

Entering a gallery these days is a very different experience from a few years ago. Now, you will find a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, consultants who are here to help every step of the way, and even great coffee! And when you've decided on the perfect picture you can even take it home to try before you buy.

# Warm and welcoming

People who work in art galleries consider themselves to be very fortunate. To be surrounded by an ever-changing panacea of striking pictures at work each day has to be one of the most enjoyable jobs in the country.

Richard Ellison has been in the art business for 25 years and is the enthusiastic owner of a gallery in the north of England. He says, "It's an incredibly interesting job. I've been doing this for a long time, and it still fascinates me. In fact, I don't consider this to be a job - it's more of a pleasure."

Selling art is obviously much more satisfying than selling double glazing, and a lot easier too. As a nation we have become increasingly visually aware, and as good art becomes an integral part of our home style, people are much more willing to venture into a gallery and spend time browsing. Ian Syer who is the area manager of a number of galleries in the South East has noticed this trend. "Nowadays galleries are not the stuffy places they used to be, the places where people felt they had to lower their voices when

they walked in. They're still special places but we've worked hard to make sure the gallery has a comfortable atmosphere. It's very relaxed and we serve good coffee. Clients are encouraged to take their time browsing, have a drink and a chat to discuss their needs."

The aloof sales consultant has, it seems, been relegated to a bygone age. Kay Thurley, a gallery owner in Lichfield has witnessed the shift, "Art has definitely come into its own over the last few years, and people like buying it, which makes my job much easier".

Ian agrees the perception of art buying has changed, "Art is a product, and I think this product sells on its own because it's good. We're here to offer information and advice and if people feel unsure about a picture we can take a selection of canvases to their home, either by the same artist or maybe a variety of different styles and artists. This gives our customers a better opportunity to make the right choice."

Whether the customer is searching for something specific or is open to suggestions, it's the galleries job to listen and offer a broad choice. Richard Ellison sums up the dilemma,



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KAY THURLEY,  
LICHFIELD

*"People are buying a good feeling when they buy art. It's not a functional thing they have to have."*

Laura Swanepoel,  
Bristol



← **Hole In My Heart**  
Resin Edition 395  
Height 18"  
£295

“Clients are encouraged to take their time browsing, have a drink and a chat to discuss their needs”

IAN SYER, WINDSOR



↓ **Tree Of Love**

Giclee Edition 495

Image 14" x 11"

£141 £215

“People tend to say ‘I’ll know what I want when I see it.’ Well of course they don’t really know, it all depends on the range of artwork that is put in front of them. They are probably confronted with a lot of things they didn’t even know existed. I consider my job is to listen to the direction they are leaning in, and then give them all the options.”

Kay agrees, “Some people buy on impulse, but usually someone will come in and see something they like and want their partner to see it.

**‘It’s nice to see people collecting art. I’ve noticed that once people start hanging good art on their walls they will throw everything else away.’**

“I’ve found that men and women have very different taste, but it’s usually the women who tend to make all the decisions. They seem to have more of a flair for interior design and they know the colour, shape and size they are looking for.”

Laura Swanepoel, who has been an art consultant in Bristol for three years says, “People are buying a good feeling when they buy art. It’s not a functional thing they have to have. It’s something they can live without, so they are buying it to please themselves, which makes a huge difference to the whole process.

“My job is to give them what they want, and of course people can be influenced by showing them different things.

“Buying art is such a personal thing, but people know they have a cooling off period after they have bought it. If they have made a huge mistake, or their partner doesn’t like it, they can bring it back and we will help them find something else, which really takes the pressure off.”

It would seem that once people have started buying art, it can soon become addictive. Kay says, “I’ve noticed that once people start hanging good art on their walls they will throw everything else away. The art we sell is so desirable and the frame and mount are fantastic quality. It’s a treat to see people falling in love with an artist and coming back for more.”

The new spring collection from Washington Green which has been arriving at galleries across the UK is already becoming a talking point with its heavier

emphasis on the newer contemporary styles than previously. Laura says, “It’s always interesting to have new art in the galleries and to see how well it does. It must be difficult for new artists because there are so many good ones competing - luckily for them everyone likes something different, and that’s what we can offer”.

And the easiest artist to sell? “That’s easy”, comments Laura, “It has to be Govinder because everyone likes him. Recently someone bought a pair of Govinder originals from me and spent £12,000 in one go - that was quite exhilarating!” ■



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RICHARD ELLISON,  
BURNLEY

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[www.washingtongreen.co.uk](http://www.washingtongreen.co.uk)