



Art and Environment

by Phil Harwood, Ascot Studios

In my previous article I tried to compile some helpful advice to buyers which has compelled me to be even more conscious of the way in which the public engages with contemporary artwork. This month I would like to demonstrate how art can help us to create atmosphere both at home and in the workplace.

It is interesting to observe the various attributes of paintings in the gallery that have attracted attention and how people responded to what they saw in the exhibition. That is why I have decided to review some of the most recent sales of original works, and ascertain some of the reasons why they found an appreciative audience. Also, I hope to illustrate how art helps us to shape our environment and influence our behaviour.

People tend to buy art to boost their self-image, for home-improvement, or to add something inspirational to their lives. New purchases represent new beginnings; new starts in re-assimilating and re-organising our homes into more ideal representations of ourselves and our aspirations. Order and regime bring about a structure to our lives and art in the home does have a strong place in our domestic 'order'.

This Fertile Earth

by Edward Foster.

(Featured in Concept For Living January issue)

This painting is one of the major works from his acclaimed Vibrant Nature series, which has sold to discerning collectors associated with Ascot Studios. His paintings explore the spiritual connection between man and the landscape and man's interdependent relationship with nature. They pose questions about man's responsibility as a custodian of the planet. If this message doesn't encourage and inspire us to become better people and compel us to at least try to leave a better world for our children to inherit, then nothing will!

Paintings such as these can find a place in our home environment but not in a purely decorative way. We, the viewer, are expected to make assessments of



the artistic message and consider this message in relation to our own lives. This piece had huge personal relevance to the buyers, who felt as though they had found something special and uniquely relevant to them. This Fertile Earth will make a profound statement in their new home in north Manchester.

Pendle Farm and Hurst Green

by Rob Miller

Rob is one of the resident artists at our professional art studios and contemporary art gallery in the Ribchester. He is a prolific landscape artist; his paintings of the UK and Europe display a maturity and depth of understanding that set him apart from his peers. A strong awareness of geology and the impact of man's behaviour on the landscape are inherent within his work.

A number of seasoned art collectors associated with Ascot Studios are already paying an avid interest. Hurst Green was bought by an enthusiast in the Midlands, and Pendle Farm went to a collector in London. His work is experimental, textural, and involves a very effective use of colour and mark-making. Many of his originals are found in office environments where they stimulate the working mind and give a feeling of space and freedom.

It is no coincidence that the paintings featured are either inspired by, or are representations of, the Ribble Valley – a beautiful area of Lancashire that the artists know and love. This draws upon their strengths – their familiarity and knowledge of their immediate surroundings – their environment. The artist's role is to evoke emotional responses or re-ignite memories. What the artist offers is an artistic interpretation of the world that is intended to enhance our environment – to inspire our minds and provoke thoughts of beauty and pleasure. As consumers of art we need to adopt a positive outlook, and be open and willing to engage with new ideas and innovative ways of interpreting the world around us.

The 'UBS Art at Work Collection' is one of the foremost examples of artistic environmental enhancements in the workplace. This selection of original work is from emerging artists under the age of 35 and is exhibited at Swiss Bank UBS's London offices. Art advisor, Stephen McCoubrey, said: "Our ambition is that the art we show will inspire creativity and invite people who live with it to think beyond their working day."

The purpose of the collection is to encourage creative thinking and help create a dynamic workspace for the employees at UBS. The mood within the building will have been lifted and its inhabitants, either consciously or not, will have adopted a more positive mindset regarding their daily experience of work. As a consequence, they will have a higher propensity to use their time effectively and channel their energies towards achieving something special for themselves and for the organisation as a whole.

All businesses should take heed; not only does art have a positive effect on productivity but there are financial motivations for businesses to build a corporate art collection. Quality work from young emerging artists can represent a shrewd investment. The market for contemporary art is soaring, and work is being sold as a financial asset as much as its 'value' as art. As author James Heartfield explained: "Artworks are unique, and so a good store of value. The generational shift that pushed the avant-garde into the same high-earning bracket as the Old Masters has made fine art a sound investment."



Blackburn Road, Ribchester

by Angela Wakefield

There has been so much excitement about Angela's Urban Landscape series that there is an acceptance that her artwork is a sound financial investment. She is a young, emerging artist with a growing national reputation. She produces work that resonates with a broad range of people, offering enduring representations of contemporary landscapes.

This warming portrayal of Ribchester village was a popular exhibit, encouraging a huge amount of positive dialogue from visitors. Angela presents a version of the urban environment stripped down to its essence, capturing the behaviour of light and employing an imaginative use of focal-point and perspective. There is a sense of movement and energy in the painting which serves to place the viewer in the picture.

The buyers, a professional couple from Preston, were very positive and engaged with the work whole-heartedly. Perhaps the ultimate compliment for Angela was that they were affected in such a way that the artwork has become a catalyst for their relocation. In other words, they feel compelled to enhance their surroundings, and in the process, create a more appropriate context for their investment.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that we are, in part, a product of our environment. The future we envisage for ourselves is initially determined by our immediate surroundings and what we see of the world. However, as individuals we have the power to exert an influence upon our lives and the lives of others and not simply be a product of our social environment. We can, to an extent, create our own future. Arguably, if we allow ourselves to control and enhance our environment we are more likely to be inspired; if we are inspired then we will grow, be productive and prosper. ■

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