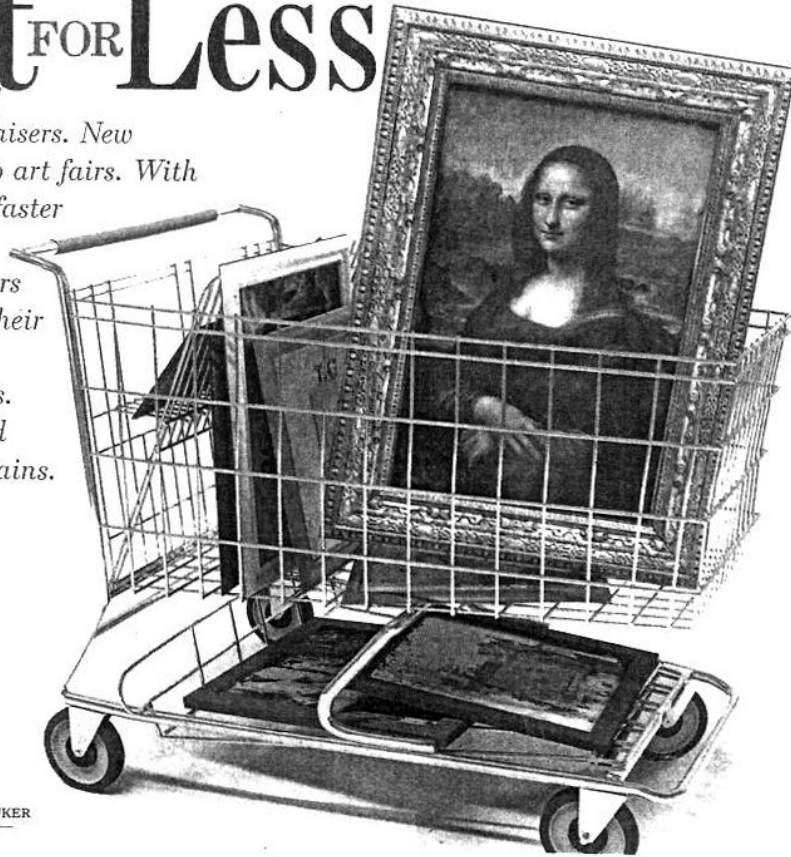


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Art²⁹⁸ FOR Less

Local fund-raisers. New approaches to art fairs. With prices rising faster than ever, savvy collectors are shifting their strategies for nabbing deals. Where to find the next bargains.



By LAUREN A.E. SCHUKER

Art Prep: How One Pro Gets Ready to Buy

Lisa Hunter began buying student art in college, and today is one of the top collectors of affordable art. Over 20 years, she has amassed a stockpile of crafts, prints, paintings and photographs centered on theater and film—never spending more than \$7,000 on an item. We asked her to walk us through how she prepares for shows and spots likely bargains well before she walks in the door. Here's how she would prepare for the upcoming American Craft Show in San Francisco, one of the most important events for collectors of craft art. —Lauren A.E. Schuker

1 As far in advance as possible, Ms. Hunter reads targeted art publications to get more conversant about the particular genre. For this fair, she would scan magazines like *American Craft*, *Fibers* and *Ceramics*.

2 A week before the fair, she will check the Web site (<http://www.craftcouncil.org/sf/>) to see which art she likes on a purely aesthetic level, bookmarking those pages so she can easily find them again. In the case of the San Francisco fair, 12 of the show's 250 artists catch her eye.

3 She takes that list of artists and begins looking into their professional backgrounds—as well as viewing more of their work—to get a better feel for their investment potential. Ms. Hunter quickly eliminates some of the 12 artists when she sees that their other crafts—including some decorated with bunnies and other animals—are too cutesy and commercial.

4 While researching, she finds that one of the artists she likes, Andrea Tucker-Hody, who makes collages with handmade paper, graduated from the Pratt Institute, a top art school in the "crafts" sector—a good sign. But then Ms. Hunter sees that Ms. Tucker-Hody doesn't have her own Web site, and the only price Ms. Hunter finds for her on

the Web, \$2,300, seems much higher than those of many better-known artists. On a closer glance at the artist's resume, Ms. Hunter also discovers that Ms. Tucker-Hody hasn't exhibited at either of the three top fairs for craft art, the Smithsonian Craft Show and the two SOFA fairs. Based on that information, Ms. Hunter concludes that Ms. Tucker-Hody is more of a local artist to track than a national artist to buy immediately.

5 At this point, Ms. Hunter has eliminated nine of her initial picks, leaving her with a short list of three artists: Masuo Ojima, Myra Burg and Elaine Hyde. To find more details on their pricing, she goes to artnet.com, which lists auction results. Because most emerging artists haven't sold at auction, she browses the site for prices of artists who have similar backgrounds or are working in a comparable medium.

6 After doing that, Ms. Hunter knows that all three artists are in her affordable range—\$150 to \$2,500—and she can shoot off an email to them and their dealers, announcing her interest and intention to buy at the fair. She might also use the opportunity to ask if the artist has anything smaller or cheaper than the prices that she found online.