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Lëtzebuenger Land

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Accompanying Collectors

by France Clarinval

Recently settled in Luxembourg, Sharon Zoldan advises art lovers on how to build their collections. A Profile.

(Translated from French)

It is not an art gallery, but art surrounds us. As we enter, we are greeted by an installation of hundreds of birds printed on vellum. The pages rise slightly as we pass, like the wings of birds. This piece, by Turkish artist Sena Başöz, is inspired by a doleful Forough Farrokhzad poem that likens Iranian women to caged birds. Adjacent, a prominent painting of dancers by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye (whose Tate exhibition was recently featured at Mudam) is in dialogue with dancers from another era: a drawing by Degas. Further down, in the office, a large felt sculpture by Robert Morris hangs on the wall, complemented by an intimate straw marquetry by Brognon Rollin. These works function "as an extension of the collection" of



Sharón Zoldan and her husband. "I can't imagine working without being surrounded by beautiful objects, even if my job doesn't necessarily require an office," she says. A little less than a year ago, her company SZ | Advisory opened its offices in the heart of Luxembourg's old city center, and the art advisor uses her space to showcase what she does for a living, as a curator of private art collections.

Sharón Zoldan has been developing her advisory for the past decade, first in her hometown of Los Angeles, and now in Luxembourg, her husband's native country. A graduate in Art History, Italian, and Spanish from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), she first fell in love with the Italian Renaissance, which led her to Florence: "a holistic experience." She then worked for Christie's auction house, before joining the Hammer Museum (adjacent to her university), where she suddenly understood "the bridges between Contemporary Art and Old Masters." Sharón Zoldan considers her training to be a solid foundation in "understanding what is happening in today's art market, without losing sight of a personal intuition." Although they were not collectors, her parents, Israeli immigrants, opened her up to creativity and an aesthetic sensibility. "My mother regularly took us to museums and encouraged us to draw. My father was a designer, so I always saw him working with his hands." Her choice of career stemmed from a desire to be in a creative field, while "earning enough to be free and independent."

"When you work in a museum, you don't often see the fruits of your labor until several months or even several years later. I wanted to do things faster." This led the consultant to pivot toward working with several galleries, where she discovered the world of art fairs and exhibitions, visited artists' studios, and met collectors. "I was able to cultivate a network of supportive clients, but, most importantly, clients who were eager to learn." Sharón Zoldan appreciates working with people who are just at the beginning of their art education, "because they are quite open and receptive to discussion and advice." She regards her approach as a partnership alongside clientele - to develop a vision of a collection "and to follow a path of discovery together." She travels with certain clients to guide them through fairs, auctions, and, sometimes, goes as far as giving them lessons in Art History or specific techniques. Her early clients were friends and friends-of-friends. She recalls her first sale, "a close friend came to her to help her beau: he had nothing on his walls, and no background in buying art. We spoke in depth about his interests, and I offered him works that spoke to them, and once he was convinced by my insight, I was able to secure him a stellar piece by an LA-based artist." She will reveal any more for the sake of discretion, but in that moment, she recognized her potential as an art advisor. Gradually, she made a name for herself and expanded her network by putting on exhibitions and spearheading charity events for nonprofits. "I grew into my profession along with my clients: starting off young, looking out for what young people could appreciate and collect."

Typically, the advisor receives a commission on sales, on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes she negotiates a fee for a larger project, such as a corporate collection. On occasion, she also makes a point to advise young artists - to give them insight into the business and teach them how to sell themselves and how to approach galleries, "something that is not necessarily

taught in art schools, even in the U.S." She then works to place their pieces in collections or organize commissions.

For Sharón, the most exciting part is the artists' studio. She loves seeing artists in their element, which allows you to delve into their creative process. But that's not enough to be a consultant: "I do the research and read everything I can find about the artists I'm interested in – their background, their technique, their contemporaries, significant exhibitions, press mentions, auction results, pricing, availability... I have to be the one who knows more than anyone in the room, that's what I'm paid for!" Regular conversations with her collectors allow her to understand their aspirations, their style, and their budget. These are all carefully considered to prepare visual presentations paired with market insight, allowing for these strategic dialogues to be the best possible opportunity to understand the works. "We have to come to terms with the fact that more and more works are being bought sight-unseen, because sales move so quickly and travel is not always possible." It is this urgency, the fast pace, and current surging market prices that really make the work of a consultant more valuable, as their networks give clients privileged access to sellers and protect clients from the inevitable avalanche of other (less interesting) sales proposals. "A steadfast knowledge of the market provides for access to the best pieces." Presenting the works with investment value is part of the advisor's approach, which proves to be a sensible strategy for those from the financial sector "If this aspect is not taken into account, I am no more than a decorator, who finds a painting to complement the sofa. I get paid, *because* I study the market."

— "Luxembourg may not have the lure of a larger metropolis, but there are a lot of people passing through and it has plenty of financial means." —

Sharón Zoldan spends a substantial part of her time keeping constant watch over the artists and the market: newsletters, press releases, publications, visits to art fairs, museums exhibitions, private collections, artist studios... "You have to establish relationships with artists early on, as well, before galleries close certain doors." Social networks have become important for discovering talent: "Instagram is a good visual resource to get a sense of what's going on at an art fair in Mexico or a studio in Berlin," she believes. The tedious part is sorting through all these sources and offerings. "My mission is to filter and advise on only what has staying power, what will make history, and what will go into a museum. Even if a client is attracted to trendier works, I have to show them other options." With this passionate work ethic, Sharón Zoldan has people talking about her, and this word-of-mouth momentum is bringing her clients. She shares the story of meeting one of her clients, a fierce, young businessman. He was visiting London during Frieze, and she convinced him to visit the art fair. "He gave me 45 minutes. As I had already cherry-picked the interesting highlights, we did a quick walkthrough. He was convinced. He bought his first work, a magnificent piece, for \$350,000." Her arrival in Luxembourg gives the art advisor the opportunity to expand her portfolio of clients and artists. While she has already had the opportunity to buy for clients in Luxembourg, she regrets that the local culture is somewhat more reserved. "In the United States in general and Los Angeles in particular, collectors are proud to share what they have. It's inspiring for others and it creates emulation. I get the sense that there is still room here for collectors to support creativity and

dialogue." With this in mind, SZ | Advisory wants to organize small exhibitions, meetings with artists, conversations between (future) collectors, exchanges with international galleries or auction houses, and thus build a program that complements the local ecosystem. "Luxembourg is not a big city, but there are a lot of resources and a tight-knit community here, which are the perfect circumstances to foster support for art."

(Original article written in French below)

