

# How to Collect Art

From the Parnell ridges to a garage in Glen Innes, explore the machinations of the Auckland art world

*By Ginny Fisher*

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Art collecting for some is a serious pastime, or a ludicrous one, depending on the outlay. Last year, a Qatari collector forked out \$300 million for Paul Gauguin's, *Will You Marry Me*, making it one of the most expensive paintings ever sold. As for the reasons we collect, much has been written on the subject — perhaps it will make you appear wealthy; you can love and look at it all day long and it won't answer back. More cryptically, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard suggested collecting was an erotic act driven by a regressive desire for possession. However you don't have to be a collector, or an obsessive to enjoy this week's Auckland Art Fair, which will attract all moving parts of the art world — artists, gallerists, collectors, educators and critics. We spoke to a few to get their views on New Zealand's contemporary art scene.



*Amanda Gruenwald. Picture / Guy Coombes.*

## THE YOUNG ARTIST IN FULL COLOUR

On a sodden Auckland day, in a generic state house garage in Glen Innes, there are some colourful things going on. In Amanda Gruenwald's large fluid paintings, pools and swirls of translucent color ebb and flow over the canvas edges. They are exercises in "handling paint" and dalliances in incongruous colour combinations. Both spontaneous and methodical; chaotic and meditative. For some though, the paintings could be viewed as large globules of pigment on canvas, contrasted with the odd vigorous brush stroke.

Some might say, "oh I could do that" — a common response to contemporary art but as Degas said "painting is easy when you don't know how, but very difficult when you do."

Gruenwald concurs. "Often paintings that are really good look easy. It's taken me a long time to get to this point. It's the result of many failures, a honing down of a particular thing."

That thing for her is colour and form. Driven by a fine balance of intuition and planning, she starts by stretching the canvas, then pours the paint from above, letting it flow and create shapes. Her works in acrylic and oil paint explore the interaction of colour and surface: some areas are translucent and beaded, others scruffy with gestural brush strokes, some areas look restful, others more exuberant. "One mark influences the next and then when you get to a point where you like it, it becomes scary to put the down the next part."

The finishing phase is the hardest, she laments. Some will be here for weeks. "I'll come down and just sit here and look with a cup of tea," says the 30-year-old, "until I know what to do next."

Trish Clark is Gruenwald's gallery representative, and acts as another set of eyes. "She'll come in and say, 'that one is finished', 'that one needs more'. I value her opinion, but sometimes I'll disagree," she laughs. "Trish is great, she knows I'm a sensitive soul."

Gruenwald is softly spoken and thoughtful. Happy with her place in the world, even though the work can be hard graft at times. "It's certainly not glamorous," she gestures pointing at the chaotic space. "It's physical and messy."

Clark is amazed that Gruenwald can produce anything in her dark garage. "Against all the odds, she manages to come up with great results. She works slowly though, often I might be given a painting that's still wet, but I'll take what I can get!" That's because all her paintings have sold out.

Gruenwald, a 2012 Elam School of Art graduate, was awarded the Gordon Harris Painting Prize and the Kate Edgar Charitable Trust Grant in her final year of study, which set her on a trajectory for promise and laid the ground for a committed post-graduate period of painting. Her first successful solo show in 2013 at Sanderson Gallery titled *Accumulations*, displayed a tighter painting style in a more sombre colour palette, while her new paintings, some of which can be viewed at this week's art fair, are loose and bright.

The pressure is always present for a young emerging artist and as a painter, even more so. Though many young artists have devolved into technology to assist in their art making, Gruenwald has rejected it. "I'm not even on Instagram".

"Painting is difficult, you have to claim something as your own. You need to understand your natural inclination and feel confident with that."

Gruenwald has struggled with the idea that not all painting has to be conceptual or intellectual, some paintings are just what they are. Also challenging are the realities of living as an early career artist. Finances are tight, "but you go into it knowing that".

She supplements her income with floristry three days a week, which is followed by four days of uninterrupted art-making. "I never knew before Elam I could have a working life as an artist, even though that's what I've wanted to be since I remember."

Painting has been in her life since she was 12, when she would often draw portraits of her family. She was encouraged by her mother, who was an early childhood art teacher. Her father, a salesman, ran a supplementary flower growing business on the side. Flowers remain in her life now, "they're a subconscious inspiration of texture and colour".

Other inspirations include the lush colour palettes of early 19th century New Zealand landscape painter Rhona Hazzard, and Russian colourist Jules Olitski, a leader of the Colour Field School in the 60s and 70s. His emphasis was on materials, surface, and colour's emotional strength; his paintings, like Gruenwald's, reject any suggestion of imagery or narrative, taking abstraction to its outer limits. "Colour must be felt throughout," said Olitski, and in Gruenwald's paintings, it is overflowing.