



The Obama Art Fund

Art I'd Buy with my First-Time Homeowner's Tax Credit

By Lucia Simek



Allison Hunter, *Untitled 14*

It's official, the spouse and I are homeowners. More luck than initiative, we landed a house just in the nick of time in order to qualify for Obama's first-time homeowner's tax incentive: \$8000, give or take, come refund time. While most assuredly the proper, home owning, adult thing to do with the money would be to put the money back into the house somehow – pay down the note a little, invest in some upgrades – we have another idea that's much more fun, and that, tangentially, does some good too.

A number of things of late have pressed me and Peter into a kind of manic desire to start buying art despite our limited means (among them the realization that my lame human figure drawings and Eva Hesse-inspired attempts from college desperately need to be retired); but two things in particular have planted a seed that cannot seem to be uprooted. The first was Christina Rees' second State of the Union piece on Glasstire in which she described hipsters that could be collectors:

Then there are the "kids" and the would-be hipster collectors who outnumber actual clients and gallery artists ten to one at an opening, but haven't bought yet. They bring lots of vitality to galleries; make them feel alive and hopping. They tend to be enthusiastic about the work and are often creative themselves, and friends with the artists. They also often treat galleries like a kind of groovy satellite system to the museums and non-profits. They wear cool shoes.

Let me point something out. If one hundred of these young bohemians each bought one modest piece every third year from Gallery X, let's say an unframed drawing for \$300 (and they could pay it out in installments), then the gallery's future suddenly looks brighter. You could even break it down in terms of how much that would mean they "spend" on each opening; if they attend maybe six Gallery X openings a year, then by buying one drawing every three years

they're paying about \$16 a pop for several good hours of booze, conversation and educational diversion. They'd pay more than that to hang out at some new bar for two hours, but at the end of the day at a gallery, they've made an investment in an artist's future.

For someone like myself, not so much hipster as hipping a kid around, and very often wielding a notebook and pen and acting as critic, I've often thought myself different from the gallery attendees of my generation that Rees so aptly describes. And I've certainly always believed myself outside the capability of actually purchasing a work of art that hangs in a reputed gallery. Something about my notions of "otherness" as not-so-rich art writer kept me from thinking I could ever buy art, as much as I loved it. And certainly, in spending time with certain work both in the gallery and at the computer screen in analyzation, there have been many love affairs, but always unrequited.

What Rees' piece did for me and my husband was open a window into a world that we had so far participated in only partly, safely, as voyeurs on art collectors' good fortune of sated art desires. Suddenly, truly at Rees' command, we began to feel capable of a new kind of participation.

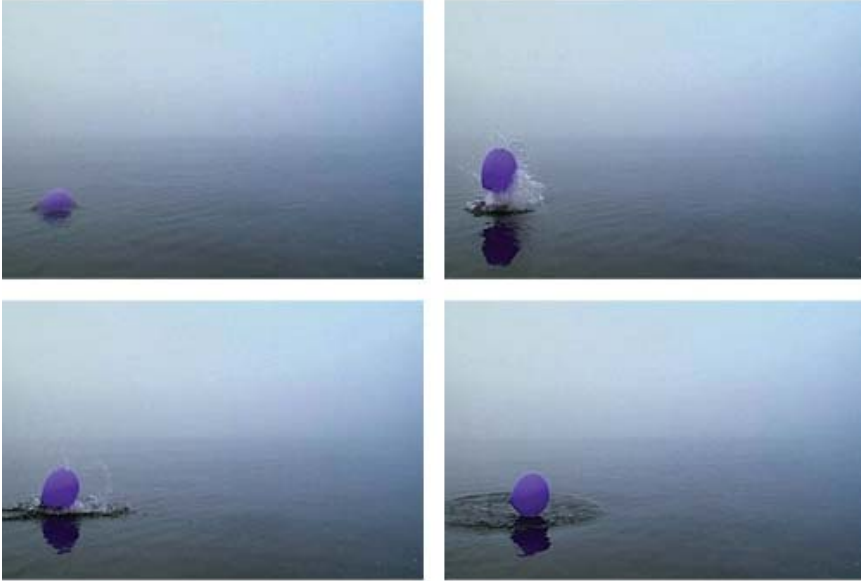
The second thing that fostered our art-wanting frenzy was the Independent Lens film about the New York art-collecting couple Herb and Dorothy Vogel – he a mail sorter, she a librarian – who over the course of their marriage amassed an art collection in their tiny New York flat that filled five Mayflower moving trucks when they donated it to the National Gallery. Buying mostly from artists directly, but always with a keen nose for the best and the bravest new work, the Vogels became art buying legends in the New York gallery scene without a pretentious bone in their bodies or a chip of gold in their pockets. They loved art, artists, and the challenge of new ideas, and understood a certain responsibility to foster those things despite their humble means. They made no excuses, they just made it work.

So. The tax credit. Sure, it's not from our everyday substance; it acts, really, as a kind of token gift for taking a chance in risky times in hopes of curbing further disaster. But there's a lot at risk these days, including the livelihood of Dallas galleries and all the artists they represent. I figure that we'll take a chance and hope our plumbing stays true in the house, that the roof stays unleaky and the foundation firm, and we'll put our money where our mouth is come this tax season and buy some bona-fide art. It's more than a little titillating to think that we could have among us in everyday life, at home, some of the work we've loved intimately from afar. I'm hoping it becomes a happy habit.

Here are my top, most-loved works of art as seen in Dallas galleries (that are still available, even if the gallery is gone) that I could buy for a fraction of Obama's tax credit. Let me just say, compiling this piece was a rather revelatory exercise for me, making me admit to work I have favored and say why. Though this list is certainly not exhaustive, it is, truthfully, evidence of the work I found most compelling and engaging, challenging, and more often than not, exceptionally beautiful on some level. Ultimately, the work I have selected took up residence somewhere in my imagination.

William Lamson, *Emerge (video stills)* (Marty Walker Gallery)

I waxed on a little about [this video piece](#) last year in [THE Magazine](#) when William Lamson had his first solo show at Marty Walker, and I perhaps said it best then. But in brief, *Emerge* employs all of the poetry and power that video art can, to my mind, toying with expectation and desire and confounding them into some other thing entirely. While Lamson's work with balloons in his series *Actions* teases out emotions through contrived battles, *Emerge* leaves a viewer feeling elevated, full of wanting, and quiet. It makes a viewer feel as buoyant as Lamson's balloons.



William Lamson, *Emerge*

Allison Hunter, *Untitled 14* (Marty Walker Gallery)

The subtle, elusive narrative in this photo, the otherworldly light and the flat, undescribed landscape make this photograph seem wrought with divine tensions. Is the sheep being cast out or chosen? It's that unanswerable-ness of the image that makes it so unfailingly powerful, like a parable without words.

Matthew Porter, *Final Flight* (Marty Walker Gallery)



I love this piece by Matthew Porter for much the same reason I love Allison Hunter's: the emblematic subject inserted into the enigmatic landscape. Like Hunter's, Porter's photograph suggests an event that will take place off-screen, unseen by the viewer, and all we're given to see is the quiet journey toward that mysterious end.

Tim Sullivan, *I'm Too Sad to Tell You* (Conduit Gallery)



This photo was part of a series of color c-prints that the artist hand-monochromed with body paint, spray paint and photo copies, making the images appear black and white. The black and white flower arrangement, and the somberness of the still life, lends the image a funereal tone. The quotation of the title of [a Bas Jan Ader photo](#) showing that artist weeping in grief, suggest that Sullivan is consoling Ader by pushing flowers "toward" him. I love the art historical hand-off that goes on in this picture, and the masochistic precision of Sullivan's gorgeous monochrome tones.

Celia Eberle, *Reminder*



I saw this piece, and a few others of Eberle's that I was quite taken with, at Road Agent's last show, "Far from the Maddening Crowd." Eberle's straight forward yet poetic play on material and meaning is witty and profound, and seamlessly rendered. This particular piece, *Reminder*, shows a jet black raven sitting atop a branch made of coral that juts from a tree made of bone. Eberle has made both death's detritus and earth's adamantine things unite in a conversation about time and art's power over it.

Danny Williams, *Spring Moon, Auteuil* (Barry Whistler Gallery)



I was so struck by the show of which this drawing was a part because the installation was so good – three walls stacked ceiling-high with hazy landscape sketches. Mostly blueish or gray, and all depicting the French countryside, the drawings were transportive through their sheer quantity and beautiful simplicity. Knowing that this body of work was such a far cry from Danny William’s previous brightly colored, pop culture paintings (which I only came to know after seeing these drawings) makes them seem testament to some incredible alteration in the artist. A work of art that catalogues an imaginative artistic shift, especially one as hauntingly lovely as this one by Williams, would be a treasure.

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