
COLLECTING

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IMMERSION

Greville Worthington believes in
direct immersion in all aspects of the
world of contemporary aesthetics.

By Kate Morris



Greville Worthington believes that collecting contemporary art requires a lifetime engagement in a particular world and is not just about acquiring pieces for investment or decoration. 'Of course, it's partly about an aesthetic – what's in your living room,' he explains, 'but it's more about a direct immersion in the world of contemporary living: art, poetry, philosophy and design.' No single thing draws him to a particular piece of art: 'It's different with each work. Sometimes working with artists, museum directors and curators, or reading books and having conversations, can be as good as owning a work.'

He began collecting more than 30 years ago, amassing about 200 sculptures, photographs, prints, text work and paintings. His collection includes conceptual work by Laurence Weiner, Land Art by Hamish Fulton and Richard Long, text work by Jenny Holzer, Maurizio Nannucci and Simon Cutts, and contemporary photography by Andreas Gursky, Catherine Yass, Dan Holdsworth, Thomas Demand and Sam Taylor-Wood.

He reads and works in his library (with a budgie flying around) in the converted Catholic church in Yorkshire he lives in with his family. As well as buying art, he has built up a substantial archive of books, catalogues and correspondence with artists, plus an off-shoot collection

of private-view invitations and memorabilia. He considers his archive just as important as his art collection.

A guest at one of his frequent shows in and around the house can also view an early Damien Hirst print in a bedroom, Gavin Turk's iconic blue heritage plaque beside the drinks cabinet, and a Keith Coventry sculpture of a crack-cocaine pipe on the kitchen table, among many other contemporary pieces.

Greville started buying art while studying at Edinburgh University in the 1980s. 'There were plenty of opportunities to encounter cutting-edge contemporary art and artists,' he says, 'as the art scene in Edinburgh was exciting and accessible.' He met curator and artist Richard Demarco and through him, poet and artist Ian Hamilton Finlay. Visiting Finlay's sculpture garden, Little Sparta, outside Edinburgh was a pivotal moment: 'Little Sparta was an art work in its entirety, and Finlay never left it, so it had this magnetic, romantic compulsion as a destination. It changed my dealings with the world at large and I bought one of his text pieces, *Evening Will Come, They Will Sew The Blue Sail*, for £15.' Later he bought an important I.H.F. bronze, *La Revolution est Un Bloc* (now on loan to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art).



Photography by Luke White







After graduating, he worked in the city for five years and continued to buy work by British artists (including Alan Charlton and Langlands & Bell) and American artists (Jenny Holzer and Laurence Weiner). University friend Jay Jopling, the influential dealer, introduced him to the early work of Damien Hirst and others who came to be known as the Young British Artists.

Worthington is on the boards of trustees for the Henry Moore Foundation and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead and recently became chairman of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. He has curated four shows at the Bowes Museum in County Durham: 'Damien Hirst. Printmaker'; 'Tim Walker, Dreamscapes, an exhibition of photographs'; 'Keith Coventry, Black Bronze, White Slaves'; and, most recently, 'Gavin Turk, Seven Billion Two Hundred and One Million Nine Hundred and Sixty Four Thousand and Two Hundred and Thirty Eight' – Turk's signature neon works made between 1995 and 2014.

'I usually become acquainted with an artist before I consider buying their art,' Worthington says. 'For example, I met Keith, engaged in many discussions, put on a show and produced a book. This makes for the basis of a good friendship and may or may not lead to the development of a collection.' He doesn't, however, always buy the work of

artists he admires or works with: 'I may really like what some artists are doing, but not want to buy the work. It may be site-specific, difficult to live with, fragile, ugly or worrying. If that's the case, I am happy to read about the work and engage that way.'

Worthington has restless energy and curiosity and he continues to add to his collection when the mood takes him. In the last few years he has bought works by the American artist, Inka Essenhigh, including *WWF*, short for World Wrestling Federation, and more recently a large-scale photograph from Dan Holdsworth's 'Blackout' series. He considers installation artist Paul Etienne Lincoln as the world's greatest living artist: 'I will continue to collect his work as much as I can. Paul works quietly on sculptures of breathtaking sophistication.'