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UPCOMING SHOWS COAST TO COAST

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One Piece at a Time

One of our favorite Art Consultants reviews Lindsay and Chris Dunham's contemporary photography and painting collection.

By Lauren P. Della Monica



Lindsay Dunham, seated beside two fruit still life pastels by Robert Peterson, began collecting photography in her mid twenties which seemed only natural having grown up as the daughter of avid contemporary art collectors.

Lindsay and Chris Dunham have spent the past eight years buying works of contemporary photography at auction, art shows and through a trusted dealer and have been refining their taste and their selections along the way. They have created a collection of contemporary photography and paintings that perfectly suits their New York City apartment and reflects who they are as a couple and as individuals.

Lindsay's first important purchase came at Christie's auction house in New York a number of years ago. While attending a photography sale preview she saw a Tina Barney photograph of three perfectly coiffed young boys, decked out in brass-buttoned blue blazers, grinning for the camera, and she immediately left a bid with the auction house. She soon found herself the proud owner of Barney's *The Boys* (see opposite page). Though a few years later she still sees the witty comedy in the photograph (and recognizes the irony that she now has boys of her own, husband, Chris, and young sons Wyatt and Miles) she finds the image harder to live with than she realized when she purchased the piece. "You have to actually live with these people that you don't know," laughs Dunham, pointing out that this photograph is now hanging in the kitchen of their New York apartment rather than the more formal rooms.

In addition to determining which works of art are harder to live with, Lindsay and Chris are also refining what art they do choose to hang in their living spaces. For example, a favorite artist of these collectors is Mark Citret, a California-based photographer. Five of his black and white photographs grace the walls of the Dunham's Upper East Side apartment. The couple placed a few of the photographs in their bedroom as they find them soothing and pleasing in a living space. "Mark is the kind



Dunham's first auction purchase, Tina Barney's large-format color photograph *The Boys*, hangs in the family's kitchen.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON PENNEY



The couple purchased *Johnny Cash's Boyhood Home, Dyess, Arkansas* from Alec Soth's *Sleeping by the Mississippi* photography book as their anniversary gift to one another this year. It now serves as the focal point of their dining/family room.

of artist people should buy to start a collection. His work is affordable and really good," says Dunham. Lindsay relayed how she and Chris recently acquired a photograph of a little red-headed boy by photographer Loretta Lux. The Dunhams had to be patient as the photograph had already been sold. Dealer Yossi Milo had his work cut out for him. "I told Yossi that if the red-headed boy

ever comes back that's what I want," says Dunham. Ultimately the Dunhams successfully bought the piece as their anniversary gift to each other this year.

Loretta Lux's carefully staged portraits, like Dunham's *Study of a Boy 2* shown on page 54, are composites of various children rather than portraits of any real child and the technique used to create them has been the

subject of much popular speculation. Dunham points out that just because something gets attention in the press or with critics that does not mean it will be price prohibitive. She recommends that people follow through when they see something they like, as they, too, might actually be able to buy that which they first saw and loved in print.



Judy Pfaff's player piano roll painting entitled *Let Me Call You Sweetheart* anchors the formal living space of the apartment, flanked by black and white photographs and pastels. Pfaff's piece appealed to both collectors immediately upon seeing it at a New York art fair. They found the perfect home for it that very day.

Though they come at art collecting from different perspectives, the Dunhams have forged a collection of artwork with which they both enjoy living. Lindsay describes her aesthetic as contemporary, but because she grew up surrounded by very contemporary art in her parents' collection she says she tends to like things a little more on the traditional side. "Chris usually doesn't like

traditional art. He is edgier than I am," when it comes to art, Lindsay remarks. But on some pieces the two agree. After seeing the work of photographer Alec Soth at The Museum of Modern Art in New York the Dunhams went to see the dealer who represents Soth in New York, and saw a variety of works by the artist. The couple chose a large format color photograph of a

desolate southern landscape with a ramshackle old house in the center. "My husband is obsessed with Johnny Cash so this was our compromise," Lindsay says of their decision to purchase Soth's *Johnny Cash's Boyhood Home, Dyess, Arkansas*.

Dunham credits the good relationship she and her husband have developed with trusted dealer Yossi Milo for guiding their



The juxtaposition of Loretta Lux's *Study of a Boy 2* and Martina Mullaney's *Untitled* add an element of youth and urban sensibility into the pre-war apartment's classic architecture.



Hiro Yokose's contemporary take on a classic landscape painting graces the living room mantelpiece. The artist used a mix of oil and wax on linen to create an ethereal, blurred view of a landscape suffused with gentle light.

collection. "When he sees something he thinks we might like he calls us and we go down to the gallery on the weekend and look at it. We have bought a number of things that he has discovered." Also featured in their collection, and purchased through Yossi Milo Gallery, are an untitled photograph by Martina Mullaney from her series entitled *Turn In* depicting beds in night shelters and an Eirik Johnson c-print from his *Borderlands* series showing a seaside cliff with the remains of an architectural element washed up on the shore. Even if you aren't buying high price tag art, Dunham recommends finding a dealer or gallery that you trust and asking them to see what they have in inventory in your price range. That way, she says, you will often find something you can afford and that you like but would not have found on your own.

Though the couple are often drawn to the same works of art it tends to be for very different reasons. The Dunhams found something they both admired in the work of Judy Pfaff at a recent art fair. Pfaff transformed an old piano player roll, covered

in the cutouts for the notes of a song, into a delicate scroll-like painting on paper entitled *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*. Each found something appealing about the work: Lindsay liked the antique aspect of the piano roll while her husband liked that the finished picture looked non-traditional. Hiro Yokose's oil and wax painting also became part of the Dunhams growing collection after a trip to an art fair. Once again, the work resonates with each of the Dunhams for different reasons: for Lindsay it was the visual reference to traditional Hudson River School landscape paintings and for Chris it was the waxy surface of the painting that lent it a cutting-edge sensibility.

Growing up the daughter of contemporary art collectors a few lessons have inevitably been passed down to Lindsay Dunham, along with some nice works of art. Together with her husband, Lindsay has developed her own concept of what art she wants to live with and she has taken an active role in acquiring it and defining it. When asked what she and Chris will do when the walls become too full to add more art to their

apartment, Dunham says "We will definitely keep buying. There are things you grow tired of as you live with them and those things will get transitioned out into storage. Maybe we will rediscover them at a later date. But we will definitely keep buying." ●



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