

# Painting DREAMS

*Have you ever wanted to fill your home with beautiful, interesting artwork but haven't known where to start? Audrey editor Carly Saillard visits a local art auction site and asks the questions you need answered*

There are three oil paintings sitting on the floor, propped up against Amanda Benson's desk. Two are of windmills and landscapes. The third is darker, richer, denser, and somehow more arresting. It's of a boy's profile, leaning his head on one hand, looking away from the painter. During my visit with Amanda Benson, Lloyd Auctions' National Art Manager, my eyes are drawn back to it, although I'm not sure why. I've always loved art, in my own way. I've gone to museums and exhibitions, even the odd gallery opening here and there, but have rarely considered a painting something that I would buy for myself. So when the opportunity arose to interview Amanda, an expert in her field, I jumped at the chance. When I walk in to the warehouse there are thousands of paintings everywhere. Stacked along shelves, by walls, even some stretched along the floor – it's an overwhelming ocean of creative endeavours. Amanda and her husband Shane have worked together here, and in places like it, buying and selling art for 15 years. Taking it up as a hobby outside of their careers in data mining and navy clearance diving, respectively, within twelve months it become their profession after

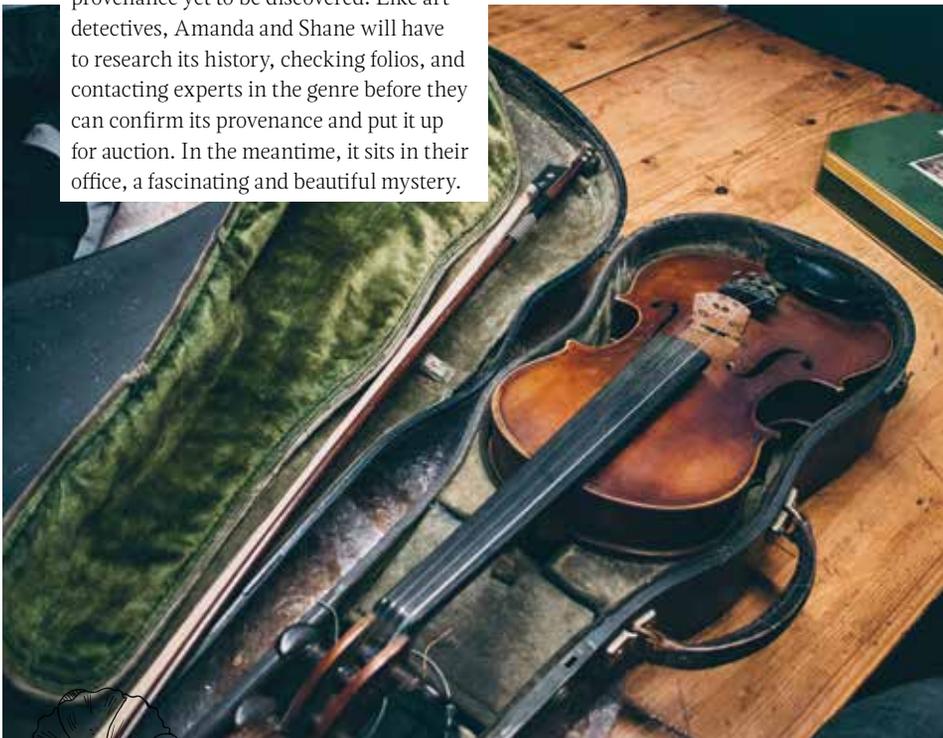
finding an online market for art-lovers: "We saw an opportunity for people like us who wouldn't go gallery openings or exhibitions. We just wouldn't be the sort of people to do that but we did enjoy paintings and so we saw offering quality works through online auctions as bridging the gap in accessibility for everyday people, and that's how we've built our business," Amanda tells me. The positive side of this model of art-buying is that the social pressure of visiting a gallery is taken out of the equation. "Lots of people don't want to show up to a gallery opening, they feel intimidated, they won't know anyone, so we're taking the works people would buy in that situation and putting them into an auction, where they can bid or not bid. They haven't got any pressure on them to buy and they make their own decision as to what something's worth." And what exactly should be my guiding principle for purchasing art? It seems like the word investment comes up a lot in conversations about art collections, but much like the stock market, property industry, and digital currency, art investment is all double Dutch to me. "What I would always suggest is whether

you're buying for investment or for decoration, always buy something that you love because at the end of the day, the item that you enjoy is always going to be a better investment than one that you don't." As the living embodiment of the saying 'I may not know art but I know what I like', it's tremendously freeing to hear from an expert that my best choice is to follow what pleases me aesthetically. It's all too easy to feel like you need to have a depth of knowledge to start an art collection, but it turns out it's much simpler to follow Amanda's advice – find something you like and then ask questions about it. Out of curiosity, I ask Amanda if she has a favourite painting, thinking it would be something she would find difficult to choose. However, her answer is both enthusiastic and immediate and refreshingly unobscure. "Oh god, yes! Van Gogh's *Starry Night* is my favourite painting, that was probably the first moment I became quite struck by art. I was working in New York in 2000 and I went to the Museum of Modern Art and I saw *Starry Night* there." Amanda pauses before adding thoughtfully, "It's quite overwhelming, that painting. It still gives me goose bumps to this day."

I want to come back to this warehouse filled with paintings and antiques and listen to Amanda tell me stories for hours. She shows me a violin that was worth thousands of dollars before someone repaired the neck with epoxy glue and rendered it more or less worthless as an antique, and boxes of thousands of stamps from a collector's estate – the stamps themselves weigh a total 50kgs. It's fascinating to learn not only about the pieces themselves, but the history of their ownership, the people who have loved them or forgotten them in a cupboard or unknowingly bought them for \$5 at an op-shop.

As we go through the paintings in the warehouse, I'm excited about how... accessible it all is. Rather than being hung austere on a gallery wall, the artworks here look like canvases and paint, touchable and moveable and yes, purchasable even by me. Amanda shows me some paintings she thinks I might like, flicking through stretched paintings like pages in a book. I make a mental list and later when I get back into the office, I'll be on my computer placing bids.

We come back to the painting of the boy. Amanda holds it up and admits she loves it too. It's a mystery to her too, the provenance yet to be discovered. Like art detectives, Amanda and Shane will have to research its history, checking folios, and contacting experts in the genre before they can confirm its provenance and put it up for auction. In the meantime, it sits in their office, a fascinating and beautiful mystery.



**Above:** Amanda recommends paintings to Carly stored in their rack system, also shown right. **Below:** An antique violin improperly repaired.



#### AMANDA'S TIPS FOR ART IN THE HOME

◆ "Paintings are always better off stored on a wall. They're far less likely to be damaged. We've had people store things in cupboards, under beds, and they almost always end up worse off for it. We've got works in rack situations, but that's because we've around 3000 artworks here at any one time and we have a very specialist racking system that your average person isn't going to have in their home."

◆ "A lot of the time people buy works that match their furniture and that's a poor choice because often you'll keep that work forever. A lot of people don't sell works, and you'll have that furniture changed three or four times before you'll change the artwork. So don't buy artwork that matches the furniture, buy furniture that matches the artwork. Start with that first and then decorate around it. Especially if it's something you love, because if it's something you love you're not going to get rid of it."