

# COOL AND COLLECTED

By ELIZABETH BOND

Photography by CASEY DUNN AND JONATHAN JACKSON



DIALOGUE - MEDITATION ON FORM, ROI JAMES

Two paintings stretching 11 feet wide oppose each other on the first floor of The Austonian, the tallest residential building in Texas. Together, the pair of oil-on-canvas paintings by artist Roi James is called *Dialogue — Meditation on Form*, and while they don't mirror one another they do work together to create a very particular tension.

Each time they exit or enter, residents of the gleaming 55-floor luxury condo tower in downtown Austin can catch a glimpse of James' coupling of realism vs. abstraction — as well as nearly 100 other works of art hanging throughout The Austonian. Each and every piece in the building's shared spaces is there thanks to San Antonio art consultant Karen Calvert, who chatted with Urban Home about her year-and-a-half process of assembling the collection now displayed in the lobby, the 10th-floor pool level, the 55th floor and residential floors. She also shared her advice for would-be collectors who want to fill their homes with art.

"Every collection is totally different. I don't have any kind of

inventory and I specialize in whatever you need me to specialize in," Calvert said of her 31 years of work for both private and corporate customers. For The Austonian, she amassed pieces by artists who are also found in local galleries and in the permanent collections of highly regarded museums, cultural institutions and corporate collections throughout the country.

"I approach it the way some interior designers and architects do, by getting to know the client," she said. "I ask, 'Do you have a budget or a theme in mind?' Based on that, I spend time thinking about what might work, thinking about artists and calling dealers. It's constant resourcing."

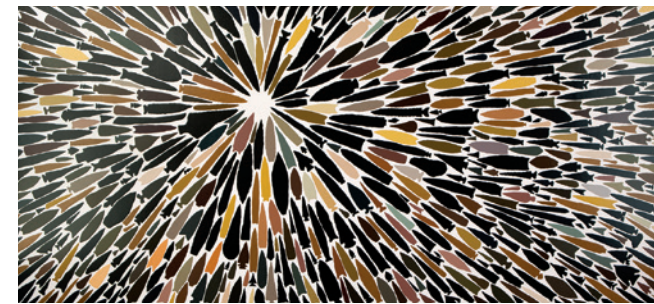
She's found that in ensuing consultations, showing is more effective than telling. That's because it can be difficult for some clients to accurately put into words the genre and feeling they have in mind. So she brings images of her suggested pieces.

"Many do not have the language or vocabulary to describe what they're thinking, so it almost becomes an art history lesson," she said.

At that point, determining an aesthetic happens pretty quickly. At The Austonian, the development and design team decided to concentrate on Austin artists with some from elsewhere in Texas to show support for the local arts



DUNN



TOP: TEXAS WILDFLOWERS, CLAUDIA REESE

BELOW: BLACK MOON CACHE, FAITH GAY

community. Because it's a contemporary building, it made sense to select contemporary art.

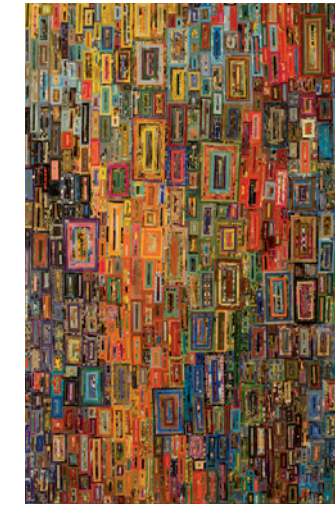
"That doesn't mean 'weird and crazy' or 'my kid could do that'," Calvert is quick to point out. "'Contemporary' first and foremost means the artists are alive. They work in a variety of styles, some traditional and some abstract or conceptual."

So how could her process translate into a personally prized art collection in your own home? Calvert says it all starts with discerning your own taste by taking a look around.

"Go to galleries and museums," she advised. "Don't get intimidated or feel pressured that you have to go buy anything. It's really a self-education. Get on mailing lists for galleries' exhibitions."

While more serious collectors have a focus, such as a period or style or a particular artist or media, most people buying art for their homes simply buy what they like. Maybe you like abstract collages such as those in The Austonian by Lance Letscher or handcolored photographs like Kate Breakey's. Whatever it is, embrace the visual work that most catches your eye.

"You gotta love it," Calvert said. "If you're a new collector and you're on the fence about a piece you find and it's going in a special spot in your home, buy what you love and you'll be happy with it. It's a gut check, so give it some thought. You can always



SHOWBOAT, LANCE LETSCHER

ask if a gallery will hold it for a certain amount of time. Ask for the right of first refusal."

Find a piece that speaks to you but it's a bit pricey? You can sometimes arrange payment terms with a gallery.

"People do that all the time — it's like layaway," Calvert said. "They want their art to sell, so they will work with you."

Remember also that as you develop as a collector, there may be things you grow tired of. And that's OK. You can always put something away for a while and see how you feel about it later on.

## WHEN SEARCHING FOR ART, ASK YOURSELF:

- Is this something that you want to look at every day?
- Does it bring back a memory or make you feel good even if you don't know why?
- Or maybe it's very provocative or compelling — it doesn't have to be joy, but is it an emotional response you could live with every day?

Calvert's final piece of advice: Don't worry too much about coordinating with every single color in your home. She describes her feelings as depicted on an old T-shirt from the Austin Museum of Art that a friend gave her, with a crazy-looking Picasso-style head over a plaid sofa with the words "Good art won't match your sofa."

"I hate using the word 'decorate' when I do this," she said. "I'm aware of the colors and spaces and I don't want it to look bad over the sofa but matching is not the idea." ❖

## KAREN CALVERT FINE ART SERVICES

210.824.8973 | Kcfas@psgart.com

## THE AUSTONIAN

Theaustonian.com

Sales: 512.623.3633 | Concierge: 512.827.2700



DUNN