



# THE ART OF ACQUISITION

Building a meaningful collection should start with being true to one's tastes, writes gallery owner Jeanne Chisholm

Art has played a huge role in my life. My first gallery was the Suydam Gallery, which opened in 1976 at 112 East 85th Street, New York, in a fabulous townhouse. I lived on the top two floors with my gallery space on the ground and first floor. There was a lovely garden for receptions and outdoor art installations. We exhibited many contemporary international artists and showed art films including the Countess of Wemyss and March's (née Amanda Feilding), short cult art film entitled *Heartbeat in the Brain*.

In 1978, my fiancé, Hugh Jeremy Chisholm (a gentleman polo player) and I were invited by William (Bill) T Ylvisaker to open a gallery at Palm Beach Polo and Country Club, which at the time was a magnet for the international jet set – the list of members read like a *Who's Who* of royalty, aristocracy, and the rich and famous, as did its roster for internationally acclaimed high-goal polo players. After my husband's tragic death from cancer in 1982

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at the age of 41, I devoted myself to the continuation of his dream to further the creation of the Museum of Polo and Hall of Fame.

In the mid-Eighties the world's top design houses turned to the Chisholm Gallery to answer their sporting art needs. These included Cartier, who asked me to curate their celebrated exhibit *POLO – USA: A Retrospective History of Polo in America*, which showed first in Palm Beach and later travelled to New York to Cartier's headquarters on Fifth Avenue, and Ralph Lauren, who approached the Chisholm Gallery for artefacts and

paintings to decorate its flagship store, the historic Rhinelander Mansion on New York's Madison Avenue. Both of these projects were monumental in scope and I loved the quest to find the most rare and elusive polo paintings, bronzes, photographs, decorations, books and ephemera. I still do to this day!

My work with museums has included the Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Museum and Hall of Fame, in Aiken, South Carolina (which enlisted Chisholm Gallery to curate an exhibit commemorating 100 years of polo history), the National Museum of Dance and Hall of Fame in Saratoga Springs, New York, and most significantly the National Polo Museum and Hall of Fame. I served as Coordinating Director for the latter, an idea that was fostered by H Jeremy Chisholm in the Seventies. The Chisholm Gallery was further invited to participate in the first-ever sporting art exhibit at the prestigious Colnaghi Gallery in London.



The Chisholm Gallery represents over 200 wonderfully diverse and talented artists in nearly 20 countries and remains vitally involved in promoting and elevating their work in the larger international arenas of the art world. We specialise in polo and sporting art, bronzes, trophies and awards, rare books, and equestrian gifts, with many of our clients being polo patrons and art collectors.

In order to collect art intelligently, you must first master two basic skills. The first is being able to effectively research and evaluate works of art that attract you. The second is being able to collate individual works to form meaning within their grouping; this is the art of collecting.

If you're like most people, you know how to buy art on a piece-by-piece basis, but may not be all that accomplished at building a collection. Interesting art can be found just

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In a superior collection, every piece belongs, nothing is random or arbitrary  
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about anywhere, in an incredible variety of subjects, media and prices – but this variation can be confusing and intimidating. So how do you decide which direction to go in? How can you relate one purchase to the next?

Great collectors are often as well known as the art they collect. Take the Rockefeller collection, the Phillips Collection, the Chrysler collection, to name but a few; these collectors

are famous because they demonstrate just as much talent in selecting and grouping their art as the artists show in creating it. Indeed, each work of art commands superior attention and price not only because of its quality, but the company that it keeps: in any mature collection, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts. What makes a collector truly great is their ability to select and



assemble works in such a way as to expand our understanding of that art. Successful collectors spot trends in world art and request works by certain artists or speciality publishers. In many cases, when I find what my clients want, I locate similar works myself. It is often those who make the initial requests who influence my stock and the direction of my buying.

Regardless of whether professional or recreational, there are techniques for all collectors in order to maximise the quality and value of your art, as well as your personal enjoyment of it. The first step is being true to your tastes. This means acknowledging your preference of art regardless of current trends. All great collectors share this trait – their personality makes their collections stand out. When personal preference is ignored in favour of the status quo, one collection begins to look just like the next. A few people dictate, the masses follow, and collections become boring and repetitive.

Collectors who aren't afraid to express themselves yield exactly the opposite results. Take, for example, the artist who put together a collection of paintings bought exclusively second-hand, often for little more than a few dollars each, and yet his collection toured the country and was later published as a book. Many of us are not only entertained but also educated – he teaches us that art can be found anywhere, not just in major museums and galleries; and he would never have put this collection together if he had chosen to mimic the tastes of others rather than to be true to his own.

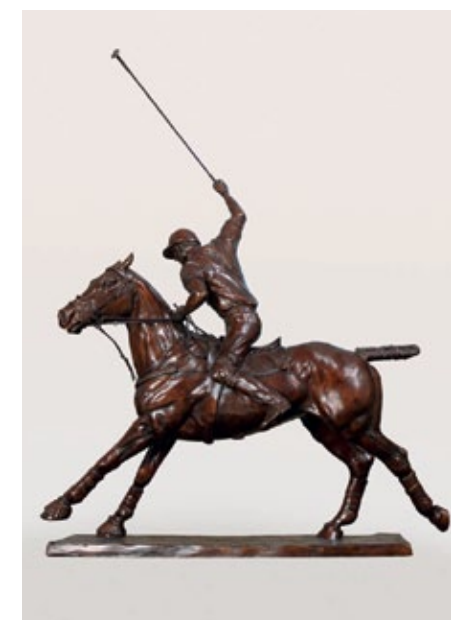
If you're an art collector, don't confine yourself to the same museums and galleries. Explore the less conventional if that's what you're curious about. Don't be afraid to experiment – something new may thrill you at some point. Periodic reappraisals of your tastes are always a good idea: what excites you today could easily bore you tomorrow. A quality collection is always evolving and never static.

**Previous page** 'Turning on a Dime', portrait of Pete Bostwick by his granddaughter Lisa Bostwick  
**Opposite, from top** 'Deauville Saison de Polo' by Jean Jacquot, circa 1938; 'Before the Match' by Lisa Bostwick  
**This page** 'Portrait en pied du Prince Léon Radziwill au polo à Bagatelle, 1910' by Bernard Boutet de Monvel





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If you expect to have  
any influence over  
the long-term future  
of your collection, lay  
the groundwork now  
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**This page, clockwise from top**  
'Harvard/Yale Polo' by Michael  
Antonio Poncé, circa 2000; 'Polo  
XI: Offside forehand' by Gill  
Parker; 'The Ride Off' by Catherine  
Ingleby. **Opposite, from top** Four  
polo prints by American artist Paul  
Brown; 'Polo at Cirencester Park',  
by Henry Koehler, 1973

'HARVARD/YALE POLO' BY MICHAEL ANTONIO PONCÉ, AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY COURTESY OF CHISHOLM GALLERY, LLC; 'BACK SHOT' BY RICARDO MORALES HENDRY; 'POLO XI: OFFSIDE FOREHAND' BY GILL PARKER; 'THE RIDE OFF' BY CATHERINE INGLEBY; AND 'POLO AT CIRENCESTER PARK' BY HENRY KOEHLER, ALL COURTESY OF CHISHOLM GALLERY, LLC

of art, but lack an overall understanding of how pieces work together, or even if they work together.

Another aspect of good collecting is documenting your art. You can see best how documentation affects older art. Suppose, for instance, that two 19th-century equestrian paintings by Rosa Bonheur come up for auction at the same time, and are virtually identical. The first is catalogued rather dully as 'Ploughing Scene'. The second is catalogued as "'The Horse Fair', exhibited at the Salon of 1853 and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City". Assuming you find both paintings equally appealing, which would you rather own? Which will sell for more money? The latter, of course. It's like choosing between a rescue dog and a pedigree.

Whenever art dealers and auction houses take on works with poor documentation, they do their best to come up with exciting titles: they know that good titles sell faster.

Having good documentation tends to increase the value of art. Imagine if you had an original receipt from the sale of a Van Gogh painting that changed hands in the early part of this century. Or perhaps your grandfather bought a Picasso and received an inscribed photo of Picasso handing him the painting. I can assure you that either of these items would be worth well into the thousands of dollars today.

The worst possible outcome for a collection occurs when the owner passes away and leaves no information about the art. Countless collections have been resold for pennies on the dollar, or even thrown in the trash. I remember receiving a call one day from a haulier who said he had some art in a storage space. He mentioned the artist who I immediately recognized as a well-known Palm Beach area painter. It turned out that the haulier had been asked to cart away seven major paintings by the artist which, at that time, were worth between thirty and fifty thousand dollars. The

owners had simply thrown them out. In fact, he had actually been paid to take them away!

The lesson in all this is that collectors, no matter how large or small their collections, should provide a complete list of instructions for those who will inherit their art. It is important to include names, addresses, phone numbers, procedures, values, and all other particulars for selling or donating as well as for dispersal within the family. If you expect to have any influence over the long-term future of your collection, lay the groundwork now. Educate your family about what you own. Ultimately you need to instill a love and respect for what you've accomplished, and make sure that they understand how important it is to you.

*Chisholm Gallery now offers handcrafted sterling silver and lead-free pewter polo and racing trophies, loving cups and derby bowls, wine coolers, fox and hound giftware and stirrup cups. All available with engraving; [chisholmgallery.com](http://chisholmgallery.com)*