

Steven Risky in his home. Behind the bar: Nicolas Party, *Front with a Red Hat*, 2017, soft pastel on canvas, (framed) 59 x 39 in., Karma Gallery, New York.



FLIGHTS OF FANCY

Humor inspires collection of Steven Risky and Bart Fassino.

Art is fluid, it's unbound, it's undefinable," states Steven Risky. For him, this is also what makes it exciting. Risky acknowledges that he spends his workdays "making sense of the chaotic world of data." Immersion in the art world offers a welcome antidote. "One of things I love about the art world," he continues, "is that it is so different from my day-to-day world. The people in it have such a different life journey."

With his partner, Bart Fassino, Risky is enjoying the voyage of discovery. It began relatively recently, when Risky's friend and fellow collector Molly Bruder introduced him to her sister, art advisor Anne Bruder. At first Risky echoed the sentiments of many newcomers to the art world, saying, "I was intimidated by it—although intrigued." With Bruder's guidance and at her invitation, the couple went to New York, where they visited a handful of galleries. "When I got to New York, I quickly became a zealot," Risky confesses, adding, "I realized that the world of art was much richer, more profound, and much weightier than I ever imagined."

Since then, the couple have become Dallas Art Fair regulars. Like most collectors, they make several visits to the fair. First they go on their own. "We like the unbiased and unfiltered views," Risky says. On this first run, they generally make a list of what they like, going into it with no quota to meet or specific wall to fill. Then they discuss their list with Bruder. "She's a little bit of a gut check," Risky explains. They particularly appreciate the opportunity to discover young, emerging artists. The imprimatur of the Dallas Art Fair also gives them the confidence that they are buying work within the mainstream of contemporary art trends.

Katherine Bradford, Nick Goss, Marc Horowitz, Tony Matelli, and Nicolas Party are among the artists whose work they have acquired over the past few years of attending the fair. The joy they derive from their collection is matched by the humor engendered in much of the work. For example, says Risky, "We love when people walk into our home who have never seen a Tony Matelli bronze

'weed' and we witness that look on their face when they are trying to decide whether or not to tell us that a plant is growing out of the baseboard in the hallway." In the kitchen, works by Chris Martin and Holly Coulis featuring, respectively, toast and hot dogs, add to the levity found within the collection.

In addition to humor, the couple appreciates art with a slight edge. "I also love people's reaction to our Cary Leibowitz painting, which reads, 'I hate you...I hate me more.' They don't know whether to laugh or cry," says Risky.

Figurative painting is another thread that weaves through much of their collection. For example, Nicolas Party's dapper, shirtless portrait bust, acquired from Karma at a previous Dallas Art Fair, watches over the couple's great room, where it serves as a conversation piece. It faces off with a newly acquired, multfigured painting by André Butzer from last year's TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art.

At this year's Dallas Art Fair, they are looking forward to seeing the offerings from New York-based galleries; CANADA, the artist-run cooperative; and Rachel Uffner Gallery. From CANADA, they anticipate seeing the work of Katherine Bernhardt, an artist they have been following for quite some time.

Closer to home, they are keenly watching the career of Jeff Elrod. "Elrod's paintings are a big acquisition, so we are just waiting for the right time," explains Risky. Though a local artist, Elrod is represented by London-based Simon Lee Gallery, which is returning to this year's fair.

Over the course of the week surrounding the fair, the couple enjoys visiting with gallerists from out-of-town, many of whom have become friends. They especially look forward to the evenings and the one-on-one time with exhibitors over relaxed dinners. During the days, however, they thrive on the palpable energy that the Dallas Art Fair brings to the city. Risky offers an apt analogy, saying, "It's like Christmas is for kids. You don't know what you'll get, but you know it will be awesome." **P**