

Tips

## 6 Tips for Fighting Gender Inequality While Starting Your Own Art Collection

London-based philanthropist Valeria Napoleone explains why time, an aesthetic focus, and a reliable network are indispensable resources for any aspiring art collector.

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January 3, 2017, 7:25am [f](#) [t](#) [s](#)



LEFT: KATHRYN ANDREWS, UNTITLED (CLOWN CABINET), 2011, CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS (AND OUTFIT OF VALERIA) BY JULIE VERHOEVEN, RIGHT: ELLA KRUGLYANSKAYA, NEGATIVE VIBES, 2013

The artists represented on the fresh white walls of Italian-born philanthropist Valeria Napoleone's West London home are, with very few exceptions, [female](#). Under Napoleone's studied eye—she received a masters in art gallery administration from FIT in New York—and their own accidental kinships, the pieces form a [curated cult of the female](#), disguised as a private art collection. Arched bay windows punctuate paintings by Elaine Lustig Cohen and Julia Wachtel; on marble-topped coffee tables stand sculptures from Nicole Wermers and Francis Upritchard and ceramics from Shio Kusaka; and in dark corners shine [projections of the Guerrilla Girls](#) and video art from Monica Bonvicini.

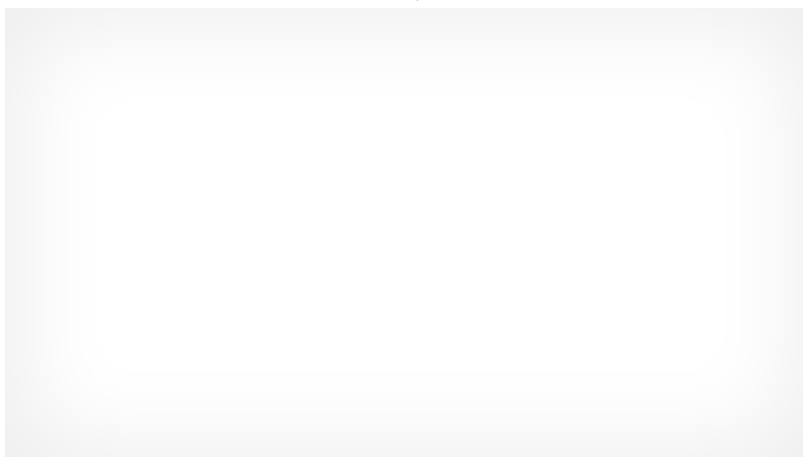


SCULPTURE: IDA EKBLAD, GAME, 2010, WALL PAINTING: LILY VAN DER STOKKER, 100% STUPID, 1991, VASES BY GAETANO PESCE

Napoleone's collection is the happy result of a concerted defiance of persistent, unequal representation in the art market. Since she began collecting in 1997, Napoleone has shown that art collection, however private, is political. Napoleone also heads the Development Committee at Studio Voltaire, a gallery championing emerging and underrepresented artists in London, and is the founder of the two prong initiative, Valeria Napoleone XX SculptureCenter and Valeria Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society, both of which hope to push major arts institutions to take real steps towards fighting the inequality of representation in their hallowed halls.

But it is the latest example of Napoleone's efforts towards art market equality that, quite literally, represents the public life of her private collection. *Going Public: The Napoleone Collection*, a two-part travelling exhibition from the Museums Sheffield, started last July and continues until March of this year. The show is a best-of from Napoleone's decades of female-focused purchases.

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LEFT TO RIGHT: RIVANE NEUENSCHWANDER, UNTITLED, 1999, JULIE VERHOEVEN, COMFORT BLANKET, 2015, ANNE IMHOF, OCEAN IX, 2015, ANNA FASSHAUER, OHNE TITEL, 2013, SHARON HAYES, AN EAR TO THE SOUNDS OF OUR HISTORY (ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE), 2012, FRANCIS UPRITCHARD, WARM TABLE, 2011

### **Don't just collect, critique.**

"I do not think that all-women shows are particularly important unless they are great shows, as applies to everything," says Napoleone. "The danger is that they are becoming 'trendy' and a fashionable way of ticking the box for political correctness, without doing much. What is needed is critical discourse and analysis on the practices of women artists, which has been absent, to position them in art history."

### **Art market inequality is a many-headed hydra.**

"Women artists are not trusted by the market, as they may become mothers and may slow down the production or interrupt it for a period," Napoleone tells The Creators Project. "This does not agree with the fast pace of consumption and speculation that drives the market. It is particularly reflected in the discrepancy between auction prices and gallery prices, specifically evident for works by female artists."



LEFT: KATHRYN ANDREWS, UNTITLED (CLOWN CABINET), 2011, FRANCES STARK: THE INCHOATE INCARNATE: AFTER A DRAWING, TOWARD AN OPERA, BUT BEFORE A LIBRETTO EVEN EXISTS, 2009

"Age comes also into the equation," Napoleone explains. "The prices of very young 'hot' artists, predominantly white male in their 20s and 30s, have been pushed alongside super established names. Women are left out in both. [This is] very evident at auctions. I see many artists, mostly female, in their mid 40s and 50s, being ignored. They are not considered so 'hot' and young anymore to be the latest discovery, and/or old enough to be rediscovered. A 'middle career crisis.' These are incredibly talented people who have been solidly working and building a practice for decades. Yet their gallery prices very often much lower than those of newcomers. I often tease my friends, 'don't worry just wait 20 more years and you will get your chance.'"

"Race certainly comes to play a role as well. Lubaina Himid is an African artist part of the Black Art movement of the 1980s. Only now her work is finally getting the credits and attention it deserves. Still, of that group she is the only one experiencing this interest. Just one example. For black women artists it has been even more arduous."



LEFT: PAMELA FRASER, COLOMBO, 2000, SCULPTURE: MAGALI REUS, IN PLACE OF (SUNDRIES), 2015. (2 PARTS OF A 3 PART INSTALLATION), PAINTING RIGHT: JENNIFER PACKER, NO MIND FOR YEARNING, 2015, CHANDELIER: PAE WHITE, SUNSHINE CHANDELIER, 2006 © MARIONA OTERO

### **Digital art is testing traditional art collectors.**

Admits Napoleone, "I do not [collect digital art] now. I see it as very problematic. I see art through traditional lenses, certain experiences are necessary for me in art, I am not ready to give them up yet, unless and until artists are able to find worthwhile replacements. I cannot say what I will collect in the future especially in terms of media, as art has the privilege to take you in uncharted territories. If I see talent and integrity, I could and would consider."

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