

Just look: When it comes to art, viewing may be as satisfying as buying

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The experience of purchasing art shares much in common with viewing it in exhibits, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Author Yu Chen (Oakland University) shows that visiting a gallery can provide many of the same benefits as buying a painting.

"The consumption act—that of enjoying the painting—is similar in both modes. The consumption modes—that of either purchasing or viewing art exhibits—provide two different circumstances of consumption: one is through a private, permanent ownership-linked approach; the other is through a public, temporal, and circumstantial approach," Chen explains.

The author found that art collectors and visitors to galleries and museums share many desires and values, including otherness, sociality, philanthropy, spirituality, aesthetics, and novelty. How collectors differ from visitors is in their desire for a long-term intimate relationship with the artworks. Visitors want to avoid repetition and dullness, and like the experience of sharing art communally.

Chen also found that the experiences of both art purchasers and art viewers do not always correspond with their expectations. "This contradiction implies that desire and illusions, more than value and perceptions, are the driving forces behind consumption," writes Chen.

In the study, the author conducted in-depth interviews with 116 people in Paris and Geneva. Collectors were people who accumulated pieces of contemporary artwork without reselling. Visitors were people who visit

art exhibits but never purchase artwork. The author visited art collections and asked questions about what drove collectors to purchase the works.

"The present research challenges the presupposition that possession is the ultimate expression of consumer desire...Access could also provide value of the extended self through the immaterial memories that enrich human sense and life experiences," writes Chen.

More info: Yu Chen. "Possession and Access: Consumer Desires and Value Perceptions Regarding Contemporary Art Collection and Exhibit Visits." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2009.

Source: University of Chicago

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