



Collector Paul Gurtler seated before part of his collection. Paintings from left to right by: YM Whelan, New York artist Dulcie Dee, Blaise Delong, and Steve Rockwell

Good Roommates Paul Gurtler's Collection of Toronto Based-Artists

by Robert Curcio

Paul Gurtler and I met about eight years ago or so, through Steve Rockwell, the intrepid leader of this publication and artist in his collection. At a little get together last May at Paul's place, the three of us conspired to put in motion this profile.

As a young man in the early 70's, the company that Paul worked for sent him to Tokyo for a few years which is where the whole art collecting bug caught him; first as a maker and collector of ceramics, then as a collector of prints. He still has a piece or two from back then, but the majority of pieces he gave away to admirers of the works. By the mid-70's Paul's company moved him to NYC where he was at the center of the art world with all the art celebs, legendary gallery owners, flashy headline making auctions, glitzy openings, the attitudes, big money and the art itself – it just wasn't for Paul. It wasn't until some years later when Paul went to Toronto on business that he found the art, artists and community that he was looking for and began to

collect in earnest.

When he began going to Toronto Paul regularly visited the Fran Hill Gallery and Moore Gallery, where at both these and other galleries, the owners and staff were welcoming and engaged with all the people coming into their gallery. This was much different from Paul's experience with NYC galleries where a visitor first had to pass scrutiny before anyone would utter a word. (This has changed a bit in NYC now, just a bit.) Something that was unexpected was that artists and galleries were all referring him to each other; artists to go see another artist's studio or exhibit, or a gallery suggesting he might like the work of an artist at another gallery. (Happens a bit in NYC, again, just a bit) He was so impressed with everyone's generosity that at one gallery he purchased three large paintings by Robert Chandler and YM Whelan, regardless of the fact that he had a typical small NYC apartment with no place to hang them.

As we were going back-n-forth

talking about the paintings, which artists he doesn't like and an out of nowhere switch about his very different collection in Bermuda, I felt there was more to investigate as to where his real interest in art and to collect came from. Now Paul is a rather private person, so I was very surprised during our interview when, without insistent prodding from me, he just opened up and started talking about his father. How his father would come home with various antiques, classical and traditional paintings and other objects d'art, that he bought to quickly turn around to sell them. In today's parlance Paul's father would have been called a "picker," someone who scouts out the local auctions and house sales for hidden gems to sell to the bigger auction houses, antique stores, designers and other clients.

Those pieces changed almost weekly, since these were pieces meant to be sold for a profit and not to collect and hold onto just for the sake of admiring the art. However, during the pieces' stay in the home Paul's father would share with him thoughts on why he bought the pieces. Paul said he talked about craftsmanship, technique, quality, and beauty, ideals that an individual artist worked at to create something unique and special. Ideals that only in recent years' people have started to discuss and consider



Steve Rockwell, John Jackson vs Tim Deverell, 2004, printer's ink on paper, 24" x 24"

within modern and contemporary art. The time spent with his father provided Paul with a true appreciation and understanding for art, and for the artist. For Paul, it is not only about the art and being able to appreciate it, it's also about his connection to the life and memory of his father. As he was thinking back to his past from his current vantage point as a collector, he stopped just briefly then continued with a knowing look saying that his collection, how he thinks about art, and his relationships with artists, would make his father pleased.

The majority of Paul's collection is primarily Canadian art, more precisely 40 out of 50 paintings are by Toronto based artists and except for a few pieces it is almost exclusively painting. Artists include: Robert Bachalo, Robert Chandler, Tim Deverell, Ric Evans, Steve Driscoll, Ric Evans, Marianne Fowler, Steve Rockwell, and YM Whelan. In a basic overall description, the collection is comprised of abstract pieces with an inclination towards the geometric and minimal with a richness and vitality of color. While we were talking, I realized that after numerous visits, just about each piece has a certain quality of texture to it. Whether it is Nathan Slate Joseph's (one of the few non-Canadians) incredibly textured metal painting/sculpture pieces or Whelan's abstract geometric paintings where the slightly raised brush strokes are visible, there is always texture.

Paul does not buy for investment and has no interest in buying at auction because that is just a business transaction. He has no buyer's remorse, as he called it when someone buys a piece on a whim only to resell it because they just don't like the piece. The big art names of Basquiat, Hirst, Koons, Warhol, and the like, he lumps all together as not exactly artists, one he specifically called a fraud, since there are squads of assistants that make their art and there is more concern with market value than with real art ideals. He understands "flipping" as another business transaction, but not something a real collector or appreciator of art would ever do.

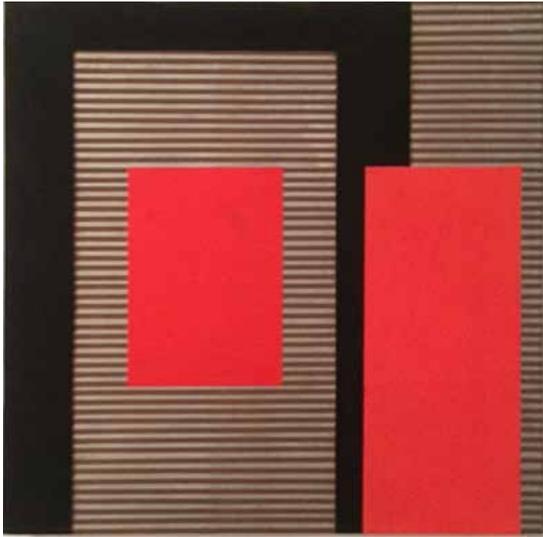
There's an old saying that there are two types of collectors: one who buys with their eyes meaning it's about the art and the other buys with their ears meaning they hear the buzz, who else is buying, the sound of money. Paul definitely collects with his eyes, and I would say his heart. Collecting gives him great pleasure and satisfaction, but even more it's the experiences and interactions with the people involved that matter as much as the art. Having that interaction with the art, artist, gallery and others, seeing the development over the years and of their friendships, that is what truly matters. The piece of art itself becomes a snapshot that holds Paul's memories over the years; visiting the gallery or

studio, talking with everyone over dinner, learning why the artist made that piece that way, new pieces being made, all building new art memories upon his earliest memories.

It's also about living with the art, many of the pieces in his collection have been with him for 15 years or more. Pieces do not go to storage or circulate on and off the wall, but in full view for all to see and a chance for him to share the art and his memories. After traveling on business for weeks or lifting his head out of spreadsheets, Paul looks at the pieces and thinks about those good times. As Paul says of his collection, giving them a human presence, they are all "good room-mates."



YM Whelan, Untitled, oil on canvas, 70" x 60"



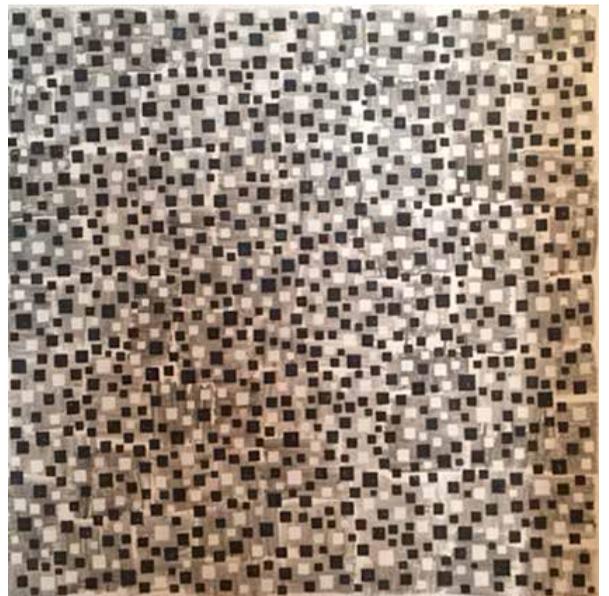
Ric Evans, East Face, 2002, oil on canvas, 24" x 24"



Robert Chandler, Scratched Entry, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18"



From left to right Robert Chandler, Paul Gurtler, Steve Rockwell with YM Whelan in front, photographed at Whelan's Yumart Gallery in Toronto



Tim Deverell, Untitled #2, oil on canvas, 36" x 36"