

“DEVOTED TO CONTEMPORARY ART” - art collector Bruce Lawson interviewed by Elaine Fleck

Bruce Lawson,
Executive Director, The Counselling Foundation of Canada
Art Collector

EF How did you get started collecting contemporary fine art?

BL I had visited galleries from time to time, but about eight years ago I was asked to sit on the Art with Heart planning committee. Art with Heart is an auction of Canadian contemporary art benefiting Casey House, and the collection is curated. I was asked to be the co-chair in 2005, and then served again as co-chair in 2006 and 2009, and participated in the curatorial committee from 2006 to 2010. When I became co-chair of the event, I thought I should actually know something about contemporary art and I was excited to pursue it, because I already had an interest in the subject. During my undergrad years in Montreal, I had taken some art history classes at McGill but I really hadn't focused any further attention on the subject. Little did I know that once I got into it, the flood gates would open and I would start buying regularly, and that part of my budget would be devoted to collecting. Not only did I start visiting galleries regularly, but as I travelled across the country I would make a point of visiting galleries to see what they were showing. And, when I travelled abroad, I would find interesting museums and contemporary art galleries and see what they were showing. I think we have great product and a vast selection of interesting work that rivals most other countries. I also think the Canadian market is relatively well-priced or under-priced in comparison to many other markets, which is good news for those of us buying work here.

EF Thank you, I totally agree.

BL Over time through Art with Heart I've bought a number of pieces, I've made a point of visiting many of the galleries that support Art with Heart to thank them in person, in the process, I often find I see something I like, and so I end up buying – often spontaneously. It's hugely important to support galleries! I often go to other charity auctions, including SNAP, OCAD, Mercer Union,

the Georgian Bay Land Trust and Gems of Hope, to name a few.

EF Great that's wonderful! Is there any advice you can give to aspiring collectors of contemporary fine art?

BL Buy what you love. The pieces I buy generate some sort of emotional resonance for me. I want something that creates a reaction, and some pieces just speak to me immediately; sometimes it's a very visceral reaction, so I am a big believer in that you have to buy what you love and what you want to live with.

EF That's exactly right...But looking at it from a businessman's perspective, do you look at purchasing art as an investment?

BL Personally, I don't. I recognize that there is investment potential, and if I choose well over time, that's a bonus, but that is not what motivates me.

EF Tell me of the satisfaction that you get from collecting.

BL I get great satisfaction by going to galleries and talking to gallery owners and curators and gallery staff and that is part of collecting. I know it is hugely intimidating for some people to, number one, walk into a gallery and, number two, talk –they think, “what do I know about art”. I think the easiest thing to do is just to start talking with somebody in the gallery and ask them questions: who is the artist? what was their process in making the art? why do you think their work is important?

EF Thank you.



Bruce Lawson at the Elaine Fleck Gallery 2011