



HEATHER GAUDIO

FEMME DE FINE ARTS

THOUGH THERE HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN PREEMINENT FEMALE ARBITERS OF ART - THINK PEGGY GUGGENHEIM OR GERTRUDE STEIN - AND GREAT AND FAMOUS FEMALE ARTISTS - SUCH AS HELEN FRANKENTHALER AND MARY CASSATT - THESE WOMEN HAVE BEEN THE EXCEPTION IN A MALE DOMINATED INDUSTRY. THE REALITY IS THAT **WOMEN-IN-THE-BUSINESS-OF-ART** IS MOSTLY A PHENOMENON OF THE LAST QUARTER-CENTURY.

Heather Gaudio runs Heather Gaudio Fine Art, the gallery located on the prime downtown corner of Elm Street and South Avenue in New Canaan. She's a prominent and respected 'femme de fine arts' and a successful woman-in-business, but Heather Gaudio Fine Art is actually a team of women that includes Managing Director Christine Romaniello, Director Rachael Palacios, Registrar Jennifer Burbank and Digital Media Associate Sophia Ziotas. The gallery features investment-quality modern and contemporary art, with a focus on paintings, works on paper, sculpture, photography, and other textural work. Their roster includes a predominant selection of established and emerging female artists. The elegant storefront is just the tip of the iceberg, as they also offer fine art advisory and acquisition services.

"OUR GALLERY IS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF COLLECTING ART..."

we welcome everyone including kids and dogs!" invites Heather. "The team is all about being approachable – acquiring art should be a fun process, not confusing, rigid, or unfriendly. We recognize that even coming into our gallery, no less asking about buying art, can be intimidating for many...and we mean to make for a comfortable and enjoyable experience. We greet everyone with a friendly 'hello', never leaving a customer to wander around worrying about what to ask. We have artworks at various price points and whether you're a first-time buyer or building an esteemed collection, our primary objective is to understand and satisfy each client. Our best advertisement is word-of-mouth referral."

Heather explains, "I get that there are people who don't know what they like when it comes to art, and really just want some advice on selecting art that will work, which may simply be driven by considerations such as color, size or price. There are also plenty of people who know just what they like, but need help identifying particular artists or artwork, or finding available work by artists they already know. Some just prefer for us to do all the leg work with the process of acquisition. We want to be the gallery for all these purposes. But we also have the expertise to advise the most sophisticated collector with respect to art, artist, and investment. We're proud to play a part in curating a vast number of investment-quality collections."



The gallerist's affinity with the world of art did not emerge in a vacuum. "One of my grandfathers was an oil executive and the other was a physician, and received his BFA in sculpture, but both were coincidentally regionally-respected fine artists. I grew up working in their art studios...so maybe I should give them credit for my earliest appreciation of art. But it was also the encouragement and influence of my strong grandmothers, who were both well-traveled, educated and art collectors. And my mother's constant support also got me focused on culture and the arts. I spent a year in Italy in college and studied at the fine arts academy Scuola Lorenzo de Medici in Florence. I took my first real drawing class *in Donatello's studio*, and traveled around getting to see the great museums of Europe. It was life changing for me!", Heather recalls fondly. "...Although a big part of what I learned was that I was better at critiquing art than creating it! I was not the one kept up at night with the compulsion to create. I was the one arriving at the studio first thing in the morning to evaluate what other artists had done. When I graduated with a major in Fine Art from the College of Santa Fe in New Mexico, I knew the art business was my destiny... even though my father, a stockbroker, said it was 'the most impractical idea of all time'."

Heather devoted the next fifteen years to studying modern and contemporary art and learning about the business of buying and selling fine art. She started out working for the Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe, and eventually moved to New York City and became an Associate Director at Forum Gallery. She learned how to curate and talk about art in terms people could understand, building a following of loyal clients. Over time she developed a personal aesthetic, favoring artists with a delicate hand and a particular craft.



The business owner smiles wryly recalling how she started HGFA, saying “My husband and I moved to Fairfield in 2008 with three young children. With the financial market collapsing shortly thereafter, the timing for a high-end art business couldn’t have been worse. And I always needed to balance work with being mom to what are now my 21, 16, 14, and 8 year-old kids. I did some private advising and had a client with a Warhol Flowers screen print with some original painting on it in the original plexi frame, which was not easily categorized or valued. I spent two years sleuthing that Warhol to give it context and speaking with the Warhol Foundation to get it authenticated...We ultimately consigned it with a full marketing package to Sotheby’s, where the work, which had originally been acquired for \$3,000, sold for \$135,000!”



Heather also connected with some of the female artists at Silvermine and was hired-on as a part-time consultant to enhance their sales and streamline their inventory organization. Heather was starting to get calls from old clients, consulting on purchases for those bold enough to be investing in the years following the economic crash. It took a leap of faith to open her first gallery in 2011, in a small space on South Avenue. Then Christine, recently graduated from college with a degree in Art History, came on board as an Intern. And then Rachael, whose experience included Hirschl & Adler and Sotheby’s and an MA in Art History, followed by Jennifer from Sperone Westwater, adding her MFA in Fine Arts expertise to the mix. Sophia’s knowledge of digital media is a recent addition that extends the gallery’s reach online. “As our collective knowledge bonded and grew, so did our business. Christine started as a recent graduate and today is the Managing Director, taking care of all aspects of the business – as well as keeping us all in line! We all work in a collaborative fashion and rely on each other’s strengths. I do believe this kind of synergy is unique to an all-women business. Although, I do have to add, that our magnificent Preparator, Bob Schwartz, who is also an artist and Conservator, is the most feminist of us all!”

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In 2015, when Sally Kaltman, the owner Sallea Antiques on the corner of Elm and South decided she was going to retire after 40 years in business, she reached out to Heather to ensure that the prized location would go to another female-owned enterprise. “Of course, it was another giant leap of faith, but we jumped at the opportunity,” Heather states. Since then, the gallery has built a strong business and represents a diverse collection of artists from all over the world. To date, they have curated over 60 exhibitions and have participated in over 10 art fairs, nationally and internationally. “We favor artwork that we consider to be ‘well executed’ and are proud to show a wide variety of art that is created in meaningfully different ways. We love working with artists who use very different techniques. Most of the work we represent is ‘process-based’, which means the artists use common materials to create uncommonly beautiful objects,” Heather explains. “You can see this type of methodology in Jessica Drenk’s work, where she uses wax and books to make carvings that look like feathers. Or Martin Kline’s, who uses a brush to apply encaustic, a wax-based paint, to build texture into the surface of his paintings, and then often casts the actual painting into bronze or stainless-steel sculptures. Other artists push the boundaries of the materials, such as Jae Ko who combines traditional Sumi inks with adding machine paper to create stunning sculptures and installations. Kathleen Jacobs wraps canvases on tree trunks, rubbing and applying paint over a period of months, making a record of not only the bark markings but the outdoor elements as well. Upcoming exhibitions at the gallery will include works by Valéria Nascimento and Lucas

Ferreira who work in porcelain ceramic, and paintings by British artist Ian McKeever.”

During the quieter months of the pandemic, when it became clear that participating in art fairs would need to be shelved for the time being, the gallery opened a ‘PROJECTS Space’, a couple of doors up the street on Elm. “PROJECTS is a great bonus space to show select works and hold condensed exhibitions. We began last year with a stunning show of Richard Serra prints which was amazing. The sales were brisk! We have a great relationship with his publisher, which speaks to the reach of our team. Currently we are exhibiting prints by Argentine artist Analía Saban, and after that we will feature paintings and a site-specific installation by Aaron Wexler.”

“We don’t approach things in business with being women as our mindset, but it probably does inform and explain some of our ethos. Coming up in the business, every boss I had, and every boss’s boss, was a man. Women served as ‘gallerinas’, supposed to ‘grace’ the sales floor in order to entertain the customers. ...At HGFA, we cherish the shared experience we’ve had growing our business in our local community and with our international clientele, and we’re honored to serve as role models for other women in business. We advocate being true to your vision, no matter how unconventional it may be, and we encourage the young women we mentor to do so boldly! We like to say young women should be directed to build STEAM, rather than just go into STEM, with the ‘Arts’ seeming to be natural for what has long been considered a male dominated field.”

