

HOW ART ADVISORS WORK WITH ARTISTS

Art advisors work with private collectors and corporations to build collections that are both financially and esthetically valuable, helping to provide opportunities to artists at all stages of their careers.

BY CONOR RISCH

Art advisors, also called art consultants, play a key role in the contemporary art market. They help private collectors and corporations build their art holdings by advising their clients on acquisitions, and they provide expertise in everything from conservation to insurance, to art handling and installation. They include full-time curators of corporate art collections and others who work independently advising multiple clients.

To understand more about the art advisor business, *PDN* recently spoke with three advisors to learn how they work with their clients, and about how they find the artists whose work they recommend.

FROM EMERGING TO BLUE-CHIP

Though they may work with well-established collectors interested in blue-chip work, art advisers often have clients with a range of interests. Liz Parks, a New York-based advisor who works primarily with private collectors, says the financial value of the art that interests them varies. “I have some collectors who might have a smaller budget and want to see what’s new and what’s poised to develop. I have others who collect mid-career artists, and others who are quite established...and have a very strict list of particular artists that they want to follow and look at.” Photographers whose work Parks has purchased on behalf of her clients include Idris Khan, whom she met through a gallery

that used to represent him in New York City, and Jose Dávila, whose work she saw several years ago at the Armory Show.

Katherine Gass of James Company Contemporary Art Projects works with corporate and hotel clients, universities, healthcare companies and other organizations. Consultants are typically hired “to bring value, both financial and esthetic,” Gass says, and “the possibility that a work will increase in value is one ingredient in the whole recipe” of her work. When she can, she likes to bring artists at different career stages into her projects. “My favorite projects are the ones that give me completely free rein,” she says. She often looks at mid-career artists who have seen success and who might

have fallen out of favor for one reason or another. “I find that those artists are creating spectacular work and the value is really wonderful, so I try to fold in a lot of mid-career artists who are not the superstars that you see everywhere all of the time. Although everybody loves a nice superstar. I have nothing against superstars.”

Gass says she attends “a ton” of art fairs and goes to museum exhibitions to look at work. When she finds an emerging artist, she will “look for key qualities that signal they’re in it for the long run,” she says. Those include education (an arts degree is an “easy identifier, but it’s not critical,” she says) and exhibition history. “You look at several bodies of work. It’s sort of a mixture





LEFT: Kinzelman Art Consulting matches corporate and private clients with "investment worthy" pieces, as well as work from emerging artists for clients looking for "work that has a conceptual edge and has value," says KAC vice president Adrienne Johnson.

EDITIONS, COMMISSIONS AND MULTIPLES

Consultants are generally in the business of helping their clients acquire limited edition artwork. Depending on the types of clients they work with, however, consultants may also commission new pieces from artists, or arrange for a client to license and produce multiples of a work.

"It really begins with the client and what their brief is," says Katherine Gass. "If they're [a] corporate or hospitality [client], there's usually a brand involved and a look and feel, and sometimes a deeper philosophy around core values [of the company]. There are a lot of preliminary meetings where we establish what the mission of an art program will be, and then we build it from there."

For one recent hospitality project, Gass negotiated a licensing agreement between artists and her clients, The Beekman, a newly opened hotel in New York City, that gave the hotel an exclusive right to create reprints of certain images. The artists included Jane Hammond, Renato D'Agostin, Luke Stephenson, Nathalia Edenmont and Cathy Cone. In addition to the reprints, the project included editioned photographs and newly commissioned work. "It was the first time the artists had licensed their work. I had the artists paid very well and everybody was happy, so that was fun," Gass says.

"I always consider photography [for projects]," Gass says, "because for me it's a language that everybody understands." Clients who are new to collecting "typically think that original painting equals fine art, and it's usually by the end of the first meeting with them they realize that can be a pretty narrow view," she adds.

APPROACHING ART ADVISORS

Though it's not unheard of for advisors to work directly with artists, the art advisors *PDN* spoke with say they generally buy from galleries, which means they're working with artists who already have representation. But that doesn't mean photographers without gallery representation shouldn't bother reaching out. Developing a relationship with an advisor is akin to developing a relationship with a gallerist or curator, or trying to make contact with a commercial or editorial client. It's hard, and a lot of people are trying to do it.

of gut feeling and judging their output and their reach thus far, and their price point and then taking it from there."

Adrienne Johnson, a vice president and senior manager with Houston-based Kinzelman Art Consulting, says her company works with corporate and private clients who are interested in "museum-quality, investment worthy pieces," as well as with "companies that are interested in the value that art can provide to their environment," but that are less focused on the financial value of the art they acquire. "They're often looking for emerging artists to provide more fiscally accessible work," she says. That does not mean, she is quick to point out, that Kinzelman Art Consulting is interested

"in a canned or decorative or off-the-shelf approach. We're interested in working with clients that seek work that has a conceptual edge and has value." Even if a client is less concerned with the trajectory of an artist's career, "it's something that's very important to us, because we certainly want to foster all artists' careers where we can, and oftentimes being introduced into a corporate collection can help bolster an artist's stature and really add a whole other line to their resume."

Johnson says she and her colleagues attend art fairs and are heavily involved in their local art scene, going to exhibitions and making studio visits. They also review portfolios at Houston FotoFest.

COURTESY KINZELMAN ART CONSULTING

Professionalism, a bit of networking and personalizing your approach can help. The Association of Professional Art Advisors [APAA], a nonprofit organization that sets and promotes standards for the art advisory field, has a membership of more than 100 individuals and organizations. Reading about their members and their work is a good starting point for finding art consultants that might be interested in a photographer's work.

"I'm perfectly happy dealing directly with artists," Johnson says, adding that she and her colleagues at Kinzelman Art Consulting appreciate it when artists reach out to them, "because it oftentimes can expose us to artists that we hadn't seen previously." When asked if it matters to her whether or not an artist has a gallery, she says, "The short answer is that it does not matter. I'm happy to do business with any artist whose work I feel has substance and value and has a potential place with my clients."

A gallery's endorsement "shows me that [artists] are serious about their careers," Johnson says, and that they have someone who is working "to get that artist's work out into the art market." But a gallery's endorsement isn't the only way an artist can demonstrate that they are serious and professional. "From our

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— ADRIENNE JOHNSON, KINZELMAN ART CONSULTING

perspective, the more organized an artist is the better," Johnson says. "Whether you're contacting a curator or an art advisor or a gallery, you really need to have a very well thought-out website, a thorough resume and an artist's statement. The more concrete information you're able to provide to an arts professional, the better. For me, receiving a phone-call from an artist is great. I love speaking with an artist, I'm happy to explain to them how we function, but what I really need to see are the visuals and to understand what that artist is creating and...why they think the work they're making is important."

Parks, who receives unsolicited emails from artists every day, says, "If there's not some kind



ABOVE: "Asalto Greenwich," 2012, a projected video work by Daniel Canogar that was commissioned for a boutique hotel in Greenwich, Connecticut, by Katherine Gass of James Company Contemporary Art Projects. The work features local community members and hotel staff.

of a context it's not usually something that I respond to. If it's a friend of a friend, I will definitely look at the work and schedule a studio visit if need be, but if there's not some context or connection I find that it's more fruitful to work the way that I normally work, through galleries." Context, she says, might include a referral, or a reference to seeing Parks speak at an event, she says. "There are certain ways in, but just to kind of cold call with images, it's probably not the best route to take." Another reason artists reach out to her to invite her to come see exhibitions, she says.

Gass says she receives a lot of unsolicited submissions, but notes that very few of them are personalized. "I get a lot of stuff that is

formatted the same, and I don't even really look at the artwork," she says. "The things that stop me are the things that aren't molded into this standard little MailChimp newsletter," she says. She prefers a personal email that says "right up front" that the artist is sending work unsolicited. "Send a small group of images of your absolute best work, that's the most arresting," she advises.

Though it may be challenging to get their attention, the art advisors *PDN* spoke with are enthusiastic about seeing artists succeed. Parks, for instance, says that while she buys work at auction if there's something specific a client wants, "I like working with galleries more because you're benefitting the artist, which is something you're not doing at auction."

Gass started her career as a registrar for the corporate collection for Chase Manhattan Bank. She recalls sitting in on acquisition meetings with chairman and chief executive David Rockefeller and Manuel Gonzalez, the head of the collection at the time. Rockefeller's "whole thing was supporting artists [in the communities] where you do business," she says. "I was very influenced by that.... I generally work with corporations or hotels that want to embrace that kind of philosophy." *pdn*