

BRINGING HOME

THE NEW BACONS

Somewhere along the line you have to take a view on art. Like that early customer of Van Gogh's: 'Can't tell you what it's of, but I love it for the colours, they go so well with the curtains.' All that matters is what appeals to you.

Although this type of decision is never easy to make, the number of places to see new art and the range of styles and mediums on offer today, have never been better. Galleries are appearing wherever dealers can find cheap rents, answering a growing demand among young buyers.

Fashion is a crucial factor behind the new energy and interest in contemporary art. It will always be the ingredient for transforming that unknown artist, working out of a disused Glaswegian container warehouse, into an asset to be fought over by London dealers. But it is a new and very important fashion which is bringing young buyers into the galleries. It means that new works are finding homes, tastes are being formed and broken and artists are getting the recognition they deserve and the cash they need.

Michael Blodget is a young artist who finds the role of the dealer as important to him as that of the buyer: 'The dealer must know how to breed artists like racehorses in a stable. I don't want to be hyped up and

then dumped.' Having his work bought by young people reassures him that there is still 'growth and flow in the work'.

For another artist, Frank Greber, it can be a disappointment to meet the person who has bought his work. 'A finished painting stands in its own right and I'm glad to get shot of it.' He does, however, believe that prices should be kept down so that the young can buy.

Rebecca Hossack, a dealer with her own gallery in London agrees: 'I like selling young art to young people and sometimes I have to really fight with my artists to make them accept keeping their work at young prices. But they must do it.' As for seeing first-time buyers in their galleries, the dealers are delighted. 'There's only one thing more satisfying than selling someone their first picture,' says gallery owner Louise Hallet, 'and that's when they come back and buy another.'

Buying art for the first time is not the awesome experience it appears. It has become fashionable and exciting, and whether you've got tens or hundreds to spend, it's perfectly possible to find a wide variety of work in all media.

And then there's the investment to be considered. Will the unknown artist who begged you to buy become a success and

their work a modest gold mine? Louise Hallet says it's a good idea to buy through an established gallery, but there can be no guarantees when the artist is unknown. 'If you buy a Howard Hodgkin drawing for £10,000, you could sell it tomorrow; if you spend £1,000 on a complete unknown, you can't tell. It's the difference between a sensible investment and a risk.'

Galleries then, remain the best place to start. Taste is subjective but quality is not and an established gallery owner's experienced eye should be able to point you towards what will last.

Contemporary art fairs are well worth a look. There are five main ones: Bath and Chicago in May, Basel in June, FIAC in Paris in October and in Los Angeles in December. Most leading galleries are to be found, showing their less expensive work so they are ideal places to compare what's happening in the art world under one roof.

The Contemporary Art Society holds an annual four-day market at Smith's Galleries in Covent Garden (November 9-12).

They scour the country for the pick of the young artists and prices range from £70 to £700 (details on 01-821 5323).

The Glasgow Print Studio has regular shows with an interesting mixture of young Scottish work, not just confined ►►

Ask people what clothes they like to wear and most can tell you. Ask them what art they buy and few have a coherent policy. Why is this consumer durable not getting a look in?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANKLYN RODGERS

Food and Drink

Music

Arts

Law and Order

Review

Score Points

London dealer Rebecca Hossack (below) prefers selling to young buyers. It's persuading artists to keep their prices within reach which is the hard part

