

FAIR AFFORDABLE ART

FORT
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ND by
Justin
Newhall



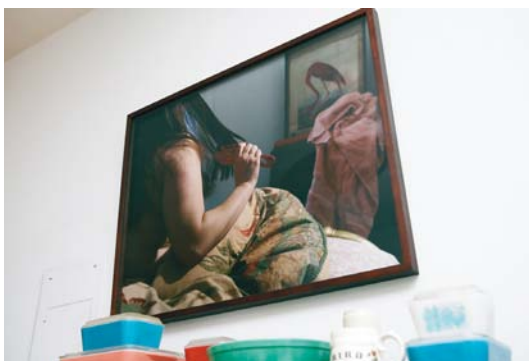
UNTITLED by Jeffrey Teuton



PLANOMETRIC PROJECTION
by Carrie Marill



UNTITLED by Mara Bodis Wollner



LISA, NEW HAVEN by Benjamin Donaldson



SPACE AND ILLUSION
by Carrie Marill



UNIVERSAL, FL
by Benjamin Donaldson



jen bekman

/ interview by Jiae Kim
/ photos by Alexander Wagner

AFTER BEING UNEMPLOYED FOR A LONG STRETCH AFTER THE INTERNET BUBBLE BURST, JEN BEKMAN IMPULSIVELY OPENED HER EPONYMOUS GALLERY ON A QUIET STRIP OF SPRING STREET. THIS WAS IN 2003, WELL BEFORE THE NEW MUSEUM MOVED INTO THE BOWERY AND THE WOOSTER COLLECTIVE'S 11 SPRING STREET PROJECT BROUGHT THROGS OF ART LOVERS TO NOLITA. BEKMAN'S LOCATION WAS FAR AWAY FROM THE HUSTLE OF THE CHELSEA ART CENTER; A SELF-PROFESSED ART NOVICE, BEKMAN HOPED HER LACK OF ART WORLD EXPERIENCE AND DISTANCE FROM THE ART WORLD ESTABLISHMENT WOULD BENEFIT, NOT HINDER, HER ABILITY TO TRANSFORM THE WAY A GALLERY PRESENTS AND SELLS ART.

BEKMAN, A FORMER INTERNET MEDIA EXECUTIVE, EXPERIMENTED WITH DIFFERENT APPROACHES, FOCUSING ON EMERGING ARTISTS TO KEEP PRICES LOW, CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE AND HIRING FRIENDLY GALLERY ATTENDANTS TO PUT NEW BUYERS AT EASE. BUT NOTHING QUITE TOOK AND SUCCESS WAS ELUSIVE.

IT WASN'T UNTIL SHE TAPPED HER ONLINE EXPERIENCE THAT SHE FOUND A FORMULA THAT WORKED BOTH FINANCIALLY AND PHILOSOPHICALLY: SELL ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE SMALL-SCALE ARTWORK IN QUICK BURSTS (PIECES SOMETIMES SELL OUT IN THE SPAN OF MINUTES), COMPLETELY ONLINE. IN 2009 THE PROJECT, CALLED 20X200, RECEIVED \$885,000 IN FUNDING BY TRUE VENTURES. ACCORDING TO *FAST COMPANY*, BEKMAN AND THE 20X200 PROJECT "[HAVE] SOLD MORE THAN 65,000 PRINTS BY BOTH EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED ARTISTS" SINCE ITS LAUNCH IN 2007.

THEME VISITED JEN BEKMAN IN HER ART-CRAMMED EAST VILLAGE STUDIO APARTMENT TO GET A FIRST HAND LOOK INTO THE WORLD OF THE SPIRITED CURATOR'S ART COLLECTION. MS. BEKMAN PROVIDED US WITH SOME INSIGHT INTO HOW NEW ART AFICIONADOS SHOULD BEGIN A COLLECTION.

Jen Bekman with PRAIA PIQUINIA 06/08/04 15H40
by Christian Chaize



THEME: YOU OPENED JEN BEKMAN GALLERY WITH ZERO EXPERIENCE AS A GALLERIST. BALLSY.

Jen Bekman: Yeah, my parents were like, “What the fuck are you doing? Really?”

One year, I asked my Mom for a cordless drill for Christmas — she’s the type of person who asks you in July what you want for Christmas — because I was installing a lot of work at the gallery. Come October she asked, “Do you still want that cordless drill or are you going to give up on that whole gallery thing?” And I was like, There’s no way I am closing this place. I would never give her the satisfaction — so for a while it was just sheer stubbornness that kept it going.

I have enough distance from it now that I kind of wonder, “Did I do that?” But I did. And because I didn’t come from an art background, I made very different decisions. I opened the gallery because I had never collected art before and nobody tried to sell it to me — and that kind of annoyed me. I had a friend who was an artist and I saw how hard she worked. It was just very clear to me that there was a big audience of people who would collect art and a big audience of people who wanted to sell it, and they weren’t connecting with each other.

WHY DON’T YOU THINK THEY WERE CONNECTING? THERE’S PLENTY OF GALLERIES OUT THERE ALREADY.

The art world is so snotty! I thought if I created a welcoming space that was warm, positive and professional, that would address a lot of people’s anxieties about collecting art and get them on the path to collecting. I later realized people come in with so much baggage that you can’t address by just being friendly; so few people find the opportunity to get started. The entry point to buy art is high — you’re lucky if it’s \$500, it’s usually \$1,000 or \$2,000, that’s a lot of money to spend. People don’t want to make commitments to something without knowing what their taste is and also, most people don’t understand how awesome it is to live with art. I always say, I have the fervor of the newly converted because when I opened the gallery I didn’t have any art on my walls, and my life is so much better now because I have it.

20X200 REALLY MADE ART AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE ON A MASS LEVEL.

20x200 was conceived as a way to give people a low risk way to try collecting and, through the experience, get hooked on it and become more engaged with art. It’s online, super easy and affordable enough that you can take a chance on it.

BESIDES MAKING ART MORE AFFORDABLE, HOW ELSE ARE YOU DEMYSTIFYING ART COLLECTING?

I’ll say that I like something because it’s a certain color or admit that I’m attracted to a certain genre of art because of nostalgia. I think a lot



FORTUNE (WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN...) by Kirby Pilcher



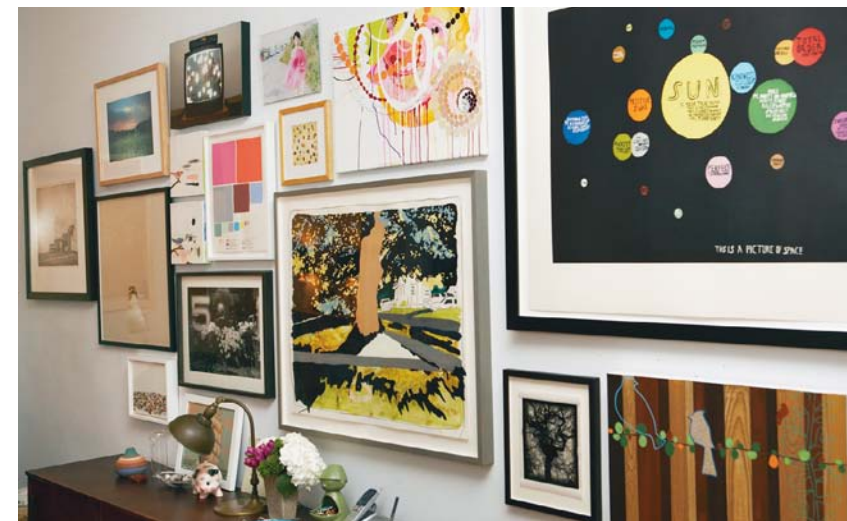
BOOKSHELF 20 by Jane Mount



by Harry Zernike



BEAR #31 by Kent Rogowski



Clockwise from far left: TROJAN HORSE by Beth Dow, PETROLEUM COUNTY, MT by Justin Newhall, THE DRIVE WITH CHRISTINE by Chad Muthard, INFLATABLE by Akiko Sato, NY.07#20 by Jennifer Sanchez, THIS IS A PICTURE OF SPACE by Chris Johanson, POLLY by Christina Muraczewski, STRUCTURE OF THOUGHT 6-A + 6-B by Mike and Doug Starn, THERE WERE MANY INVITATIONS AND I KNOW YOU SENT ME SOME BUT I WAS WAITING FOR THE MIRACLE TO COME by Anne Hall, UNINVITED GUESTS by Ian Dingman, NEW YORK CITY by Jeffrey Ladd (b+w photo below), MY FAVORITE PLACES AS OF NOVEMBER 2007 by Andrew Kuo (painting with squares above), UNTITLED AND UNTITLED by Jeffrey Teuton, WHITE AND GREY CANARY #1 by Luke Stephenson, SPACE AND ILLUSION by Carrie Marill.

of times people feel like this approach is too shallow, and for me, I always feel like whatever provides somebody with a way in, to get started, is a huge step.

THE ART ON 20X200 ARE NOT ORIGINALS BUT ARCHIVAL PRINTS, HENCE THE AFFORDABILITY. DO YOU THINK THESE PRINTS WILL INCREASE IN VALUE OVER TIME?

For every 200 prints that we sell in edition, you know, maybe 100 years from now only five of them will be left. We ship with care instructions, the artist’s statement, and the certificate, and we really encourage buyers to treat it like it’s really special. It’s art. You’re buying something that has been carefully thought through so I think that inherently it should be treated with care and respect.

Every once in awhile I’ll go on Flickr and I’ll do a tab search on 20x200. And I saw a picture of this guy who was super chuffed about his Clifton Burt print — it was a super popular edition, the \$20 prints sold out, like, immediately. He had it hanging next to his medicine cabinet on the towel bar on a skirt hanger with clips and my first reaction was, “Oh my God! Does he know somebody would probably pay a lot of money for it?” But I realized that’s part of what’s cool about what we’re doing — which is, he’s really inspired by that image and because it was \$20 he felt okay putting it in a place where he was going to see it every single day. And that’s valuable too.

YOU DON’T RECOMMEND BUYING ART BASED ON THE FUTURE DOLLAR VALUE OF THE PURCHASE.

It can be a good investment but I think that if you lead with that intention, it’s just the wrong place to approach it from. First of all, nothing is guaranteed. Buy it because you want to live with it but, you know, treat it like an investment. Take care of it, frame it, and keep all the provenance info.

BESIDES 20X200, WHAT ARE SOME AVENUES FOR FINDING GOOD ART?

The internet is a great resource, but there are almost too many options so you have to have good filters. If you’re really into design,



BEAR #21 by Kent Rogowski



AIRPLANES by Tod Seelie

KAREN SPECTOR by Coke Wisdom O’Neal



Jen’s vintage Chambers stove, acquired at a flea market



BEAR #42 by Kent Rogowski



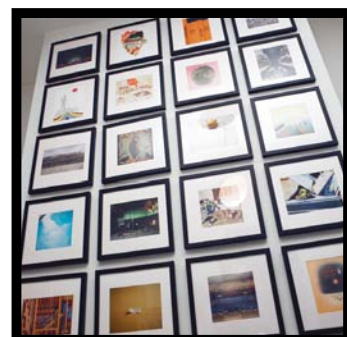
BIG PAIN by Coke Wisdom O’Neal



LEGGY by Ian Dingman



THE COLLECTORS



Grid of 20x200 Prints

THE COLLECTORS





Lower left to right: HOLIDAY by Tod Seelie, AIRPLANES by Tod Seelie, LAUGARÁS, ICELAND (horse) by Bob O'Connor



VELODROME by James Deavin

swissmiss.com is always posting cool prints that she finds out about. Paulson Press, where I got my Chris Johanson and Tauba Auberbach piece, is a great print source, as is Crown Point Press, where I got my Ed Ruscha print. I also really encourage people to go to auctions because it's a great opportunity to get stuff that's been donated, that's often less than you can get it for elsewhere.

SO LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR FIRST ART PURCHASE.

I literally had nothing on my walls when I opened the gallery in 2003. And then I collected a bunch of stuff from artists that I worked with through the gallery. But Andrew Kuo's *My Favorite Places as of November* is the first time I walked into a show and bought it — I think I bought it in 2007. I walked into 33 Bond on the night of his opening and I saw that on the wall and I said, "I'm going to buy it." It was a great feeling because I felt really sure about it. It had everything I was interested in because it had a design element to it, because it was colorful, because it had text on it, because it had, like, almost like a techie angle to it — those are all things that I knew would have enduring interest for me.

WHY DID YOU WAIT TILL 2007 TO START COLLECTING?

Well, I didn't have any money! I was so tragically broke. I mean, there was a time when I was six months behind on rent at the gallery and had to sublet my apartment to pay it.

WHEN DID YOU GET TO A POINT WHERE THE GALLERY BECAME A FINANCIALLY VIABLE BUSINESS?

A year ago.

WAS IT WITH 20X200?

Yes. With 20x200, I felt like I had a set of businesses that complemented each other.



COMBATANT BALLS by Tim Davis



UNTITLED (MAX) by Dorthe Alstrup



STRUCTURE OF THOUGHT 6-A + 6-B by Mike and Doug Starn



BIRDS OF A FEATHER by Echo Eggebrecht



AHERN RENTALS, WESTMINSTER, CALIFORNIA, 2006 by Brad Moore

WITH LAUNCHING 20X200 — ACTUALLY, YOU'VE COME FULL CIRCLE BECAUSE IT REALLY DOES LEVERAGE YOUR BACKGROUND IN INTERNET, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL SPACES.

That's why I love it so much. I started working on internet stuff very early on and did that for almost 10 years, working at Disney and Netscape before becoming the chief creative officer at this startup funded in part by AOL. I thought "We'll do one more round of financing and then we'll get acquired and then I'll retire." Then the bubble burst in 2000 and I was unemployed for 18 months. I ran up a lot of credit card debt. But it was good in the sense that it totally redirected me.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE THERE'S KIND OF AN OVERARCHING VISION FOR YOUR PERSONAL ART COLLECTION?

No. I think that you see certain things over and over again — I'm really drawn to bright colors, I love the color green and so if something has green in it, any green, I'm sold.

I like text — there's a lot of stuff has text in it, like the Ed Ruscha piece. Obviously there are a lot of birds too. I have a bird problem.

I CAN SEE THAT! AND WHAT ARE SOME MISTAKES THAT YOUNG COLLECTORS MAKE?

I think the biggest mistake is not buying stuff that you love, and buying stuff that you think you should like, or buying based on whether it's collectible or whether you're going to make money off of it. A friend told me that he was on vacation with his wife and he saw this painting that he really, really loved, but it was \$900 and he couldn't bring himself to buy the painting because he just couldn't figure out if it was worth it. Then he went back two years later and the same artist's work was \$4,000. I said to him, "You know, in the two years between you probably would've gotten \$900 worth of pleasure out of it."

You have to value experience and you have to be able to say, what are the things around me that I've spent this amount of money on, and is it going to be worth it? People buy expensive things all the time. They buy shoes, handbags, cars, computers, very expensive TVs, so we all have considered big purchases. Set a budget for yourself and say I'm going to buy three significant pieces this year and I'm not going to spend more than \$1,000 on each one of them but I'm going to do it. ☺

