

COLLECTOR'S EYE

Jorden Nye proves that art is truly for everyone

INTERVIEW BY Rosemary Carstens PHOTOGRAPHY BY Bill Stengel



Some love affairs last a lifetime. For Jorden Nye, after 30 years of collecting art one piece at a time, often paying for them over many months, it's clear that his is no mere infatuation. Growing up in a working-class family in suburban Los Angeles, Nye hadn't had much exposure to cultural events when a Lyndon Johnson Great Society program provided the funding for an excursion to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. "It was the first time I had ever been in an art museum," he relates. "I was entranced with seeing art that spanned several centuries and mediums — I loved every minute!"

Nye developed his art expertise by "reading, visiting museums and regional art exhibitions, visiting commercial art galleries and looking at hundreds of thousands of artworks on the Internet." But, beyond that, he built his museum-quality collection by having a discerning eye. Following a successful federal government career in Washington, D.C., Nye now lives and breathes art in Santa Fe, where he manages the Jane Sauer Gallery. Every leisure moment is spent on the hunt for new additions to his collection.

WA&A: *What inspires you to collect art?* **Nye:** Great art has always held an important place in my life. I'm always searching for works that move me emotionally or have a compelling narrative. In short, I'm drawn in by a work of art when I can't take my eyes off it! Most of my free time is spent looking for the next great under-discovered artist — I need to find artists before they are out of my price range. The search has filled my life with intriguing adventures.

WA&A: *What was the first work you purchased and what made you choose it?* **Nye:** It all began with the purchase of a black and white photograph by Arizona artist Jay Dusard in 1980, a surprisingly fabulous close-up of a rock face with an erotic subtext. It's a contact print, made by placing an 8-by-10-inch negative directly onto the printing paper to produce radiant clarity. I paid \$200, all I could afford at the time. I still display this photograph as a fond reminder of where my collection started, and it fits in perfectly with everything that followed. I now have over 300 artworks, in every medium.

WA&A: *What is your most beloved piece and why?* **Nye:** My favorite artwork is a 9-foot-tall bronze sculpture of Adam by Mexican artist Javier Marin.

It has so much emotional power. You can feel the creative authority of the artist in every slab of clay he slathered on and every mark of his sculptor's tools. The hands and feet are greatly exaggerated, creating an impressionistic interpretation of man rather than being purely representational. Sometimes I just pull up a chair and sit in front of it for a few minutes to study it. I purchased the piece at the artist's studio in Mexico City in 2000. A year later, Marin became an international superstar and I will never again be able to afford his work. But, I have one of his masterpieces!

WA&A: *At what point did you realize you were a collector?* **Nye:** I'd say it was in the early 1980s, when I connected with one of the best photography galleries in the country at the time, in Baltimore, Maryland, about 50 miles from where I lived. I opened an account that didn't get closed for 10 years. I paid them a few hundred dollars each month, but always found yet another photograph I had to have. That was only the beginning. When, a few years later, I whipped out my credit card to buy a magnificent 5-by-12-foot wide painting on steel by Lawrence Gipe that was too large to display on any wall in my home, I knew I had the bug.

WA&A: *Which living artist would you most like to have to dinner?* **Nye:** German artist Anselm Kiefer. His paintings and sculptures are very powerful, reflecting on such things as good and evil, violence, the creation, the Holocaust and post-WWII angst. He uses interesting materials such as paint, tar, ashes, straw and lots of lead. My kind of stuff.

WA&A: *What was the one that got away?* **Nye:** Fortunately, there haven't been many. If an artwork is anywhere near my price range, I will figure out a way to buy it. But I will forever long for a copy of Sally Mann's 1987 haunting photograph of her 10-year-old son, Emmett, waist deep in a river with dark foreboding trees and shadows surrounding his image. I missed buying the last copy by one week! In 1992 it cost less than \$2,000. In 2009 a copy was auctioned for \$40,000 — way beyond my means.

WA&A: *Where do you imagine your collection will be in 100 years?* **Nye:** I hope that my "children" will someday find their way to a nice museum collection. ■