

ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ART ACQUISITION SPECIALISTS IN LOS ANGELES SPOKE IN AN INTERVIEW ABOUT HOW TO SELL ART FOR MILLIONS, WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE MODERN ART MARKET, AND WHAT APPROACH HELPS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN THE INDUSTRY



## FABIAN LOPEZ: HOW TO SELL ART FOR MILLIONS

The hero of my interview is a strong player in the American art market, an art dealer who lives in Beverly Hills, works at Winn Slavin Fine Art, the top contemporary art gallery located on Rodeo Drive, and is also an art collector and photographer. Last year, Fabian and I worked together at several fairs in Florida - Palm Beach Modern + Contemporary and Context Art Miami 2022. I was fascinated by his professionalism and impeccable work with collectors, deep knowledge of art, and his ability to sell the pieces for very big checks .

I really wanted to learn from Fabian the secrets of art sales and communication with clients, and this opportunity presented itself.

I think this interview will be interesting not only to our colleagues - art dealers and gallery owners, but also to artists and even art collectors.

By Daria R

*Photo credit to Liza Hakobyan*

Tell us how it happened that you ended up in the art industry?  
Why did you choose this path in life?

I believe in destiny. I believe that we attract a certain trajectory into our lives, or rather, the destiny itself finds us, and then we follow it with all our energy, using all opportunities, with the desire to succeed in what we follow. In my case, chance also played a huge role in choosing a profession. It wasn't what I was specifically looking for. At that time I was working in a different industry. I lived in Los Angeles, acting and modelling, but also working for some companies in the field of international marketing, travelling a lot. When I finally settled in California, I met Sir Daniel Winn and Randall Slavin through my artistic friends just as they were opening their first Winn Slavin Fine Art galleries on Santa Monica Boulevard and Rodeo Drive. They started inviting me to their events and art exhibitions. I didn't know anything about art...

But it attracted you, and you decided to immerse yourself completely in this industry?

Yes, art was attracting me a lot. At high school I enjoyed attending classes in fine arts, especially portraiting. I was not very good at drawing, technically it was not so easy for me, and I decided to leave it for that moment. But when I met Daniel and Randy, I felt this attraction to art again. Looking at the work of other artists, I felt incredible inspiration. I started to get interested in the art market: why does this work cost more and that one less, if the first work is much larger than the second one? What determines the value of the works of art? I couldn't figure out where pricing comes from in the art world, and that intrigued me insanely. By visiting local art fairs and exhibitions, I started to «romanticize» art. Then I realized that art is really what I want to do, and I did my best to enter this environment - learning, gaining experience and connections. I am very fortunate to have been mentored by Sir Daniel Winn, who has been a successful artist and art dealer for over 30 years. Getting this invaluable information directly from him, I got an exclusive experience. Actually he helped me to become what I am now in my profession.

Believe it or not, something similar happened to me. I was also in modelling and film industry. One of the projects was finished, and I did not know what to do next, as if I was at a crossroads. And suddenly, in one movie I saw how paintings were being sold at an art auction, and it dawned on me - this was what I really wanted to do! I was so intrigued by the world of art and wanted to get there so much that I started studying like crazy, attending all the exhibitions and auctions, and the doors themselves began to open - even where it seemed impossible ... after six months I opened my first gallery.

That's lovely! It happened so fast for me too. In the first year with Winn Slavin Fine Art, I visited my first international art fair. It was Shanghai. And it seemed incredible!

*Photo credit to Irene Shebeko*






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## "I TREAT MY CLIENTS NOT AS MY CUSTOMERS, BUT, ABOVE ALL, AS MY FRIENDS AND LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE"

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And now you live in Beverly Hills, work in one of the most luxurious galleries on Rodeo Drive, go to international fairs, attend star events. You are literally living the life of your dreams! However, I know that our profession is not only a beautiful facade. In reality, an art dealer or a gallery owner combines many different careers, and should have different skills and multitask. Tell me, what is your work week usually like?

Sometimes my weeks are very busy. And there are spontaneous days when it is difficult to predict how it will go, even if I have planned my day in advance. For example, I know that I will be working in the gallery, that new pieces will be delivered, and I will study them. But suddenly my clients from other states or other countries call, and I need to help with the delivery of the purchased art, organize its transportation. Or bring the pieces personally, help to hang them, look at the client's space, advise on the best way to place the works of art.

Or help to select art in the interior. But this is exactly what I like most about our work! Spontaneity, adventure... For example, today, before our conversation, one of our artists and his team suddenly arrived to the gallery. He started filming the content, sharing his plans, talking about new works. I love that there is always something new going on!

Yeah, our profession is not only talking about art with a glass of wine. You need to have knowledge in different areas, and combine different types of activities, switching in the moment...

Exactly. It is also important to keep in touch with art collectors. We are constantly on the line with them - for example, we can go for coffee and talk about new works of one of the artists. Or attend an event together. I treat my clients not as my customers, but, above all, as my friends and like-minded people.

*Photo credit to Daniel Winn*

This is the right approach! What do you value most in your work? You know, despite the stress that it entails sometimes, we are still doing something very beautiful and exciting. There is always much fun and joy in our work.

That's for sure! Let's talk a little about the state of the art market today, and its tendencies. What trends do you think are currently prevailing in the US art market?

I think pop art is dominating the market right now. And this trend applies not only to the United States, but to the whole world. All international galleries showcase pop art to some degree. Also, street art is rapidly gaining momentum. I would even say that the most fashionable trend right now is a combination of pop art and street art. And, of course, abstraction is also in the top.

Artists who are engaged in both street art and gallery format are very popular. I mean, those who transfer street art to the canvas. For example, CANTSTOPGOODBOY from Malibu, or Australian artist James Peter Henry. This style is very trendy right now. He uses mixed media, including graffiti spray, and combines different trends in his work - cubism, abstraction, pop art...

Imagine that you were approached by a novice art collector. He wants to invest in contemporary art but doesn't know where to start. He does not understand what will grow in price, and what has no prospects. Your recommendations?

First of all, I will ask what style or direction he likes the most. What attracts him to art. We know that there are investment-grade artists, and there are emerging artists whose names are not so well known yet. If the client does not want to buy the piece of a famous master, I will not insist.

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## "THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THE WORK OF ART PLEASES ITS OWNER"

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After all, the most important thing is that the work of art pleases its owner. You have to live with it, and see it every day in your space. Of course, it is important to advise the collector in terms of the art market. For example, we have works by Picasso, and even Dali, whose provenance comes directly from the Argillet family. I would recommend Dali, first of all, because there are different styles in his work, and there is plenty to choose from. There are also very worthy and promising contemporary artists. It all depends on the relationship with the client, on his personality. It's very individual.

As a rule, the collector reveals his true preferences only in a personal conversation.

Do you collect art yourself? Please tell me about your private collection. What are your favourite items, and what do they mean for you?

Yes, I also collect. For example, I have a work by Salvador Dali done in sepia. This is my favourite one. I also really enjoy supporting local emerging artists and buying their work. By the way, I just love sketches. I have several by Sir Daniel Winn in my collection.

I love pencil drawings. Black and white... You know, in general, I collect things that have some meaning for me, that are somehow connected with me, with a certain period of my life. There are a lot of collectors who see art as an investment, and buy something that is sure to increase in value, then to resell, or leave in the assets of their families, as a legacy to their descendants. I collect art on a different principle - emotional. I buy what excites me, and causes strong feelings

It is so unusual! You don't see that very often in our industry these days. According to your preferences, I realised that you like graphics more than painting ...

I like sketches. There is something sacred in the sketch, it captures the magic of the process. It is much more attractive to me than the finished work. When it comes to painting, I prefer abstraction to figurative art. Abstraction gives more emotion.

Do you paint yourself?

I prefer Visual Art. I am a photo artist. Now I feel a new surge of inspiration, and I am ready to study and master new techniques.

Great! You are very versatile, and cover several areas in the industry at once - art sales, art collecting, and the creation of works ... Talking about the connection of eras - the past with the present. What would you prefer - the work of an old master, or of a modern one? For example, I started with antiques works, and my base is totally classics. I will always prefer an old master.

As for me, I will not answer so unambiguously. Rather, I like to watch the evolution - from the old to the modern. Now I lean more towards contemporary art, because it includes new techniques and means of expression that traditional artists did not use. And one more thing: from the old masters we got only the result, the finished work. And I like to observe the process. This is available to us only with contemporary art.

Talking about art-dealing... What was the most expensive artwork that you had ever sold?

If you mean the separate piece, most expensive were the sculptures, at \$700,000 each. But the most expensive invoice for one client was for \$1.600.000.

That's really impressive! I think that 90% of successful sales depends on art dealer. What does exactly help to to sell the art?

I think that my strength lies in the fact that I can always correctly describe any piece of art. I know how to connect an artwork with a collector because I take the time to communicate with artists, study their method of creating a piece, and the idea that they wanted to transmit. Then I present it as if I were the artist myself, and lived through the entire process of creation.

Of course! The story sells...

Besides, the client always wants to be guided, to be explained in a professional language not so much about the artist, but mostly about his work. I can anticipate any collector's question and answer it competently. For people who manage such capitals, it is very important to be advised by a professional. If I had just shrugged my shoulders in response, I would hardly have been able to sell anything. I know the story behind every piece I sell so well, that I can spend hours talking about it to a client. And then he is happy to buy, because if this work aroused such passion and emotions, then it deserves to be in his collection.

In addition, the collectors must feel that they are in good hands throughout the process. This is what keeps them coming back and buying again.

Good. I want to ask you something unusual. If you could be any piece of art, what would you be and why?

Good question! Wow... I don't even know what to say... You know, my consciousness is always present in several places at one moment, I do a lot of things at the same time, I am constantly in the creative process. I think I would be an abstraction.

Abstraction can be different ... We can say that Malevich's "Black Square" is also an abstraction. But it seems to me that you are a painting with a lot of different bright colours.

(Laughs). I can definitely say that I am an unusual piece: something strange, but modern. If you had asked me a few years ago, I would have answered without hesitation that I am an etching by Dali «Pieta» (1960), that I really like ... But that is already in the past. I think that throughout your life, in different situations, you can feel like different works of art. In general, art is more than a subject.

Totally agree. I like this conversation, because you talk so exciting about your profession! But let's recap. What advice would you offer someone considering the career of an art acquisition specialist?

First of all, I would advise going into this profession without calculation. Some people become an art dealer or gallery owner because they think it will make them a lot of money. That is definitely true, but first of all, you need to feel passion and interest for what you are doing. Especially in our field. You need to find some direction in art that will inspire you, and start studying it, understanding the industry, meeting people and, of course, trying to find a good mentor, as it happened in my case. It is very important to love what you do, to live it.

I am also convinced that our industry cannot do without passion and love for art. Let's light it all around!

By *Daria R*

*Photo credit to  
Irene Shebeko*

