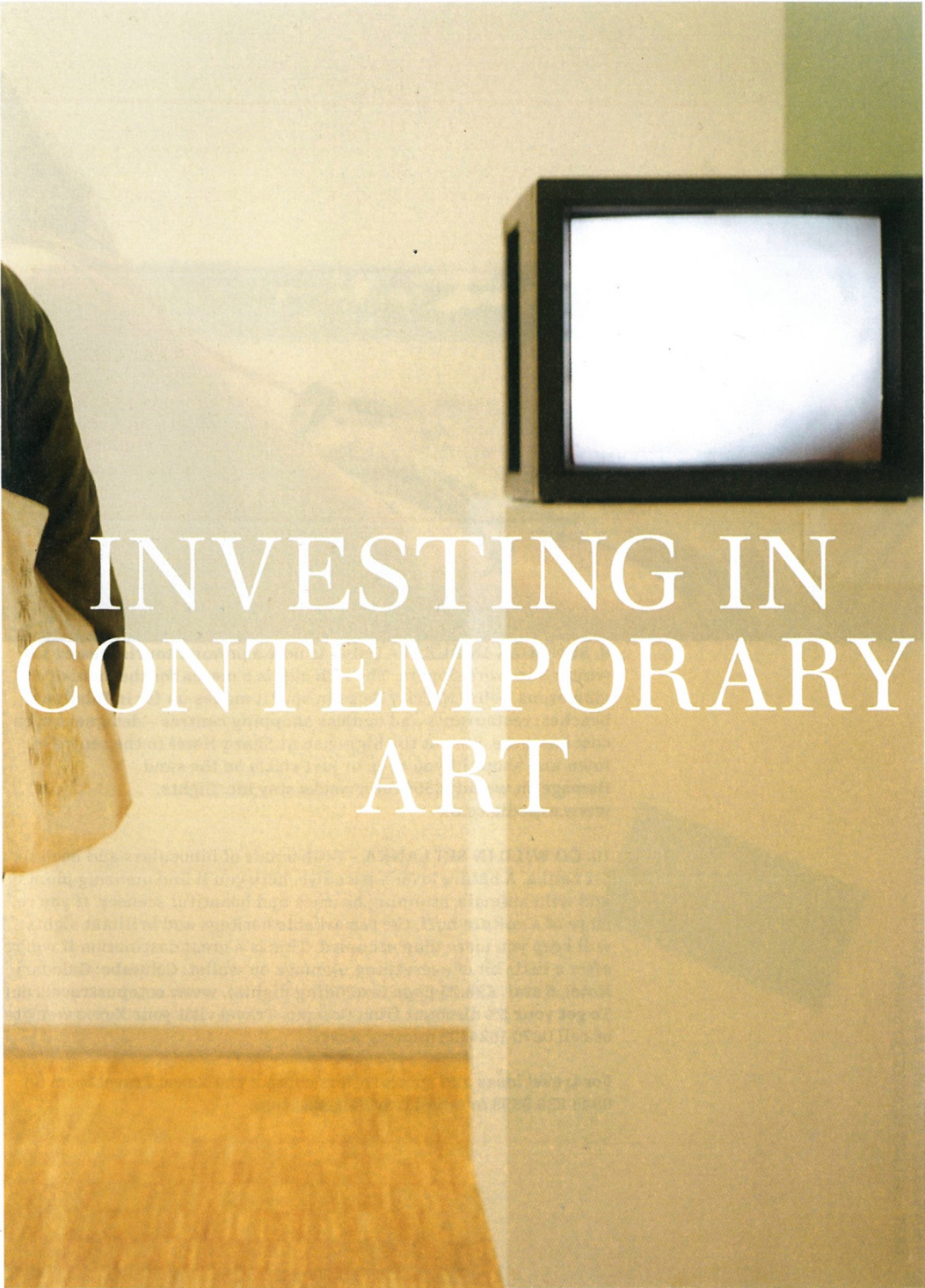




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INVESTING IN CONTEMPORARY ART

CONTEMPORARY ART IS THE NEW FASHION. EVERYONE WANTS A PIECE OF IT AND SOME EVEN THINK THEY CAN MAKE MONEY OUT OF IT. BUT LIKE ANY OTHER INVESTMENT, IT TAKES A LOT MORE THAN LUCK TO GET A RETURN ON BEING AN ART DEALER. YOU NEED TO DO SOME SERIOUS RESEARCH AND YOU NEED TO HAVE A PASSIONATE BELIEF IN THE WORK YOU BUY AND SELL. SIMON O'CONNELL SPEAKS TO A SERIOUS COLLECTOR, A GALLERY OWNER, AND AN ALL ROUND ART GURU ABOUT INVESTING IN CONTEMPORARY ART.

INTERVIEW BY: SIMON O'CONNELL
PORTRAITS BY: RALF OBERGFELL

ROBERT TIBBLES, INVESTMENT BANKER AND ART COLLECTOR.

There are two totally different approaches to buying art. Either you buy for the enjoyment it brings you or you buy art for investment reasons and they are totally separate. If you buy just with the sole intention of making money then almost certainly you will not – you need to have a feeling for what you buy. I started collecting at 28 with no fixed idea of what I wanted to buy. I knew I didn't want a Constable or anything too figurative. I simply wanted some art in my house that was genuine, that wasn't a print or anything like that.



When ever I here about someone who'd made a lot of money and has gone out and spent a lot of money on art quickly then you can be sure they are not going to make money. You hear about people making lots of money from selling art occasionally, but that's generally because they've held on to it for a very long time. If you look at the value they have had from that art over the years then the money can look insignificant. If you hold on to something for, say 50 years, then that's great. Things increase in value over a long time.

Seventy per cent of my collection is in my house so I can appreciate it all the time, the rest is in storage. I've got Ork by Michael Landy, Damian Hirst's early medicine cabinets, Michael Craig Martin, Grayson Perry and Ian Davenport among others. I have only ever sold one piece and that was twelve years ago. You develop an attachment to things. For example if someone comes to my house and they say they like a piece of art then it makes me happy; and if someone says they don't like something then I'm unhappy. I feel very attached to them. Lots of people come to me and ask for advice on collecting but very few of them have gone out and done it – well, maybe one guy who really has got into it and taken his time.

You hear about people sweeping into galleries and buying the whole lot up if they are very rich, but they're not the type that makes money from art. I go around most of the major art colleges, to the degree shows and build relationships with galleries. You have to take your time with art and make sure that you go to see as much as possible.



CATHERINE SHEARWATER,
OWNER VERTIGO GALLERY, LONDON.

Contemporary art is difficult to invest in, there are no guarantees and resale can be difficult since there's no guarantee of a buyer. Even if you buy something at £5k and it's later valued at £10k, you'll end up making only a little because the auction house or gallery takes a considerable cut.

There are so many different artists it's difficult to predict what's going to go up and for what reason – you need to know your subject really, really well. I know a man who works in the city, he's quite senior and he claims to have made more money from his art collection than he has from being a banker. He's an example of someone who's done well. He bought lots of Tracey Emin and Damian Hirst – that kind of thing – at the right time. But then he treats it almost like a job and he knows an awful lot about it. He goes to all the openings, reads all the journals, and I think, if you have a huge amount of knowledge, then you stand a better chance of making money from buying and selling art. I think it would be very risky to enter into the art market without knowing it very well – the same as any other market.

It's difficult to know what will happen to certain artists. Some start off doing well and then just die off and there's no market for them at all. I think art is the most unpredictable commodity. It's good to know the history, whether they've been bought by major collectors, which gallery they're represented by. The main guide to prices for established artists is previous auction prices.

One of the pitfalls of the art market – flying at the moment – it doesn't just slow down, it disappears intermittently so you can be left with something that is completely un-sellable. If you don't want to take chances then go for something really safe, like an Andy Warhol print, which is pretty much a commodity now or a contemporary painter like Gary Hume, who is well respected.

If you want to spend tens of thousand then you're best bet is to go round the art colleges, check out the BA and MA shows, and just go with your instincts. It's a bit of a lottery but if you buy something you really love, then even if you can't sell it on you have a beautiful object in your home. In the £2-3k area, your best bet is to pick someone who's gone to a reputable art school and who maybe has representation by a gallery, although obviously you'll have to pay dealers fees too, unlike if you get them straight from college.

Vertigo, 62 Great Eastern Street, London, EC2.
www.vertigogallery.co.uk

**KENNY SCHACHTER, ALL ROUND ART AGENT PROVOCATEUR,
DEALER, COLLECTOR. OWNER ROVE GALLERY, LONDON.**

I've been involved in every facet of the art world for 15 years, everywhere from making art to writing about it and dealing. My main specialisation is discovering young artists and I've worked with a lot of artists who have become quite famous.

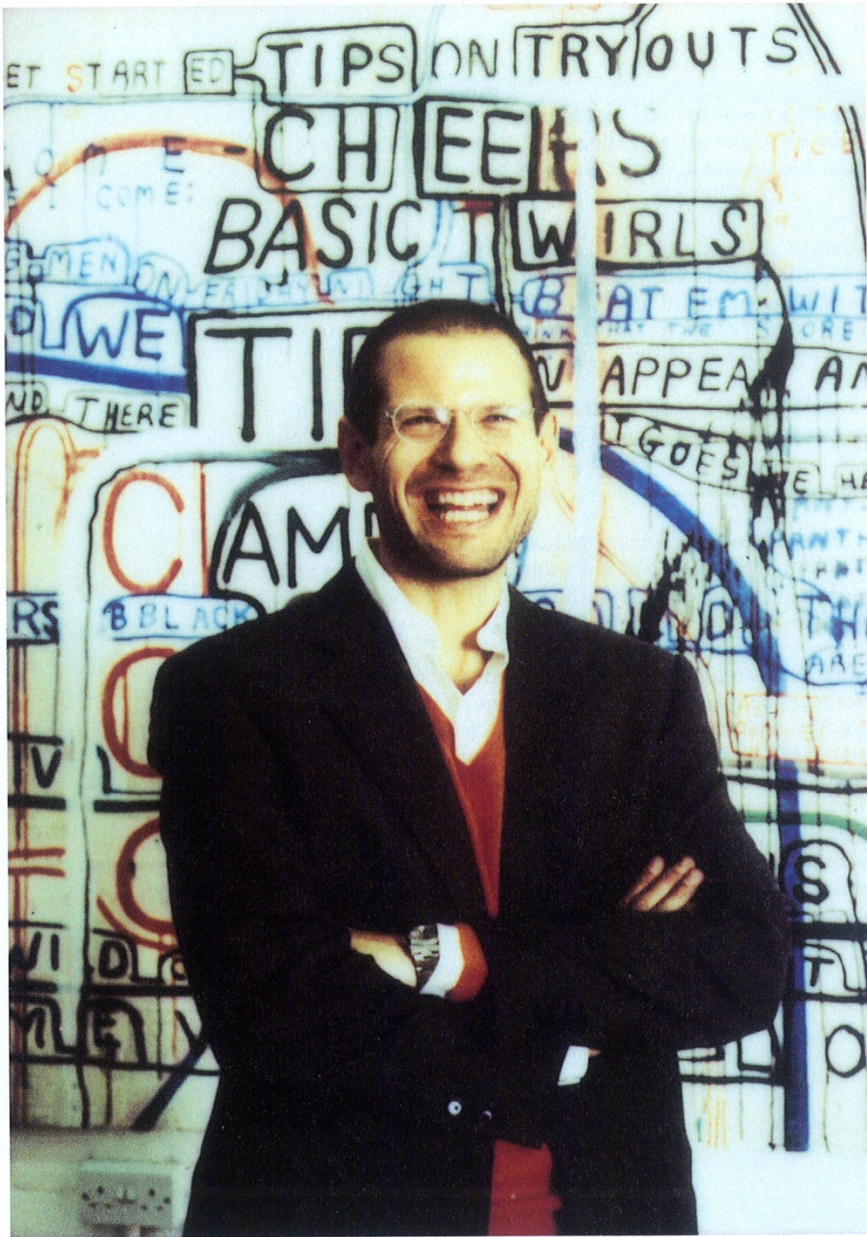
I've been independently curating, dealing out of temporary shows that I've put together and then about two years ago I opened up my first permanent space in New York city and now I've moved my entire operation to London.

I stumbled upon art late, after a legal education, I went to law school but I wanted to do something more entrepreneurial. I always went to museums and was cognitive of contemporary art, but I was never really aware that there was a whole commercial side to it. Then when Warhol died and his estate was auctioned off at Sotheby's I went there expecting to see all his own work, but it was his vast collection of everything from cookie jars and jewellery.

Then I started going to contemporary galleries, when I had this realisation, you know, when I became more aware of the contemporary art market and I took out an unsecured loan and bought some Twombly prints and got started.

It's taking the risk and jumping right in to something and that's really the best way to do it ... You can either go to art school and if you're interested in the commercial side, study art history, or get a low rung job at an art gallery and you work your way up. I just sort of got involved and learned by doing it.

It's easy to apprise yourself with what's happening in the contemporary art world. There's a handful of art magazines: Art Forum, Art News, Art Review, Art Monthly, read those magazine and you see the same names cropping up over and over again.



Every week there's a new art fair and biennale. There's amazing museum shows here, and all over the world. You educate your eye by looking and seeing and at one point I was seeing 30 shows a weekend.

Also at one point I realised that I had educated myself in post war art but I realised there was a gaping hole in the breadth of my knowledge and I knew I would have to fill it, but the thought of going to an art history class was dreadful so I started teaching – I blagged my way in to a teaching job.

I think the art world is burgeoning, there's more people making it, there's more people buying it, there's more people exhibiting it than ever before in history in spite of the bad attitude of many practitioners in the art world.

I mean art galleries are little cottage industries and at the same time there's a kind of hypocrisy of not wanting to associate art with money, even though it's pretty much the only thing that drives the commercial centre.

Art has history as a sound financial investment. I would never encourage someone to view art solely as a financial investment, it's ludicrous. The main difference between stock or bond and art is that whenever there's a pull back in the market the liquidity doesn't slow down it disappears.

I mean that's clear but I find London an incredibly dynamic place with a deep understanding of what's happening in contemporary art. No museum in New York gets five million people to visit to see contemporary art like the Tate Modern. There's no better place to be situated than here, because of its proximity to Europe and because of the sheer dynamic art making that's going on here.



ABOVE – SAM TAYLOR-WOOD, PIETA 2002, owned by Robert Tibbles.
Photograph by Ralf Obergfell. www.photodebut.org

Art galleries can be intimidating and exclusionary environments and many reasons why some people have some trepidation when it comes to looking at art is because of this exclusionary mindset you get in a gallery.

It's like buying a used car when you visit a gallery, it's expected there will be negotiation. The only person who buys a piece of art with no negotiation is a complete neophyte. Art is priced with these discounts, because everyone fully expects to get a discount. That's just the way it is.

The best way of learning is seeing and seeing and seeing and doing the legwork. That's the only way.

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