

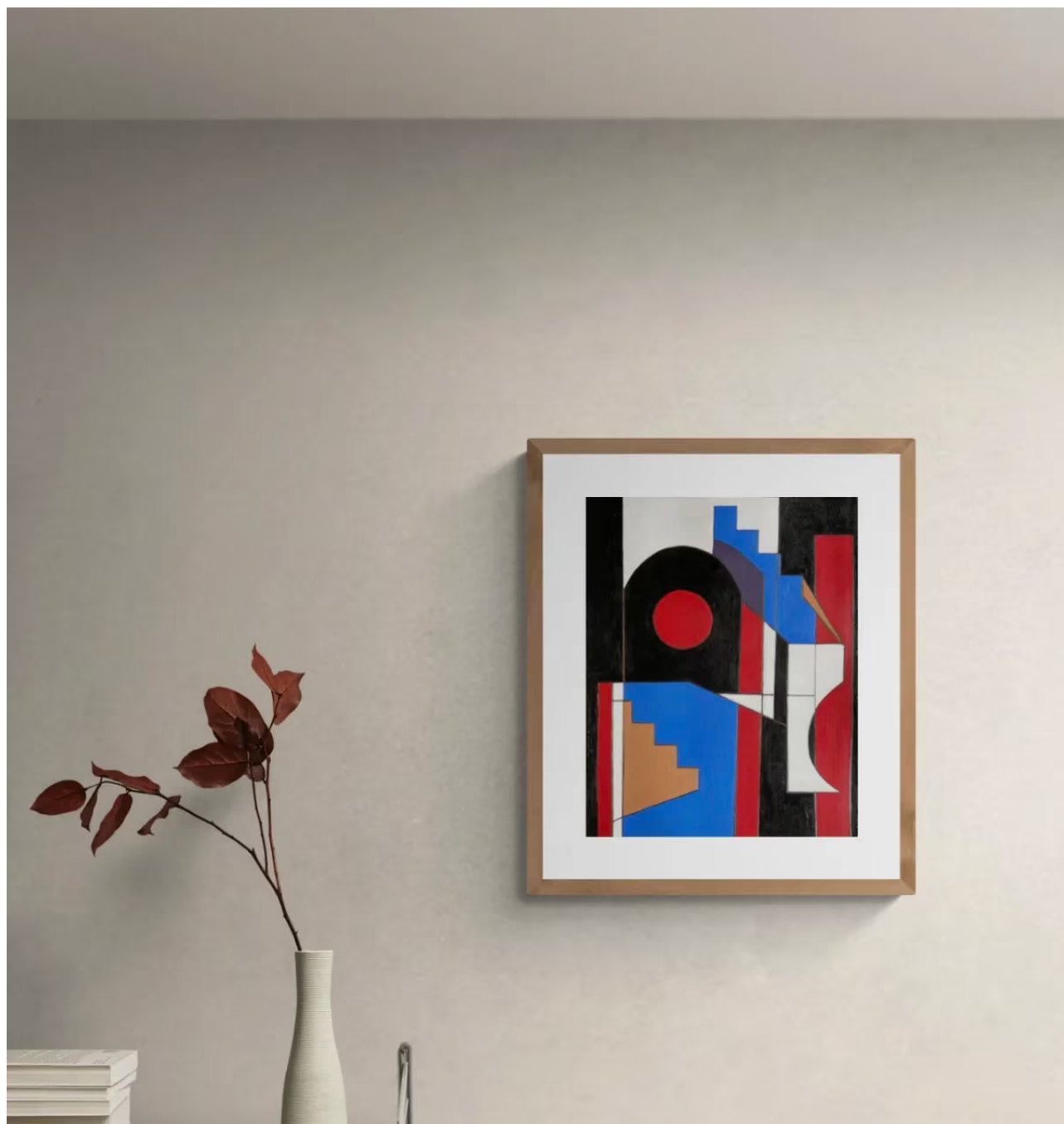
# Want to buy affordable artwork? Here are some tips, plus 10 Canadian online galleries to explore

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**GAYLE MACDONALD >**

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The World Expands For Our Dreams by Moncton, NB-based artist April Pyne.

HANDOUT

*Jump ahead: 10 Canadian online galleries to explore*

Choosing original artwork – whether it's a painting, a photograph, drawing, print or sculpture – shouldn't be stressful. After all, it's one of the best opportunities to showcase your personality and your taste – and what's more fun than that?

### **Affordable art for all: How the online market changed the art-buying game**

Still, at the outset, the prospect of where to go, how much to spend and which mediums to focus on can be daunting. To take some of the pressure off we asked experts for help navigating this sometimes intimidating landscape. They provided many tips on how to make informed choices, but one piece of wisdom superseded everything else: The emotional connection between the art and the viewer is what matters most.

Also, remember that a personal collection doesn't need to increase in value. Of course, that's a bonus if it happens – but buying even just one piece can have a positive effect on you and the artistic community.

So relax, have patience and trust yourself to choose pieces that will make you happy for years to come.

## **Rule No. 1: Know that art is for everyone**

Buying art can and should be enjoyable, says Rishi Midha, co-founder of online art gallery ArtMatch. “Sadly, due to the price tag of art and an exclusive façade looming over the art world, people often approach it with dread, or avoid it all together,” he says. Ignore the aura of exclusivity which is (mostly) false, he adds. Contrary to popular belief, art shopping is not exclusive to the ultrarich or the ultraeducated. To be an art buyer is to be proud of the works you’ve collected, regardless of their financial or cultural value. Knowing that, Midha says, drop your expectations of what art should be and let it become an extension of yourself versus impressing your guests.

## **Rule No. 2: Start slow and learn what you love**

Working out your own taste in art doesn’t necessarily happen overnight, so take your time getting to know your likes and dislikes. That approach will not only expand your perspectives, but also help you cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of art, says Bronwyn Hunter-Shortly, vice-president of Peggy, an online art platform launched earlier this year. “There is a lot of information out there, so first, be patient with yourself. You don’t need to seek out and know all the answers right off the bat. Be in an exploratory phase for whatever time you need or like. Listen, look, read lots. Eventually you will figure out what you gravitate toward and you will identify patterns for yourself. Do I like landscapes? Do I prefer portraits? From there you start to build that emotional connection which is so key.”

## **Rule No. 3: Don’t be afraid to explore new ways of finding art**

Craig D’Arville, co-owner of Ffoto, an online gallery that specializes in fine art photography, says that when he was starting to collect he would visit the usual

places – museums and galleries – but also frequent second-hand shops, vintage stores and antique markets. “One great way to get into collecting photography is through vernacular photography, which are snapshots taken by non-artists capturing everyday life. That type of collecting can be done on any budget and there is some fantastic stuff,” he says. While D’Arville’s online site is affiliated with Toronto’s prestigious Stephen Bulger Gallery, he recognizes that one of the big barriers to collecting is that people feel they don’t have the necessary credentials. “Have confidence that your interpretation of what constitutes art is valid. With that philosophy you can begin to start to build a collection that is meaningful to you,” he says. Another tip: Find out when university arts programs are selling works by graduating artists. “You can find amazing works for unbelievable prices.”

## **Rule No. 4: Do your due diligence on artists**

Nuria Madrenas, founder of Tacit Collective, an online gallery and art consultancy dedicated to female artists, says one of the biggest advantages of the online space is that collectors are no longer confined to galleries within a home city. “It’s opened it up to top galleries all over the world, so you can discover so many more artists.” It also means, however, that due diligence is more critical than ever. Before buying an artist’s work, Madrenas suggests researching where the artist comes from, what their inspirations are and what mediums they work with. If you’re keen on graduating to art-buying as an investment, ask what kind of gallery shows they’ve had. “There is always the potential that a work will appreciate with time ... and careful research allows you to make assumptions about whether that might happen.” She also recommends trying to meet the artists whenever you can – even just virtually. “There are so many fascinating layers to unpack when you are buying from a real person. The more you learn about the artist, the more interesting, and treasured, the piece will be.”

## **Rule No. 5: Do your due diligence on online art sites**

One of the most important features to look for is a section of the website dedicated to background information about the owners/founders of the platform, says Toronto-based fine art consultant Martha Reeve. If there's an "About" page, it will usually provide information about the business, the credentials of the founders/directors and their curating style. Some questions worth asking: How long have they been operating? What is their approach to working with artists? Do they support diversity? "That is the best way to see if your values align," Reeve says. If you reach out by phone or e-mail, a reputable site should get back to you in a timely way.

## **Rule No. 6: Support emerging artists**

Purchasing pieces from young, emerging or lesser-known artists is a great place to start when buying art on a budget. "An artist's work will typically be most affordable when they're first starting out, and you're likely to be one of their first collectors, which means your purchase may well be the crucial support and confidence-boost they need to continue working," says Tammy Yiu Coyne, co-founder of the online art platform Partial, which connects art lovers and collectors with diverse and emerging artists from across Canada. Also, look out for graduates or artists just gaining recognition from renown schools such as the Ontario College of Art & Design University in Toronto and Vancouver's Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

## **Rule No. 7: Prioritize original and local work**

If you're seeking to buy a work with intention – one that you have a profound connection to – original art is the way to go, says ArtMatch's Midha. "If you've done your research and you've talked to the artist, whether by e-mail or on the

phone, then you know the story behind it and it's a story you can then share with other people." In that context, a piece of the artist is now living in your home, which significantly increases the work's meaning and worth to you. "However, original art is not only an investment in yourself," Midha adds. "It is an investment in your important – and sometimes fragile – art community." Regional and affordable artists are often overshadowed by recognized artists; by becoming a patron of your arts community, you inspire local artists to keep working. If owning an original is still pushing your budget, Midhi suggests exploring smaller pieces, works on paper or signed limited-edition prints.

## **Rule No. 8: Don't confuse art with design trends**

Your art collection will outlive whatever decor trends come and go, so it's never a good idea to choose a piece because it goes nicely with a sofa or carpet, says Ashley Mulvihill, founder of online art gallery Ninth Editions. "Your art collection is an expression of you, so it doesn't have to fit an aesthetic. If it makes you think, and it makes you feel, that's the value of art. It's not meant to be decorative – it's a portal into someone else's world. When you have a relationship with a work of art, the value stands up for itself."

## **On our radar: 10 Canadian online art platforms**

Here's a shortlist of online galleries that offer affordable original works and limited-edition prints in Canada.

**Nintheditions.com**: a highly curated selection of contemporary, emerging artists.

**Tacitcollective.com**: dedicated exclusively to female artists.

**Partial**: focused on emerging, Canadian and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people

of colour) artists.

**Eyebuyart.com**: dedicated to up-and-coming artists, primarily in Canada, and also internationally.

**Ffoto.com**: a global platform for curated fine art photography.

**Peggy.com**: a social marketplace of global contemporary art.

**ArtMatch.ca**: a mix of emerging and established local artists.

**Theartshop.ca**: local, emerging artists in all mediums.

**Sweetpeagallery.ca**: supports early career, underrepresented artists (BIPOC and LGBTQ) across Canada.

**Studiosixtysix.ca**: represents emerging and established Canadian artists.

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