

Practical Collector's Checklist

26 actions for acquiring, documenting and preserving a work of contemporary art.

This checklist brings together the main questions to consider throughout the acquisition and ownership of an artwork. It is intended as a practical guide: not every check applies in the same way to every work, and some circumstances require the assistance of specialised professionals.

I. Before Acquiring – Making an Informed Decision

- ☐ **Clarify your interest in the artwork.** Identify what motivates the acquisition and how the work might find its place within your collection.
- ☐ **Examine the artwork's artistic characteristics.** Consider the medium, materials, dimensions, composition and any particular display requirements.
- ☐ **Situate the work within the artist's practice.** Where possible, seek information about the series, period of creation and developments in the artist's work.
- ☐ **Distinguish facts from assessments.** Identify what is documented, what constitutes a curatorial interpretation and what remains a hypothesis concerning the market.
- ☐ **Understand the asking price.** Examine relevant points of comparison without assuming that they establish an objective artistic value or guarantee a future resale.
- ☐ **Assess the total cost.** Take into account, as appropriate, taxes, transport, import charges, installation, insurance and conservation expenses.
- ☐ **Identify the parties involved.** Understand who is offering the artwork, in what capacity they are acting, whether they are authorised to sell it and what financial interests or commissions may be involved in the transaction.

2. Before Confirming the Acquisition – Checking and Formalising

- ☐ **Confirm the artwork's identification.** Check that photographs, title, artist, date, medium, dimensions and any edition details are consistent.
- ☐ **Review the available provenance.** Identify documents that help trace the artwork's known history and any remaining uncertainties.
- ☐ **Examine evidence relating to authenticity.** Review certificates, statements or other supporting references where available, taking account of their origin and evidential significance.
- ☐ **Check the artwork's condition.** Request available information and, where circumstances warrant it, a condition report or a specialist assessment.
- ☐ **Clarify the terms of sale.** Confirm the total price, payment arrangements, any specific conditions and applicable rights or remedies.
- ☐ **Agree on delivery arrangements.** Clarify responsibilities for packing, transport and insurance, as well as when ownership and the risk of loss or damage pass to the buyer.
- ☐ **Plan the acquisition documentation.** Establish which documents will be provided – an invoice, receipt or contract, as appropriate – and retain proof of payment and other related records once the transaction is completed.

3. On Arrival – Identifying, Documenting and Installing

- ☐ **Inspect the artwork on arrival.** Confirm that it corresponds to the agreed acquisition and check for possible transport damage, observing any applicable notification deadlines and procedures.
- ☐ **Create or update the artwork's record.** Assign an inventory number and record its identification details, the date and method of acquisition, and its location.
- ☐ **Prepare photographic documentation.** Retain photographs of the artwork and, where relevant, its details, inscriptions and material characteristics.
- ☐ **Organise sources and documents.** Keep acquisition records, artistic references, any certificates, technical reports and conservation information together with the artwork's documentation.
- ☐ **Adapt the installation to the artwork.** Consider its materials, exposure to light, environment, safety and any specific display recommendations.

4. Over Time – Preserving and Allowing the Collection to Evolve

- ☐ **Monitor conservation conditions.** Periodically review the artwork's environment and seek specialist advice when intervention appears necessary.
 - ☐ **Keep the inventory up to date.** Record changes of location, movements, interventions, loans and any transfers of ownership.
 - ☐ **Preserve the archives.** Retain important original documents, organise digital files, identify their sources and maintain regular backups.
 - ☐ **Review insurance requirements.** Check that the cover remains appropriate, particularly when circumstances, locations or display conditions change.
 - ☐ **Establish clear arrangements for any loans.** Clarify in writing the responsibilities, conservation requirements, transport and return arrangements, and any guarantees provided.
 - ☐ **Verify reproduction rights.** Do not assume that owning a physical artwork automatically authorises every use of its image in publications or online.
 - ☐ **Plan for continuity of management and future transfer.** Ensure that authorised individuals can access essential information and, where necessary, obtain appropriate legal or tax advice.
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The Principle to Remember

A considered acquisition does not depend on the certainty of having every piece of information. It depends on the ability to identify what is essential, understand the uncertainties that remain and make decisions appropriate to the nature of each artwork.

This checklist supports that approach without replacing the specialist checks that certain acquisitions may require.