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Sean Kelly on "Collect Wisely"

Whenever a gallery chooses to heavily promote an upcoming show with ad placements, there's a good chance that many in the art world will have heard of the artist and be actively interested in seeing the exhibition. So when Sean Kelly's eponymous gallery chose to buy a billboard ad, launch a series of podcasts, and host a series of dinners to promote its new "Collect Wisely" campaign, you can bet that it got people talking.

So we decided to reach out to Sean Kelly himself to hear about the genesis for the initiative, what exactly he hopes to accomplish, and what we can expect in the months to come. Hint- it involves mega-collectors, Rodney Miller and Ron Pizzuti.

What was the original catalyst that spurred the launch of the "Collect Wisely" campaign? Was there a particular event or trend in the market that caused you to feel that this was a necessary addition to the ongoing conversation about the market?

The idea for the Collect Wisely campaign was born out of many concerned conversations with gallerists and collectors worldwide about the changing and challenging landscape for galleries on the one hand and for collectors on the other. Many galleries are concerned about the changing demographics of the art world, the decline in the number of visitors to their physical spaces, and the growth and power of art fairs in shaping the discourse around the future of the art world and its overt commercialization. Increasingly, seasoned collectors were talking to us about their disillusionment with the changing landscape. Where it appeared that conversations increasingly focus on money and commercial value they were turned off, and new collectors were often intimidated and daunted by the emphasis on certain priorities they felt were emerging. We decided to address this perceived confluence of crises with a positive, proactive position in which we focused on the core values of collecting and connoisseurship and why serious collectors, seasoned and new, are interested in, and passionate about art and supporting artists. We want to shift the discourse from investment strategies to art again.

Who exactly is the "Collect Wisely" campaign aimed at? Established collectors? Younger/newer collectors?

As stated above, Collect Wisely is aimed at both seasoned collectors, who increasingly find themselves alienated by the overt commercialization of something they are passionate about and younger collectors, perhaps just starting out, who may be less certain about their motivations for collecting in such an environment and want to set their compass on a true course for the future. The podcasts in particular are a way of saying to both groups, there are likeminded souls out there who are passionate about collecting and connoisseurship. For younger collectors, it's an opportunity to hear inspiring examples of really serious, dedicated collectors who have gone before you and built important collections. We are interested in reaching out to individuals who have the same passion and emotional investment we want to foreground in our conversations, and to those who may be intimidated by the art world, or unsure of where to start or what position to take.

What does the gallery hope to accomplish with the initiative? Are there concrete steps you'd like to see take place in the market or is it more about a renewed sense of awareness about viewing art through a collector's lens vs an investor's?

It is both. We want serious collectors of all types and age categories to feel there is a likeminded community of collectors out there whose core values they can empathize with. Equally we think all of us who care about the larger eco system of the art world need to look at the rise of the new systems and models that have emerged over the last thirty years or so, question them and start to adjust to the new commercial realities of the art world at the outset of the 21st Century. Collectively we need to address

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what they mean and how we can affect them in a positive way moving forward. We want there to be a vital, healthy and expanding collecting community of empowered and informed collectors who are interested in connoisseurship, history and a healthy community.

Many dealers are known to carefully select who they'll sell certain pieces or artists to; ideally looking to bypass the speculators who hope to flip a particular work after a few years, and instead place it in the hands of collectors who will hold onto the piece for a significant amount of time. Is "Collect Wisely" aimed at cultivating more of those types of collectors?

Absolutely, especially collectors who have a sense of their civic responsibilities as stewards of our common contemporary culture and our public institutions. We have to understand that the larger ecosystem of the art world is intimately interconnected, if one area is under threat the larger organism needs to work together to protect the whole. Small, medium and large galleries all need to survive, not just a few multinational corporations. You cannot have a viable international art world, or indeed art fairs, with a few dozen clients. We all need to do what we can to level the playing field and create a healthy environment. After all we are all swimming in the same water.

The gallery is a commercial enterprise (and considered a particularly successful one within the industry) with a strong roster of artists ranging from established market heavyweights to younger, less well-known artists. Nonetheless, if the "Collect Wisely" campaign is about sparking more 'passion' and 'connoisseurship' in the market (as opposed to 'investment'), then will the gallery be making it more of a priority (or effort) to sell to newer collectors at prices that may be more affordable to them?

We already do. You will often hear gallerists remark when they sell to a new client that it is a double benefit, the sale itself and the new relationship. It is vital to encourage new collectors at all levels, particularly ones that share common core values, a passion for collecting and an aspirational orientation towards connoisseurship and stewardship of our contemporary culture; rather than greed, venality and short sighted personal interest. Let me be clear, we are not averse to success and profit, quite the contrary, we are just arguing that one should approach the subject consciously, with a big picture view, that is moral and responsibly sustainable.

Did any of the gallery's artists on roster have any input in the launch of the campaign? Can we expect to see anyone in particular at the salons/dinners that have been announced to take place starting in the Fall? Additionally, are there any future collectors who are participating in the podcasts that the gallery is ready to announce?

None of the artists had a direct input into the concept of Collect Wisely as we wanted the idea to be fully formed and a surprise when we introduced it, however we did ask Callum Innes for his input on the color sequencing for the backgrounds for the campaign. We are looking forward to inviting a diverse range of artists to curate the salon dinners. The response to the podcasts has been overwhelmingly positive, particularly from collectors, and we have a number of forthcoming episodes already recorded. We are pleased to be releasing new podcasts with Rodney Miller and Ron Pizzuti to coincide with Art Basel later this month.

Marc Spiegler Responds

As the collective art world gathers in Basel this week for the year's most important fair, many of the movers and shakers that dominate our industry will be talking about the struggles facing mid-size and smaller galleries, and the potential causes for their financial struggles. Many- if not most- will cite David Zwirner's recent suggestion that larger galleries should "pay a little more" at fairs so that smaller galleries can face less daunting exhibiting costs. And yet, that seems to put the onus on the fairs to react and help lead the charge against the headwinds facing the gallery ecosystem. With there being a myriad of potential causes for the recent chatter, The Canvas felt that this wasn't necessarily a fair causation to

draw. So we decided to email Art Basel's Global Director, Marc Spiegler, for his take on things. Needless to say, his answers didn't disappoint.

Q: Picking up where things left off after the New York Time's Art Leaders Network conference, has there been any continued discussion (either within Art Basel itself or between the fair and some of its largest exhibitors) about David Zwirner's suggestion for a tax/subsidy that large galleries should pay to help support small-mid tier galleries?

A: We welcome David Zwirner's willingness to "pay a little more" in order to subsidize younger and emerging galleries and are acutely aware of the issues facing many galleries – not simply younger galleries – and are always discussing potential solutions to these issues. In actuality, our current structure already means lower booth costs for younger galleries in sectors such as Statements or Positions, but we are always exploring ways to further support the galleries.

Q: In addition to the factual narrative that has developed over the past year (that many small-mid tier galleries are struggling) it seems like lately there's also a narrative developing amongst some who draw a causation between the success of Art Basel (and the other leading fairs) and the troubles of those galleries- the prohibitive costs of booth space for instance. Do you subscribe to that theory? What other factors or causes would you point people to as potential reasons?

A: The situation is far more complex, and we are talking about larger systemic issues that need to be resolved. Simply hanging the square-meter pricing structure at our fairs will not resolve the challenges many galleries are facing today. Art fairs like Art Basel are not the cause of these challenges and a good fair can actually help galleries from these levels of the market to succeed. What is really important is that collectors keep coming into the market and supporting younger and mid-level galleries and their artists. So, the conversation also needs to be about additional system-wide solutions, beyond the art fair, that help diversify and encourage more collecting. At the same time, our focus is on how we can further improve our fairs, so they perform for our galleries in these tough times. We are fully prepared to be part of these discussions – even lead them when necessary – and implement any viable solutions.

Q: Are there any current plans to reevaluate booth costs for younger/smaller galleries or for all participating galleries as a whole?

A: As mentioned earlier, this is something we have been looking into for at least six months. We are exploring whether there is a really different pricing model that can be applied across the fairs - but it is far more complex than many people realize. For the Hong Kong show next year we've decreased the cost of the Discoveries sector by \$2,000 per booth. Despite increasing costs on our side and inflation, there will be no increase for the Insights and Encounters sectors next year. We have also decided to increase the booth costs in our main Galleries sector by only 2%. Traditionally the sector pricing in the Galleries sector in Hong Kong increases by almost 4% year on year – to cover growing costs to host the fair with venue rental being our single largest operational cost.

Q: There's been a kind of generalized debate over whether art fairs should try to hew more to their 'trade show' roots and be more focused on sales and the segment of the audience that attends fairs specifically to buy art, or whether to be more like "malls" (as Jerry Saltz memorably described it) and strive to appeal to as wide an audience as possible in order to open up art to new audiences and hopefully cultivate younger or newer buyers. Which strategy can we expect the Art Basel fairs to employ for future iterations? And why do you prefer to stick with that model?

A: I don't think these approaches are mutually exclusive. Art Basel serves the artworld and we serve the public in very different ways. We attract established collectors and at the same time are focused on bringing new collectors to the fair, because we see ourselves as a platform for gallerists to meet new collectors and form long-lasting relationships. In one year, we work with over 500 galleries across our show and therefore have very diverse clients with very diverse needs and try to respond to all of these.

A Conversation with Brett Gorvy

Brett Gorvy's Instagram is special. Ever since the co-founder and partner at Lévy Gorvy sold a Basquiat that he posted to his account for approximately \$24 million in late 2016, people have been paying attention to what the former Christie's chairman and international head of postwar and contemporary art posts on a seemingly daily basis.

With close to 100,000 followers, Gorvy's personal Instagram following bests many rival galleries' main accounts. With increased talk lately of galleries using digital platforms and tools to reach out to a new generation of buyers, we spoke with Brett about the origins of his Instagram, his experiences with collectors who use the app, and his recommendations and advice to other galleries looking to build their own social media presence. The conversation below was lightly edited and condensed for clarity purposes.

When did you initially start posting to Instagram and what was the catalyst that made you start?

I want to say I started in February of 2015 as part of the run up to the auctions that were coming up. There were three people who were involved in getting me to start- Loïc Gouzer who was on Instagram and who was enjoying it and who was one of the main influences for me, my daughter Tamsin who was 10 years old at the time and who wanted to be on Instagram herself, and Lisa Layfer, who's here with me now at Lévy Gorvy and was with me at Christie's at the time. Lisa said that I'd love it and I'd get this window into the world where I'd be able to see various exhibitions and other kinds of things that I'd appreciate. I had to get one of them, as well as my daughter, to actually set up the account for me as I'm not the type of person who's always up-to-date in terms of the latest technology.

I very quickly fell in love with the fact that you can be very concise in what you're trying to post while at the same time being able to tell the whole story of an artwork. Specifically, what I found at Christie's was that I had this high octane job, which required spending a lot of time waiting around, sitting in client waiting rooms. So whenever I was on planes, for instance, and had these windows of time available, I could look through images and be creative. And it's amazing how quickly a flight to Europe can go when you're on Wi-Fi and on Instagram the whole time.

And I never really had an idea that it would grow and become a large part of my life and turn into a significant medium through which I can connect to people. At that stage it was really just a creative outlet, as Loïc and I were putting together 'Looking Forward to the Past'. He was the main curator of the sale, and we had been working together to consign major pieces, and there was this kind of momentum going into the rooms and just being blown away by the sheer quality of the pieces that we were working on and being able to share those experiences in real time. And what I found with Instagram was that I'd get this instantaneous reaction from people, some of whom liked the art I was posting and others who didn't. But the fact that there were collectors and dealers communicating in the comments section of one of my Instagram posts about their own personal history with a given artwork was fascinating. You could see a community being formed in real time.

What are the mechanics/logistics of a post? How does you decide which pieces to highlight and what the accompanying caption will be?

Quite honestly every post is different. Every day when I wake up in the morning, which can be any time between 3:00am and 6:30am, there's a good chance that I'll post during that window as I'm thinking very spontaneously. I don't have anything particular lined up at that point, but over a long period of time I've accumulated hundreds of images of paintings and works of art that I've seen in different exhibitions. So I'm literally waking up in the morning and posting images of artworks that convey a feeling or emotion that I want to express.

And at the same time Instagram has forced me to go back to some of my early loves which is poetry. Some people think that I have this extraordinary knowledge of poetry which isn't the case at all. However, I do have a love of certain poets, and can hear their voices in a general sense and match their

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words to different paintings. So when I look at works of art, I have a kind of sense of the type of poetry that comes to mind and then I look through the volumes of poems that I keep on my phone. I have a self-imposed 20 minute rule which basically means that if I start writing a post and I haven't finished it in 20 minutes, I drop out and wait to post another time.

Is there a time or instance that you can talk about in a general sense where Instagram led directly to a sale or a new relationship being formed with a collector?

Yes, I think there are essentially two things that sort of happen on the platform that leads to sales. First of all, I get a lot of people who send me direct messages and they get me directly, because when you receive an enormous amount of texts and e-mails throughout the day like I do, you're more likely to respond to the three or four direct messages than the flood of emails. I'm amazed by how many major collectors communicate through direct messaging on Instagram.

The second thing that's happening is that there's a community of people who are responding to the same things throughout the day. So there's this sort of weird connectedness permeating throughout the art world. And during the day I can see who exactly is following me when they reach out, what posts they've liked, and get a general sense that we're in the same orbit. And ultimately this is an industry that's very relationship-oriented so anything that breaks down those barriers that can lead to new relationships, or allows you to be closer to your client, is useful.

There are a lot of international collectors who follow me and I'm always surprised when they come up to come and tell me they like my Instagram or comment on a particular post. That's happened a lot of times, actually. And very quickly you realize that there are a lot of very important collectors and museum curators who are on Instagram and following me as much I'm following them in order to try and keep up with what they're doing which creates that same sense of community.

What type of recommendations or advice would you give to either established or younger galleries when building their own social media presences?

I think the first thing I would say is to try and be relevant. And what I mean by being relevant is not just posting about your own program and artists, but also about what's relevant in the art world at any given moment. So for instance we'll post (both on my personal Instagram and the gallery's account) about an artist's birthday, or about a major exhibition where an artist's work is presented.

I also feel very strongly that you have to imbue your Instagram with your own personality. At the end of the day, I think people follow me just as much for my dog and my daughter and snippets of my personal life, because I think it's the human side that people connect to. So definitely, think about all the things that relate to your gallery but also make it your own and allow your own voice to come through.

I also view hashtags as a very useful little tool for people to get a broader sense of what I'm doing, and to make simple notes about what the painting might be or how I view it in a historical context. It acts as a kind of shop window where people can peek inside and very quickly get an abstract idea of what the work actually is.

Amidst the talk of some of the financial pressures that younger or less established galleries are currently facing, do you feel that Instagram (and social media more broadly) can act as a valuable sales tool to combat those headwinds?

I don't necessarily buy into the idea that you're going to create a direct marketplace around your Instagram. That I just don't see. I mean, for all the times that a collector will reach out via Instagram, within two minutes or so I move the conversation to the telephone or email, or I'm meeting with them in person.

However, Instagram has absolutely led directly to sales because it acts as a promotional tool for any given artwork. For instance, there was the Basquiat from a few years ago. In that case it let someone actually beat the rest of the market by allowing them to transpire time zones, and gave them an access

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point well beyond anyone else who was actually physically seeing the painting in person. It's about speed of information and being able to use that information very quickly to make a decision or at least take the first step.