

ART REVIEW

Two prominent gallerists share their views on contemporary art and their own personal collections.



Tim Olsen

is a leading gallerist in Australia, running Olsen Gallery, Olsen Annexe and Limited in Sydney's Woollahra. Born into the arts dynastically, he is the son of the great painter John Olsen. He recently launched Olsen Gruin gallery in New York — taking Australian art international.

On a lifetime of collecting I bought my first artwork, a Godfrey Miller pencil drawing on paper, when I was 21 years old. Growing up surrounded by major oil paintings helped me as a budding dealer, but like anyone else I still had to make that first commitment with my own money. The impulse to collect is like painting a self-portrait — decade by decade all the stories are there. Look through my record collection and perhaps you might know me; look at my art and see it all laid bare — it's a tactile memoir.

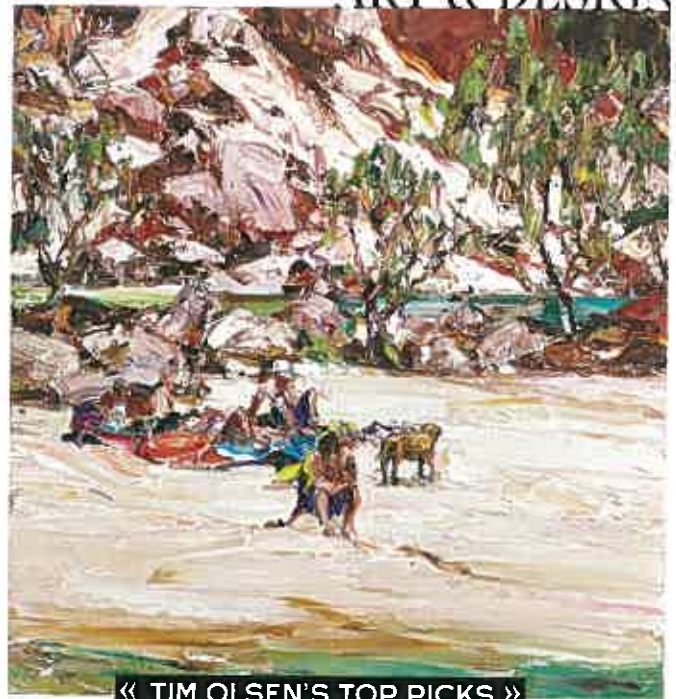
On how to choose art The biggest misconception about art collecting is that it is solely for the rich. The first investment you make is actually an emotional one. "Can I live with this? What does it mean? What does it say?" Buying art is always a meeting between the heart and the head. But it's not rocket science. A good art collection, like a great wardrobe or a beautiful interior, evolves over time.

On his private collection The walls are covered in beautiful Nicholas Harding landscapes and gutsy, lyrical [John] Olsens. I need a few pieces that talk back like naughty children — my works by Juz Kitson almost bite!

On displaying art at home The art in my house is the opposite of decor and I let it clash deliberately. It took me a long time to learn that aesthetics are different to taste. Taste sells a house; aesthetics make a home. I try to let my art breathe and move around. The idea that art 'completes' a room makes me restless. It's suffocating to think you can't lean a painting on a bookshelf or pin a drawing to a wall because it's an 'investment'.

On contemporary Australian art I've always thought it was misunderstood and underrated by international collectors and gallerists. Art fairs, as they grow vaster and more homogenous every year, feel a lot like luxury shopping malls, as many galleries brand themselves with the faceless, gilded authority of Gucci or Prada. In that context, a small independent Australian gallery can drown. Art reflects economies, so in Europe and America, art is studied, marketed and collected on an industrial scale. The young Australian fashion designers who broke into couture in Paris and the Marc Newsons who took Milan and then the stratosphere have few equivalents in our art world.

On the future of Australian art It's inevitable that Australian art will gain prominence beyond Indigenous painters and Biennale showcases. In the meantime, Australian collectors still have the privilege of being able to afford their country's best artists. And they also get to galvanise their own faith in painters, photographers and sculptors who are not global name brands.



« TIM OLSEN'S TOP PICKS »

NICHOLAS HARDING

Much like Paul Cézanne, I feel you can divide any section of a painting by Harding and find more to sustain the eye. The originator of the new school of landscape painters, he was the first to apply that thick impasto oil and, though widely imitated, he's still the best. Estuary Figures (Swamp Oaks, Swim-ring and Dog) (2012, above).

SOPHEAP PICH

The Cambodian sculptor has an ethereal line that echoes the fragility and organic lyricism of Bronwyn Oliver — an artist dearly missed in Australia. Spirituality in a cynical art world is rare. Using apparently simple materials, his work has the rare ability to draw a line through space. Morning Glory (2011, left).



IAN FAIRWEATHER

Probably the purest artist Australia ever produced, even if he was born in England. His beauty dwells in his contradictions: he rejected Cubism but painted tonally; he denied abstraction but pushed our painting (finally) out of landscape and into modernism. Anak Bayan (1957, right).



On Australian art abroad It's been perplexing to watch my father paint for 70 years and not truly 'crack' Europe or America. He probably won't live to see the shift in global art collecting. Being a true believer, I don't want to stand to see another generation of great Australian artists remain relevant in just this hemisphere. Last year I opened a small gallery in New York. What started as a small pop-up is now a lively, ongoing concern. If Zimmermann is in the Hamptons then Australian art needs to be on the Lower East Side and then in London, Rome and beyond.

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