

art media agency

Art magazine



376

art
media
agency

Art magazine

PASSIONATE ABOUT ART?
SUBSCRIBE TO AMA.

It's free!

subscribe.artmediaagency.com



JOINTS

Joyride (2024), Hollis Heichemer

Courtesy Hollis Taggart

SUPPORTING THE VOID

Renowned art dealer Hollis Taggart and influential collector Evan Chow open up about their passion for abstract art.

Discussions about the abstract art market invariably centre one thing: return on investment. Consider the endless stream of market reports touted in the art media that focus exclusively on sales numbers. Or platforms like Artsignal, backed by Christie's Ventures, the investment arm of Christie's auction house. Artsignal has one purpose: to use AI to scrub the Internet to create a report telling potential buyers whether the artist whose work they are considering buying is a good or bad economic investment. Such ventures, and the stories reporters write about them, paint a picture of an art market that exists solely to encourage superficiality and greed. But in reality, most art sellers and buyers have little interest in whether the art they sell or buy will be worth more money one day. They understand that the market they are supporting has a much bigger role to play in the culture. Especially in the realm of abstract art, most key market players are in the space because of something deep, intellectual and connected to spirit.

Art dealer Hollis Taggart has a reputation as one of New York's key supporters of contemporary abstract art. But abstraction was not always Taggart's focus. "My gallery originally specialised in 19th and early 20th century American art — Hudson River landscapes, impressionism, still life, genre paintings, Taggart says. Over time we moved forward chronologically in what we began to exhibit, beginning with American modernism — O'Keeffe, Hartley, Dove, etc. — and little by little, we began to examine the bridges from modernism to abstraction."

An exhibition the gallery organised in 2007 called "Pathways and parallels" solidified Taggart's decision to focus his programme on Abstract expressionism — along with contemporary artists who are pushing the concerns of abstraction forward. That decision was not based on economics. It was rooted in what Taggart saw as abstract art's ability to express emotion in a way that viewers can connect with quickly. "The essence of art is communication from the artist to the viewer, Taggart explains. The reason abstraction evolved as an art form is so that artists could express and communicate from a deeper personal level. For me, I am less analytical when assessing abstract works; I approach it more from a feeling level and how the work emotes a mood or feeling. So it is more emotional than intellectual for me. To the extent that the viewer feels the same emotions or mood that the artist felt when making the work, that to me is the measure of how successful the work is."



Evan Chow
Courtesy Evan Chow

2 questions to... *Evan Chow*

Evan Chow collects abstract art.

Why do you think abstract art, and in particular minimalist art, is growing in importance and popularity right now to international contemporary audiences?

The world feels very full at the moment, full of images, information and opinions. Everything moves quickly and there is always something new demanding our attention. In that kind of environment, I think people are drawn to abstraction and Minimalism because they offer a sense of quiet and balance. They remind us that clarity and proportion can still exist, that structure can hold steady even when things around us feel uncertain. Laozi (Chinese philosopher and writer, typically considered as the founder of Taoism) wrote that fullness and void complete each other, that what is empty gives form to what is whole. I often think about that when I look at abstraction. Emptiness is not about the lack of something, it is about the space that allows something essential to appear. Minimalism carries that same idea, it takes away distraction so we can notice what really matters, the relationships between things, the rhythm in simplicity. Abstraction also reflects the way the world feels right now, complex, fast, sometimes overwhelming. It gives us another way to respond to that reality. There is a quiet discipline in how these works are made, a logic that appeals to me. It is a kind of beauty built on proportion and balance, where every line and rhythm has a purpose. Maybe that is why abstraction feels so relevant today. It does not try to explain the world... it helps us face it, with focus and intent.

What differences do you see between the kind of interior experience a person might have with an abstract artwork versus that they might have with a figurative or representational artwork?

Figurative works often invite you into their world. They give you something to recognise. A face, a gesture, a narrative and you instinctively start to place yourself within it. That can be powerful, but it also shifts the atmosphere of a space. A friend once told me he avoids tribal art because he feels the figures are looking at him. I understand that feeling. Representational art can hold a strong presence and it often carries context. It reflects the world as it was, its time, its culture, its stories; and that gives it a certain gravity. But that weight can also define a room and direct how we experience the space around it. It commands attention and sometimes fills a room completely. Abstraction moves differently. At first, people might see it as something decorative, but I think its quietness is what makes it powerful. It integrates rather than competes. It becomes part of the architecture, part of the rhythm of a room. In that sense, it supports rather than dominates, creating balance and openness. I also find that abstraction changes with time. The light, your mood, even the season can alter how you see it. There is no fixed point of meaning. Instead it creates a sense of ease, a calm that invites reflection. It becomes a place for the mind to rest, a soft space within a world that rarely pauses.

Art collector Evan Chow would agree. "For me, collecting is not about accumulation, Chow says, but about engaging with ideas that refine how we see and think." Chow admittedly knows a thing or two about accumulation and wealth. He was raised in a prominent Hong Kong banking family. His earliest exposure to art was through his grandparents' collection of antiques, ceramics and Chinese ink paintings and drawings. It was not, however, the commercial value of such objects that attracted him, it was their ability to open his mind and senses to bigger and more profound ideas. Over time, like Taggart, Chow's tastes evolved more towards abstraction and, in particular, Minimalist art. His personal collection includes prominent historical artists like Donald Judd, as well as living artists like Yayoi Kusama, South Korean artist Lee Bae and German artist Tomma Abts.

"Donald Judd's works have always stood out to me for their logic and precision, Chow says. They reveal how clarity and discipline can become forms of expression in themselves. There is a rigour in his structures that reshapes how one perceives space. Not just as something static, but as a field of proportion, rhythm and relation. It is less about what it represents, and more about what it makes possible, what could be a different way of looking. The sense of quiet conviction is also something I find in Lee Bae's practice. His use of charcoal, made by his own hands, echoes the cycles described in the Dao De Jing (*The book of the way*

and its virtue): life and death, presence and absence, fullness and void. The material begins as something brittle and charred, yet he turns it into something luminous and enduring. There is a quiet authority in that gesture, a sense of renewal that feels both spiritual and grounded.”

More than a pretty picture

Taggart has built his programme primarily on a foundation of scholarship. Over his 45 years in the art business, those who attend exhibitions at his gallery have learned they can expect much more than just a glass of wine and something interesting to look at — they will also learn something significant about whatever is on view. Taggart’s hallmarks include producing museum quality catalogues with authoritative storytelling for his exhibitions and even borrowing not-for-sale works from museums

possible the historical background of the works he shows, revealing his own passion for the story of how Western Abstraction, in particular, evolved. “When you look at the history of art and how figurative and representational art gradually morphed into abstraction, you can see a thread that underlies this transition in art movements, from hard-edge works, to softer impressionism, to modernism in the 1920s and 1930s, to the eventual breaking away from representation, Taggart says. Already as early as 1910, you have Kandinsky and Arthur Dove in [the] USA, and others, beginning to experiment with colour and inner emotions to express feelings into their works. The full-blown explosion of abstract expressionism was the response to the times, with reactions to post WW2, when artists began to look within vs. painting what they saw on the outside, to express more deeply how they felt vs. what they saw.”

darkness, order and uncertainty. Stillness and movement can exist side by side. Perhaps that is what abstraction ultimately offers, a space where opposites coexist and remain open for a quiet search.”

Chow especially responds to artworks that have a history of being exhibited to large audiences, in part because they carry some echo of the emotional experiences those people had with the them. “The works I live with have taken their own journey, he says, having once been part of the New Museum Triennial and the Tate’s Turner Prize exhibition. That history adds a quiet richness to living with them. I like knowing they have been seen and appreciated by visitors who travel to experience art. These works carry not only the artist’s process but also the collective curiosity of those who have stood before them and cared deeply for them.”

“The essence of art is the exchange between artist and viewer. When faced with an abstract work, I am less analytical: I approach it through feeling, through the mood it evokes. For me, emotion takes precedence over intellect. — *Hollis Taggart*

to include in shows, simply to add context. Why give up precious gallery real estate for works that cannot be sold? Why spend thousands of dollars to produce scholarly publications to give away? Taggart hinted at his reasons 25 years ago in an interview in *The Art Newspaper*, explaining, “Serious collectors want more of a relationship with a painting, certainly more than simply a pretty picture can deliver.”

Taggart makes it an essential part of his mission to share as much as

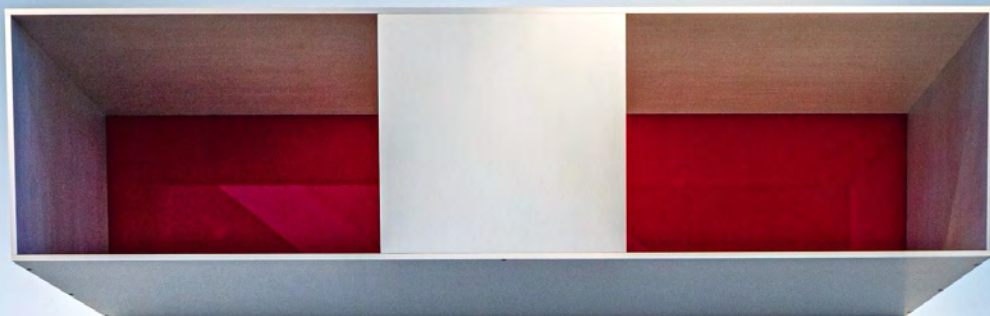
Chow is absolutely one of those serious collectors Taggart describes, who want more than what a pretty picture can deliver. Chow looks for artworks that have the capacity to nurture his mind and his feelings over a lifetime, regardless of what else is happening in the world. “What draws me to [the artists I collect] is how their approaches converge, even in difference, Chow says. Each engages abstraction as a way to think, to test how far form materials and process can be pushed. From their work, I see how the artists balance light and

“Great abstract works provoke an authentic chord inside the viewer, Taggart says. The true artist is painting from his or her soul. This is personal to the artist and cannot be copied externally. The gift of abstract art is to stir the soul, to enliven a feeling, a memory, or a deeper appreciation within oneself. All kinds of art can provide this experience — a beautiful sunset landscape by Frederick Church can evoke emotions as well. Abstraction is just another means to stir a deeper level of feeling in the viewer.”



Hollis Taggart
Courtesy Hollis Taggart





Untitled (1991), Donald Judd

Courtesy Evan Chow