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HOW A CORPORATE ART CONSULTANT BUYS PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS

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By Interview David Walker




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Julie Kinzelman, the principal of Houston-based Kinzelman Art Consulting, discusses how she helps corporate clients choose photographs, what they pay for prints and what she looks for in photographers she works with.

PDN: Are you working with clients to acquire prints for investment or decorative purposes?

Julie Kinzelman: I don't see myself as a decorator. There's a tremendous amount of strategy that goes into the selection process that achieves a diverse yet cohesive collection. Yes, we're enhancing an environment, but the process by which we get there through this curatorial endeavor is to connect one work of art to the next. ... I want the art to truly resonate with the clientele and people who are going to interact with the art.

I spend a lot of time getting to know who the clients are, show them a lot of work so we can [find] what resonates with them. Is it representational? Is it abstract? Is it a bridge between the two? Are there genres that resonate with them? This is a process I want them to participate in. We're educating the client about the integrity of the art, and who the artist is. We are navigating them through the art market to make smart decisions

PDN: Some fine-art photographers think the corporate market has a stigma attached to it.

We've talked to artists who've said: I do pieces for galleries, and other stuff I do for corporate art consultants that I don't put into galleries. Some even use pseudonyms for their corporate work, to avoid devaluing their fine-art "brand."

J.K.: Then I would say that's a different level of advising. There are tiers within the corporate sector. [Some clients] have square footage [on walls] that needs to be filled. That's a completely different beast than what I do. If [a photographer's] goal is mass production, that's fabulous. That need exists. The market is very diverse, and there's no right or wrong. But I have to be clear about the differences between [decorating] and collecting.

I would not be motivated to have an artist move off of their normal output, and create a body of work that's strictly for decorative purposes to fill an environment. I'm interested in an artist who has dedicated their practice to the development of a body or bodies of work. I would be looking critically at that body of work to be able to say to my client, here's an artist whose [work] connects back to who the corporation is, philosophically, or esthetically. It shares a very rich conversation with other works of art in the collection. So there's something to be gained beyond the esthetics of it. There's this concept behind it, and I'm interested in that.

PDN: What are examples of photographic prints you've acquired lately for clients?

J.K.: Recent acquisitions include works by [Michael Berman](#) (Rio Grande, 72" x 110") and [E. Dan Klepper](#) (Full Cold Moon and One Hundred Forty Moons, 58" x 116" each). Due to confidentiality agreements, I am unable to provide the names of the clients.

PDN: How do you source photography?

J.K.: We spend a lot of time researching, doing studio visits, attending art fairs, attending gallery openings, to build on [knowing] who the artists are out there, who is experimenting in innovative ways, as well as styles and genres that exist over time. We do portfolio reviews periodically through Fotofest, seeing the work in person is the best option for us. We try to stay active in the art community to stay informed, in order to see the work that's being produced, [and] where the artists are regionally and internationally.

PDN: Are there things that you like and look for in particular?

J.K.: I'm motivated by artists who are pushing the medium of photography—artists that are exploring new process or innovating creatively within the medium itself. That could be alternative processes, forcing me to look at a tried-and-true subject, from landscape to still life, in an innovative, creative manner.

PDN: Can you give me some examples?

J.K.: Artists who I currently find of interest [are] [Leslie Hewitt](#), [Klea McKenna](#), [Tom Lovelace](#), [Matthew Brandt](#) and [Alison Rossiter](#). These artists function in a multidisciplinary mode, often incorporating photography, sculpture, performance and alternative processes.

PDN: How important is a photographer's CV? Do they have to have a name and reputation must they have to get your attention?

J.K.: I do take that to heart. If the art is strong, if it's a young artist just out of school, and/or somebody who has really dedicated their practice to developing a strong body of work, it will show. But I am very curious about an artists' CV [such] as their exhibitions over the years, who the dealers are they've worked with, institutions who have their works as part of the [institutional] holdings. There's security in knowing that there is a dedicated effort as a practicing artist to securing this long-term trajectory, constantly trying to better themselves, constantly trying to grow, and the CV should illustrate that. Who's looking at them? Who's exhibiting them? Is it only within their region or are they getting much more critical attention internationally? That interests me because it speaks to the credibility of the artist, and I can [convey it] to my clientele.

PDN: Is there a range of prices that clients pay for photographic prints?

J.K.: It could start anywhere, but it could go up to \$20,000 or even more than that. It completely depends on the client and the artist, and where they are in the market. The higher the dollar value, that's where you get very critical about the CV and exhibition record and the collector base and the museum holdings they may be a part of, because those variables are what's supporting that value.

PDN: What about an artist who is really interesting to you, but who doesn't have much of a track record as an artist? What could they expect?

J.K.: Those could be anywhere between several hundred dollars to less than \$5,000. Then you get into the whole conversation about the edition size, and that can be difficult to navigate. I prefer lower edition sizes myself. The more prints out there, the less special it is. My clients are interested in works that are unique.

PDN: What edition sizes do you like to see?

J.K.: I like less than 10, personally. I know that can't always be a reality and I work with the dealers to understand why they're editioning where they are.

PDN: What does an edition mean to you? Does it mean a limited number of all types and sizes?

J.K.: [I mean] edition sizes complying with the [specified] dimensions. I like the idea of three different sizes being offered, but I still want there to be low editions within those dimensions.

PDN: Do photographers approach you directly?

J.K.: We get bombarded, and I appreciate that, but it doesn't always [lead] to us working with artists. I advise people to look at our website to understand what are clients are like. I like to think there's a consistency to our esthetic and our approach, and people can get that from the website.

PDN: Is interest in photography among corporate clients changing in any way?

J.K.: I think [the interest] is about the same. But there's still sort of a stigma associated with photography. From a corporate perspective, there's a tendency to assume that photography is a less expensive option [than other media]. I find that to be not true, and I educate [clients] about why.

PDN: What do you tell them?

J.K.: You need to contextualize [it]. For some collectors, an original work of art or sculpture would warrant the highest price point, because the media is original. The psychology of value is tied to the media. Photography can be no different than a limited edition lithography series [in terms of price]. You can find economical photographs, but you can find economical works on paper, too.

PDN: What other advice do you have for photographers who want to reach the corporate market?

J.K.: The majority of my research is going through dealers and colleagues in the field. We compare notes [about] who's been collected, and why. I rely on those relationships [to find] photographers that we work with. Reaching out to people who are curating corporate collections is fine, but if [your name and work] is coming by way of a recommendation from another photographer or curator we have worked with or partnered with, that helps me to understand the work a little better. People need to do their homework before they email their portfolio or send a link to their website. They need to study hard the

types of collections that corporate advisors or curators have put together, to see if it makes sense to reach out, because sometime it doesn't. They need to study the galleries, their programs, the corporations and their collections, to get their CV together and their portfolios together, before reaching out.

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FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

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In our recent interviews with photo collectors for our story “What (and How) Photography Collectors Buy Now,” one long-time collector noted that being able to meet and talk with fine-art photographers often inspires him to buy their work. He met photographer Lynn Saville after he bought one of her prints at the annual benefit auction for The Photo Review because Saville thanked him...

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