



Photograph by Gary Ray Rush

FCFA EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH DR. SARA DIAMOND

PRESIDENT AND VICE CHANCELLOR OF OCAD UNIVERSITY

Maggie Broda, President of OCAD Alumni,

Your knowledge and leadership position in Canadian art and culture today is well recognized, my goal is to shed some light on the least talked about of the many hats you wear and that is your reputation as serious art collector. You are well known for opening your home and hosting casual dinners and gatherings for students and other supporters of OCADU. So it should be no surprise that upon entering your home in Toronto they are swept away by the fantastic display of art. Sara how long have you been collecting and what motivated you to begin collecting?

Dr. Sarah Diamond,

Maggie, I started to collect when I was an artist, as many artists do. I would trade my own work for that of colleagues and friends. Some of the works I am most fond of are from that era – the 1980s and early 1990s. I have some great pieces by the Canadian-Cuban artist Jan Wade from that period. When I was at The Banff Centre as the Artistic Director of Media and Visual Art, the galleries and collection fell under my leadership. We were a collecting institution so staff did not buy art work as we did not want to impact the market. However, there were artists in the residency program who would gift art works to me. This made for a fantastically eclectic and international beginning collection. I began to collect in earnest when I moved to Toronto in 2005, purchasing works from charitable auctions and from private galleries in Toronto and beyond.



M.B,

There is a wonderful sense of chronologically biography emanating from your walls. Tell me about that.

S.D,

Almost all of the works that I own are relatively contemporary, starting in the 1980s and moving all the way up to pieces that artists produced this year, with one modernist work and an Inuit sculpture that my father gave to me, both from earlier times. Ironically I have digital prints of my CodeZebraOS software works from the late 1990s that can no longer be replicated, as the software no longer exists. I hope that the collection gives pleasure to, and provokes viewers who come to my home. It is a complex collection, with works that are not always easy to view or understand, for example by Fiona Smith, next to pieces of sheer beauty, like Laura Millard's ice pieces. There are no dull visual moments in our house – I can contemplate a room, or a wall or a work and think about the artist's intention and experience the work itself. I never get tired of the environment around me. My partner Kellie loves to DJ and we have very eclectic taste in music, as in art, so our home often has an amazing visual and sonic resonance. And then there's food...

M.B,

I've often heard "Go with your gut when you buy art." Do you agree? Or is having a plan necessary to building a solid collection?

S.D,

I think the first principle is to buy work that impacts you, and that you respond to. It is important to develop your art vocabulary so that as a collector you are unafraid. In the room I am in currently there is a fantastic piece by Spring Hurlbot, another by Bonnie Devine. Both reflect on death on some level, but in transformative ways. Art is also a commodity and if you choose to collect because you wish to build a valuable portfolio you should get advice from a professional art consultant. I still think it's critical to buy work that moves you because you need to live with the artwork. I do not buy for market value, although pieces appreciate at times and others likely move in the other direction! Also, as we grow and age, different kinds of works may appeal to us. So, in principle, developing a strategy to rotate your collection, or even sell or barter parts of it is wise.

M.B,

You are immersed in the highest level of creativity at OCAD University. How strong is the temptation to acquire a new piece and do you ever wonder if you might run out of space?

S.D,

"Might run out of space"? Oh no, we have run out of space. We try to rotate the collection every two years. And yes, I continue to buy. The art

scene in Toronto and at OCAD University is so exciting and there are strong galleries and art fairs. The house is like a 19th century Parisian salon, with artwork everywhere.

M.B,

Some collectors seek specific artists or images such as: Women Painters or Canadian landscapes. Has a theme emerged from your collection of art?

S.D,

I have some interests that are very long-standing and hence there are series of pieces that respond to these. For example, I have a keen engagement with ideas and practices regarding portraiture, "the writing of the self", and "the representation of the other", including the tension between documentary, documentation and representational practices, whether John Scott, Sandy Nicholson, Ed Pien, Brendon Fernandez, Attila Richard Lukacs, Janet Werner or Lori Blondeau. I am also interested in the politics of landscape, for example Royal Art Lodge, Alex MacLeod, Rafael Ochoa, Kim Dorland, Alan McKay, Public Projects and Jesse Boles. I own some fantastic works of contemporary abstraction, for example Anda Kubis, Dan Solomen, Vlad Spicanovic, John Eisler, and Monique Mouton, and conceptual pieces (Ricardo Rendon, Simon Glass, Callum Schuster for e.g.). I collect indigenous visual artists such as Shuvina Ashoona, Mike MacDonald and Julie Nagan; a reasonable sample of artists from Latin America, and many Canadians. I certainly collect OCAD University faculty, alumni and students works as the examples suggest. How could I resist – our school is so full of talent. My collection includes sculpture, photo-based work, prints, media art and painting – a medium I love.

M.B,

What is the best piece of advice you could give a nascent collector?

S.D,

My advice is to start slowly and start with low-level investments. Come to our GradEx 100th Anniversary show at 100 McCaul at other locations on the street, Wednesday, April 29th 2015 to Sunday May 3rd, 2015. Go to exhibitions at contemporary galleries. Go to charitable auctions such as our Project 31, which features our faculty and alumni and supports studio based learning at OCAD University, and Art with Heart or the Canadian Art Hop. Take a continuing studies course with OCAD University or elsewhere that helps to build your vocabulary. All this aside, start with what you love.

M.B,

My very sincere thanks once again for your time Sara; your advice is both inspirational and practical for anyone who has ever had the desire to begin a collection. It's time to stop hesitating and start buying art!